

AN EXPANDED PARAPHRASE TO
BUILD STRONG FAITH AND
NURTURE SPIRITUAL GROWTH

THE CLEAR WORD





FOR **EVERYONE** WHO HUNGERS
FOR A CLEARER **UNDERSTANDING**
OF **GOD'S WORD** AND A
RICHER **DEVOTIONAL** EXPERIENCE

THE CLEAR WORD

PARAPHRASED BY
JACK J. BLANCO, TH.D.

Imagine how much more you would get out of the Bible if the meaning of every passage were crystal clear. Compare the same text from the King James Version and *The Clear Word*.

*"Incline my heart unto thy testimonies,
and not to covetousness. Turn away
mine eyes from beholding vanity; and
quicken thou me in thy way"
(Psalm 119:36, 37, KJV).*

*"Turn my heart toward your law more
than toward accumulating riches.
Help me not to desire worthless trinkets,
but give me more desire for your word"
(Psalm 119:36, 37, TCW).*

The Clear Word lets the power of ancient texts come through today. As the meaning of Scripture becomes more transparent, you see more of God's grace. His love shines through even in difficult Old Testament passages. *The Clear Word* has renewed the devotional lives of thousands of people. Let it renew yours.

Jack J. Blanco, Th.D., retired dean of theology, resides in Ooltewah, Tennessee. He began writing this paraphrase by hand to develop a deeper devotional experience with Jesus Christ.

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JACK J. BLANCO

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PREFACE

As has been stated in previous editions, *The Clear Word* is not a translation, but a devotional paraphrase of Scripture expanded for clarity. It is intended to build faith and nurture spiritual growth. It should not be considered a study Bible. Excellent translations of the Scriptures are available for such purposes.

This paraphrase provides my personal insights into the gracious and long-suffering character of God, the loving ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ and the struggles of the church from its inception to the last days. May the Holy Spirit use *The Clear Word* to bring about a stronger faith and a deeper spiritual experience to its readers.

A paraphrase uses current language to make the text more understandable. Over the years there have been several modern paraphrases, such as Phillips' *New Testament in Modern English*, Taylor's *The Living Bible*, and Peterson's *The Message*. These provide a variety of reading choices. God has more ways than we can fathom to reach His children wherever they are. Each translation or paraphrase has proved beneficial in its own way to bring readers a clearer understanding of God's magnificent gift to a fallen race.

This paraphrase began as my own devotional journey in seeking a deeper relationship with the One who loved me and gave His life for me. It was simply an extension of what I had been expressing over the years in pastoring, teaching, and in helping people better understand the Word of God by making it more relevant to their lives.

A writer's own understanding of a biblical text will surface in a paraphrase, but it also occurs in translations written by a group of scholars. However, every attempt has been made to allow the Bible to interpret itself. For example, Matthew is allowed to interpret Isaiah, for while the Scripture has many writers, it has only one Author. Where a passage was unclear in the original language, personal judgment had to be exercised in consultation with translations, commentaries, and Bible scholars.

I am indebted to the many thoughtful colleagues, pastors and laity, old and young, who have written or called with constructive suggestions to make this paraphrase more meaningful. Especially, I wish to thank Jolena King and others who have unselfishly given of their time to make this new "column format" more reader-friendly.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will use our humble efforts to bring many to the foot of the cross and to a greater knowledge and appreciation of what the Son of God has done for us.

To the glory of God, our Father, whose love knows no bounds,
Jack J. Blanco

It is a very common mistake to think that the only way to get a good result is to work hard. In fact, the most important thing is to work smart. This means that you should focus on the things that are most important and that will give you the best results. You should also make sure that you are working in a way that is sustainable and that you are not overworking yourself. This will help you to stay motivated and to get the most out of your work.

Another important thing to remember is that you should not be afraid to ask for help. If you are struggling with something, it is always better to ask for help than to try to do it all on your own. This will help you to learn from others and to get the most out of your work. You should also make sure that you are working in a way that is collaborative and that you are working with others to achieve your goals.

Finally, it is important to remember that you should not be afraid to take risks. Sometimes, the best way to get a good result is to take a risk and to try something new. This will help you to learn from your mistakes and to get the most out of your work. You should also make sure that you are working in a way that is innovative and that you are always looking for new ways to improve your work.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

GENESIS

Six Day Creation

1 This earth began by an act of God. He created the heavens and the earth.

²The earth was only a mass of created matter floating in space, covered with a vapor garment. Everything was dark. Then the Holy Spirit hovered over the vapor,

³and God said, "Let there be light." And everything was bathed in light.

⁴God looked at the light and was pleased. Then He separated the light from the darkness, ⁵and He called the light Day and the darkness Night. That ended God's activity on the first day of earth, marked off as it is now by nighttime and daytime.

⁶The next day God spoke again, "Let an atmosphere encircle the earth instead of water vapor." ⁷Instantly, there was a magnificent sky; most of the vapor in the atmosphere disappeared, and the vapor below the atmosphere came together as water covering the whole earth. ⁸God called the sky Heaven. This was the second day of His activity on earth, marked off by nighttime and daytime.

⁹The next day God said, "Let the water covering the earth be collected in certain places, and in other places let dry land appear." And it happened. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth and the collected waters Seas. And He was pleased with what He had done. ¹¹Then God said, "Let grass appear on the earth as well as plants that produce seeds, and fruit trees with seeds in the fruit so they can reproduce themselves. And that's what happened. ¹²Instantly the earth produced fruit-bearing plants and trees in abundance. And God was pleased. ¹³The nighttime and the daytime marked off the third day.

¹⁴Then God said, "Let there be lights in the sky to help make a difference between nighttime and daytime, and let them not only control the days, but also the seasons and the years. ¹⁵They will be as lights in the sky to shine on the earth." And that's what happened. ¹⁶There were

two lights that God made, the larger one to shine during the day and the smaller one to shine at night, together with thousands of twinkling stars which He had previously made. ¹⁷God arranged the way these lights should be and placed them in the sky to brighten the earth ¹⁸to make a difference between daytime and nighttime and to separate the light part of each day from the dark part. And God was pleased. ¹⁹The nighttime and the daytime made up the fourth day.

²⁰The following day God said, "Let the bodies of water swarm with all kinds of fish and let the air be filled with all kinds of birds." And that's what happened. ²¹Some of the fish God made were huge, but all the fish were created by Him, both big and small, as were all the different kinds of birds. And God was very pleased. ²²Then God blessed the birds and fish, saying, "I'm giving you the ability to reproduce and multiply, so fill the bodies of water with life and the air with song." ²³And the nighttime and the daytime made up the fifth day.

²⁴The next day God said, "Let various kinds of animals appear on the earth." And that's what happened. ²⁵He created domestic animals such as cattle, as well as free ones. He made all the animals, large and small and those in between. And once again, God was pleased.

²⁶But this was not the end of His work for that day. Next He said to His Son, "Now let us make beings who look like us and can reflect our thinking and our personality. Let's give them the responsibility of ruling over and caring for the fish, the birds and the animals which we created."

²⁷So they created two human beings, a male and a female, equal but with different functions, to reflect the unity of the Godhead.

²⁸Then God and His Son blessed them and said, "We have given you the capability to produce beings in our image. So be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and manage it for us. We have put the two of

you in charge of the fish, the birds and all the animals that walk the earth.”²⁹Then God told them what to eat, saying, “For food, we have given you fruit-bearing plants. There is ample food for you and your offspring.³⁰There is also plenty of food for the animals, birds and all the other living things which we created. They will eat what the earth produces just as you will.” And that’s how it was.³¹Then God looked at everything He had created through His Son, and it was very good. And the nighttime and the daytime made up the sixth day.

2 So the earth with its atmosphere was finished, and everything worked together in harmony.

²Then on the seventh day of creation week, God stopped to enjoy what He had made and to rest in the beauty of it all.³So He blessed the seventh day and set it apart as a day of spiritual refreshment and joy, a memorial of creation.

⁴In brief, this is the story of creation when God made the earth and the sky.

⁵Only after man was expelled from the garden and told to work the soil were cultivated plants and herbs grown. And God did not send rain to water the earth until after the flood.⁶At first, God watered the earth by streams which came up from the ground.⁷When God created man, He used clay to mold his body, then through man’s nose, He blew life into the clay, and the clay became a living human being.

The Garden of Eden

⁸God arranged a special garden for man to live in. This garden was located in an area called Eden, the place where the first man made his home.⁹In this garden God not only placed trees for food but also ornamental trees, most beautiful to look at. In the middle of this garden God placed the Tree of Life and not far distant, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil by which He would test man’s love and loyalty.

¹⁰There was a river flowing through Eden which helped water the garden. Beyond the garden it branched into four smaller rivers.¹¹The name of the first was Pishon, which made its way through the region known as Havilah where people today (Moses’ day) go to find gold.¹²The gold there is some of the best. A sweet-smelling resin perfumes the air and precious stones, such as onyx, are abundant.¹³The second river was called Gihon. It made its way through the entire region of Cush.¹⁴The third river, called Tigris, was east of Assyria. And the fourth river was the Euphrates.

¹⁵God placed man in this special garden called the Garden of Eden to tend it and keep it beautiful.¹⁶He told man, “You may eat of every tree in the garden,¹⁷but there is one tree whose fruit you mustn’t eat; this will test your love for me. You must choose between good and evil. If you decide to eat from this tree, you will have chosen evil and will have to die.”

¹⁸On the sixth day of creation God and His Son had said to each other, “It’s not good for us just to create man and leave him alone. He needs to have companionship similar to our oneness, so let’s make another human being suitable for him.”

¹⁹But first God brought the animals and birds to Adam—that was the man’s name—and asked him to name them, and whatever he called them, that became their name.

²⁰As Adam inspected and named all the animals and birds, he noticed that all of them had a companion. He thought he might eventually see a suitable companion for himself, but there was none. That’s when Adam first felt lonely.²¹So God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, and while he slept, God opened Adam’s side, took out a rib and closed the wound.²²He used the rib which He had taken from Adam to create a woman as a companion for him. Then God woke Adam up and introduced him to her.

²³When Adam saw her, he said, “This is a companion to make man complete. She

is my flesh and bone; she's like me, and she will be known as woman because she came out of man." ²⁴That's why a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two of them shall become as one person.

²⁵Adam and the woman, whom he called Eve, wore no clothes in those days, yet they were unashamed because they were innocent and covered with the light of God's presence.

The Fall of Man

3Of all the animals, the serpent was the most beautiful and intelligent that God had made. One day Satan used the serpent to speak to Eve. When she came close to the forbidden tree, the serpent said, "Didn't God restrict your freedom by not letting you eat from any tree you wanted?"

²Eve was startled, but instead of fleeing to Adam's side, she answered, "God didn't restrict our freedom. We may eat of any tree in the garden that we want to ³except this one which is in the middle. God asked us not to eat of it or even to touch it, or we'll die."

⁴Satan, through the serpent, said, "That's a lie. You won't die. ⁵The reason God told you that is because He knows that there is supernatural power in this tree, and as soon as you eat its fruit, you'll be as intelligent as He is and will be able to decide for yourself what is good and evil."

⁶As Eve watched the serpent eat the delicious fruit, she suddenly felt a strong urge to taste it too. She reached out and touched the fruit and nothing happened. Then she picked it, took a bite and instantly felt a surge of energy. Excited, she took more fruit and ran to find her husband. When Adam saw her, he sensed what she had done. But in the blush of her excitement, she looked more beautiful than ever. He couldn't bear the thought of living without her, so he took the fruit and ate it also. ⁷As soon as he did, their eyes were opened to the true character of

what they had done. The light of God's presence disappeared and they stood there naked. Now, for the first time, they felt shame. Taking some fig leaves, they fashioned coverings for themselves.

⁸In the cool of the morning they heard God walking in the garden looking for them. Adam and Eve ran and hid among the trees. ⁹God called to the man, "Adam, where are you?" ¹⁰Then Adam came out from among the trees and said, "I heard you coming and I was afraid. I was ashamed for you to see me because the light of your presence was gone. So I hid."

¹¹God said, "Who made you realize that you were naked? Did you eat fruit from the tree I told you not to?" ¹²Adam answered, "The woman you gave me ate from the tree first, then she offered it to me and I ate it."

¹³God turned to the woman and said, "What have you done? Why did you tempt your husband to eat?" The woman answered, "The serpent you created tricked me into eating from that tree."

¹⁴Then God said to the serpent, "Because you were used as a tool of Satan, I cannot continue to let you be the most beautiful creature in the garden. You will now be lower than any of the animals and will crawl on the ground eating its dust. ¹⁵Also, I will place a hatred of sin in the heart of the woman and her descendants. This hatred of sin will find its ultimate expression in One of her offspring. Satan, like a striking serpent, will try to kill Him, but as a man crushes the head of a poisonous snake with his bare heel to save his children—knowing he will die—so the Savior will sacrifice His own life to save those who love Him, and He will utterly crush the serpent's head."

¹⁶Turning to the woman, God said, "Because you have sinned, childbearing will be very painful for you. And because you desired to control your husband, you will be subject to him."

¹⁷Then God said to Adam, "Because you listened to your wife when you knew bet-

ter and you ate fruit from the tree I told you not to eat from, you will live a life of toil. The soil will be hard to work and sorrow will follow you throughout your life. ¹⁸You will contend with thorns and thistles, and you will have to grow vegetables to survive. ¹⁹By the sweat of your brow you will have to earn your bread, and it will be a struggle to provide for yourself and your family. When your life is over, you will be buried in the ground out of which you were taken. You are made of dust and to dust you will return.”

²⁰Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all human life, including the One who would break the power of sin and death.

²¹But God didn't carry out their sentence that day. He told them He had a plan to save them. Adam must sacrifice a lamb as a symbol of the One who would come and die in their place. God then took the lamb's skin to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness. ²²God said to His Son, “Man was like us, but he has changed. He now knows good and evil, so he's infected with sin. If we leave him in the garden and he continues to eat from the Tree of Life, he will never die, and he and his descendants will live in sin forever. We can't let this happen.” ²³So God sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden to till the soil. There they would live and work until they died. ²⁴Near the garden He stationed angels whose beams of light looked like flaming swords, so no one would eat of the Tree of Life again.

Cain Murders Abel

4 Soon thereafter Adam slept with his wife, and Eve conceived. She gave birth to a son whom they named Cain. She said, “I have given birth to a man! Maybe he is the One who will break the power of sin and death.” ²The next child was also a boy, and they named him Abel.

Abel grew up to be a shepherd, and Cain became a farmer. ³As they worshipped week by week, Cain brought the fruits of the field as an offering to the

Lord—symbolic of his own labor and given as a favor to God. He refused to ask his brother for a lamb in order to sacrifice an offering as the Lord had instructed his parents to do. ⁴But Abel brought a lamb to the Lord, and God accepted Abel's offering because it pointed forward to the One who would give His life for man. Abel understood the principle of redemption and, by his obedience, showed faith in what God had promised to do.

⁵But Cain's offering was not acceptable to God. He saw no need for the sacrifice of blood. He believed that offering the fruit of his labor was all that mattered. When Cain realized that God was not pleased with his offering, he not only became upset with God, but blamed his brother as well. As time went on, he became increasingly angry.

⁶So God said to Cain, “Why are you so angry? And why is your face so distorted? ⁷If you had done what you had been told, wouldn't your offering have been accepted? If you insist on doing things your way, you open the door for sin to control you. With my help you could master this.”

⁸But Cain did not listen to God's counsel or ask Him for help. Instead, he asked his brother to meet him in the field. When they met, he turned on Abel and killed him.

⁹Then God spoke to Cain again, “Cain, where is your brother?” Cain answered, “How should I know? Am I my brother's baby-sitter?”

¹⁰God said, “What have you done to your brother? His blood is crying out to me from where you killed him in the field.

¹¹What you have done will be both a curse to you and to the soil which soaked up your brother's blood. ¹²From now on the soil which has been so responsive to you will not be as fruitful because I am cutting back its power to produce. As a result of your rashness, your family will never fully trust you again. You'll be a lonely man wherever you go and will be treated as a stranger wherever you live

because everyone will hear about what you have done.”

¹³Cain answered, “This isn’t fair! The punishment is out of proportion to what I’ve done! ¹⁴For the rest of my life there will be no place where I can feel at home. If no one feels safe with me, how can I feel safe with them? I feel like running away! Whoever finds me will kill me for having killed my brother!”

¹⁵God spoke mercifully to Cain: “If anyone kills you, the consequences will be seven times worse for him than for you, and I will make sure that everyone knows this.” Then God put a mark on Cain to protect him and to keep him from being killed.

Cain’s Descendants

¹⁶So Cain left the area near the Garden of Eden where his parents lived and traveled east to settle in a part of the country which he called Nod, meaning I’m A Wanderer.

¹⁷While still at home he had married one of his sisters, and in this new land she gave birth to a son whom they called Enoch. Then Cain decided to build a city for his descendants, and he named the city Enoch, after his son. ¹⁸Enoch grew up and had a son called Irad, and Irad had a son called Mehujael, and Mehujael had a son called Methushael, who was the father of Lamech.

¹⁹Lamech turned away from God’s pattern and married two women at once, one was Adah and the other Zillah.

²⁰Adah gave birth to Jabal, who preferred living in tents and taking care of cattle, as did his descendants. ²¹His brother was called Jubal, who was interested in music, and so were his descendants. ²²Zillah also had sons; one was called Tubal-Cain, who became an artisan in brass and iron. Zillah also had a daughter named Naamah.

²³One day Lamech boastfully said to his wives, “Listen to me! Listen carefully to what I have to say! I have just killed two men, one for hitting me and a young

man for insulting me. ²⁴If God protected Cain and said that seven lives will be taken for anyone killing him, then God will protect me also, and say that seven times seven lives will be taken for anyone killing Lamech!”

The Third Son

²⁵Meanwhile, Adam and Eve had a third son and named him Seth, meaning Substitute, and Eve said, “God has given me another son in place of Abel; maybe he will be the appointed Deliverer.”

²⁶Seth grew up and had a son he named Enosh. Enosh and his father led those who had chosen to serve God to openly declare loyalty to Him and to call on the Lord to help them.

The Family of Adam

5In brief, here are the descendants of Adam. When God created man, He created him in His image. ²He created a male and a female and brought them together, blessed them, and called them Mankind. That happened right after they were created.

³Adam was one hundred and thirty years old when he had his third son. Seth strongly resembled Adam in appearance and character. Seth led God’s people to openly profess Him and to call on the Lord to help them be faithful to Him.

⁴After Seth was born, Adam lived another eight hundred years and had many sons and daughters. ⁵Altogether, Adam lived nine hundred and thirty years.

⁶Seth was one hundred and five years old when he had his first son, called Enosh. ⁷After Enosh, Seth lived another eight hundred and seven years and had many sons and daughters. ⁸Altogether, Seth lived nine hundred and twelve years.

⁹Enosh was ninety years old when he had his first son, called Kenan. ¹⁰After that he lived another eight hundred and fifteen years and had many sons and daughters. ¹¹Altogether, Enosh lived nine hundred and five years.

¹²Kenan was seventy years old when he

had his first son, who was called Mahalalel. ¹³After that he lived another eight hundred and forty years and had many sons and daughters. ¹⁴Altogether, Kenan lived nine hundred and ten years.

¹⁵Mahalalel was sixty-five years old when he had his first son, who was named Jared. ¹⁶After that he lived another eight hundred and thirty years and also had many sons and daughters. ¹⁷Altogether, he lived eight hundred and ninety-five years.

¹⁸Jared was one hundred and sixty-two years old when he had his first son, who was called Enoch. ¹⁹After that he lived another eight hundred years and had numerous sons and daughters. ²⁰Altogether, he lived nine hundred and sixty-two years.

²¹Enoch was sixty-five years old when he had his first son, and he called him Methuselah. ²²Enoch kept very close to God. After Methuselah was born, Enoch lived three hundred years and had many sons and daughters. ²³Altogether, Enoch walked this earth for three hundred and sixty-five years. ²⁴His life on earth was much shorter than those before him. He knew God so intimately that one day when he was walking in the field, he disappeared, and no one could find him because God had taken Enoch bodily to heaven. This brought hope of eternal life to all who loved God.

²⁵Now Methuselah was one hundred and eighty-seven years old when he had his first son, Lamech. ²⁶After that he lived another seven hundred and eighty-two years and had many sons and daughters. ²⁷Altogether, he lived nine hundred and sixty-nine years.

²⁸Lamech was one hundred and eighty-two years old when he had his first son. ²⁹He called him Noah, saying, "We hope that this will be the son who will comfort us in our toil as we work the ground that was cursed because of the sin of Cain." But Lamech's hope was not to be fulfilled in his son. ³⁰After that Lamech lived another five hundred and ninety-five years,

and he had many sons and daughters. ³¹Altogether, he lived seven hundred and seventy-seven years.

³²Not until after Noah was five hundred years old did he have any sons. Eventually he had three sons—Shem, Ham and Japheth.

The Wickedness of Man

6 The population of the earth increased as couples continued to have children. The daughters of the ungodly were particularly appealing. ²When the sons of the godly saw how attractive these women were, they took as many of them for wives as they wanted. ³God saw this and said, "More and more of my people are turning against me. The human body has become their god. My Holy Spirit will not work with them endlessly. I will give them one hundred and twenty years to change their ways." ⁴In those days people were giants, twice as large as people today. Even afterward, when children from mixed marriages of the godly with the ungodly were born, they were mighty men, known for their strength and accomplishments.

⁵God saw the growing wickedness among the people. All day long they thought of nothing but sinning. ⁶He was sick at heart over His creation. He had made man in His own image, but now man was becoming even more evil. ⁷Then God said, "I have no choice but to destroy the human beings I have made. Man's wickedness is out of control and needs to be stopped. I will also destroy the animals, including the huge creatures and those that crawl on the ground, as well as birds of the air. Man's evil cannot be allowed to continue. It breaks my heart to see what they are doing, and in mercy I will bring this wickedness to an end and save those who love me." ⁸So gradually the Lord laid to rest all those who loved Him, except Noah and his family. Finally, they were the only ones left alive who found grace in God's sight because they obeyed the Lord and did what was right.

Noah Pleases God

⁹The family of Noah was made up of his wife, their three sons and their wives. Noah was a good man, one who had total confidence in God, an unusual trait in those days. ¹⁰The names of his three sons were Shem, Ham and Japheth.

¹¹The whole culture in which they lived was corrupt, and violence was everywhere. ¹²God saw how totally corrupt the people had become. Everyone was caught up in evil except Noah and his family. ¹³So God said to Noah, "I will have to put an end to the wickedness of these people, because violence has become a way of life for them. The time has come for me to take action.

The Ark

¹⁴"I want you to build a large boat with numerous compartments. Make it of cypress wood and coat it inside and out with tar. ¹⁵This is how you are to build it. It should be four hundred and fifty feet long, seventy-five feet wide and forty-five feet high. ¹⁶Put a roof on it and leave a foot-and-a-half of space underneath for the air to circulate. You'll also need to put a door on one side, big enough to open onto three decks. ¹⁷I am asking you to build a boat because I will make it rain, something which has never happened before. The rains will cause the waters on earth to rise, bringing on a worldwide flood. Everything you see will die, including the animals and birds.

¹⁸"But I will carry out the covenant I made with you to save you and your family. When the time comes, I want you and your wife to move into the ark, together with your three sons and their wives. ¹⁹Then I will send some animals to come to live in the ark with you, two of every kind, one male and one female. ²⁰I will send you one pair from each kind of wild animal, each kind of bird and each kind of creeping animal that I have created, both clean and unclean. All other animals, birds and creeping things will be destroyed. Two of every created kind

will come into the ark to be saved with you and your family. ²¹So you will have to stock up on food, both for you and for the animals. I will help you know how much to store." ²²Noah obeyed and did whatever God told him to do.

The Great Flood

7When the ark was finished, the Lord said to Noah, "Probation for the people is now closed; one hundred and twenty years have past. So bring your family and move into the ark. You are the only righteous ones I have not laid to rest. ²From domesticated animals, take with you seven pairs of every clean animal, males and females, and one pair of every unclean animal, male and female. ³I will also send to you seven pairs of every kind of birds. These animals and birds will be needed to keep their kind alive. ⁴Seven days from now it will start raining and will continue for forty days and nights, and every living thing I have made will be destroyed." ⁵Noah listened to God and did everything He had told him.

⁶Noah was six hundred years old when the rains came which caused the flood. ⁷He and his wife, their three sons and their wives all moved into the ark to escape the coming destruction. ⁸Then the animals started coming, the clean and the unclean, the birds and the creeping animals. ⁹They came to Noah, two by two, in order, to take their places in the ark. They came, male and female, just as God had said. When the people who had scoffed at Noah's preaching saw it, they were momentarily impressed, but still they ridiculed him because their leaders had discounted the possibility of rain. ¹⁰Seven days later, the rains came and flooding began.

¹¹This was on the seventeenth day of the second month in the six hundredth year of Noah's life. Rain came down in torrents, and great jets of water erupted from the ground. ¹²This continued for forty days and nights.

¹³The very day that Noah and his wife

and three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth and their wives were told to get into the ark, they obeyed. ¹⁴So Noah's family and every kind of animal that God had created, whether cattle, bird or creeping animal, ¹⁵went into the ark, the male with its female, just as God had directed.

¹⁶After they were all safely in the ark, God sent His angel to shut the huge door and to make sure it was watertight. ¹⁷Then it rained for forty days and nights as God had said, and the flood waters rose and lifted the huge boat off its supports. ¹⁸The waters continued to rise until everything on the surface of the earth was covered, and the ark floated safely on the waters. ¹⁹The water rose until it covered the highest mountains all around the world. ²⁰Eventually the water reached a height of twenty-five feet above anything on the surface of the earth.

²¹Every living thing on the earth died—men, women, children, domestic and wild animals of all kinds, birds and even animals that creep and crawl. ²²Everything was destroyed except the fish. ²³The only ones left alive were Noah and his family and the animals with them in the ark. ²⁴After the rain stopped, the flood remained on the earth for one hundred and fifty days.

Noah's Deliverance

8 But God did not forget Noah and the animals in the boat. He made a strong wind blow to help evaporate the water and collect it into oceans. ²By this time the jets of water from inside the earth and the rains from above had stopped. ³After the flood waters had covered everything and all living things had been destroyed, the waters finally began to recede. ⁴Exactly five months later, on the seventeenth day of the seventh month, the ark came to rest among the mountains of Ararat. ⁵The floodwaters kept receding for almost another three months until, on the first day of the tenth month, the tops of mountains appeared.

⁶Noah waited another forty days, then

opened one of the portholes high up on the side of the ark ⁷and let a raven fly out. The raven flew back and forth, resting on the ark, until it finally found a place to nest. ⁸Then Noah released a dove to test how far the waters had subsided and to see if the ground was dry enough to walk on. ⁹But the dove didn't find a resting place because a lot of water still covered the earth. When it returned, Noah reached out and brought it back inside. ¹⁰Seven days later he sent the dove out again. ¹¹This time the dove was gone all day. In the early evening it returned with an olive shoot in its mouth, so Noah knew that the waters had also receded from the valleys. ¹²He waited one more week and again released the dove, but this time it didn't return.

¹³Then God sent his angel to open the large door, and Noah and his sons stepped outside and saw that the waters were gone. On the first day of the first month in the six hundred and first year of Noah, the earth was dry again. ¹⁴But it wasn't until the twenty-seventh day of the second month, almost sixty days later, that Noah felt that the ground was hard enough to let the animals go.

¹⁵In fact, Noah did not leave the boat until God told him it was safe to leave. ¹⁶God said to Noah, "You, your wife, your three sons and their wives can leave the boat now. ¹⁷Empty the ark of all creatures, cattle, birds and creeping things, so they can scatter over the earth, breed and multiply."

¹⁸After God spoke, Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives, ¹⁹together with all the animals, creeping things and birds, left the ark, each with its own mate.

God's Covenant

²⁰The first thing Noah did when he touched land was to gather some rocks and build an altar. Then he chose a young animal and bird from each clean kind and sacrificed them to the Lord.

²¹The Lord accepted the offering and said, "Never again will I suddenly change

the productivity of the earth as I did in the days of Cain, even if man's heart continues to be evil. Never again will I destroy every living thing on the earth with a flood as I have done this time.²²As long as this world lasts, planting time, harvest time, cold, heat, summer, winter, and day and night will continue."

9 Then God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Now you may have children, as many as you want, and fill the earth with your offspring.²Don't worry about the animals, because I have caused them to be afraid of you. All animals, birds, crawling creatures and fish will respect your authority and be under your care.³Many of these animals will provide food for you, and from now on, you may eat meat as well as vegetables.

⁴However, I don't want you to eat raw meat with the blood still in it, because blood is the source of life.⁵You should not kill an animal for sport, only for food. Whoever kills for sport will be held responsible and will suffer the consequences, whether blood is shed by man or beast, because he who takes a life forfeits his own.⁶Anyone who willfully takes another person's life will be judged by his fellowmen and condemned for murder. Man's right to life is sacred because he was created in my image.

⁷Have many children, because I want you to increase in number and populate the earth."⁸Then God assured Noah and his sons of their future, saying,⁹"Listen, I am making a covenant with you and your offspring,¹⁰and with every animal that was with you in the ark, the birds, the cattle and all of them as they roam the earth.¹¹I will never again allow a flood to destroy all life, nor will there ever be another global flood to destroy the earth."

¹²Then God drew Noah's attention to the sky, saying, "Look! There is the sign of my promise concerning you and all living creatures from now on.¹³I am putting a rainbow in the sky as a perpetual reminder of my promise about the future of

men and animals.¹⁴The rainbow will appear wherever it rains to remind people of my promise never again to destroy the earth by a flood.¹⁵I will keep my promise concerning you and all living creatures that I will never again destroy all life with a flood.¹⁶The rainbow will be in the clouds for both of us to see, and I will not forget the promise I made to you and to all living things."

¹⁷And God repeated, "This rainbow is the sign of my promise to you and to all living things upon the earth."

Noah and His Three Sons

¹⁸The sons of Noah who left the ark with their father were Shem, Ham and Japheth. Ham was the forefather of the Canaanites, and his son was Canaan.¹⁹It was from Noah's three sons that eventually the whole earth was populated.

²⁰After Noah settled down, he planted gardens and vineyards.²¹One day he drank some wine that had been sitting for awhile, became drunk and was in his tent naked.²²When Ham, (the father of Canaan) came into the tent and saw the condition his father was in, he thought it was funny and went and told his brothers.²³But Shem and Japheth didn't think it was funny. They took a sheet and, out of respect for their father, walked into the tent backwards, covering him without seeing him naked.

²⁴The next day when Noah came to his senses and heard what had happened and how his younger son had laughed at him, he made this prediction:²⁵"The descendants of Canaan will be called Canaanites, and they will have no sense of shame before God or man. This will be a curse to them, for they will not acknowledge their guilt. They will be subdued by the descendants of Canaan's brothers."

²⁶He also said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem, through whose descendants the Deliverer will come. May Canaan not walk in the sins of his father but serve the God of Shem.²⁷May God ex-

tend the land of Japheth. May he live in the tents of Shem and continue to be at peace with his brother, and may Canaan serve the God they worship."

²⁸Noah lived for another three hundred and fifty years after the flood. ²⁹He was nine hundred and fifty years old when he died.

Nations Descended From Noah

10 These are the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japheth, which were all born after the flood.

The Japhethites

²The sons of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech and Tiras.

³The sons of Gomer, Japheth's first-born, were Ashkenaz, Riphath and Torgarmah who are ancestors of the people who bear those names.

⁴And the sons of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim who inhabit Spain, Cyprus and Rhodes. ⁵Their descendants became maritime people and lived along the coastlines and on the islands, each one speaking a different language.

The Hamites

⁶The sons of Ham were Cush, Egypt, Put and Canaan whose descendants live in the countries of Ethiopia, Canaan, Libya and Egypt. ⁷The sons of Cush were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah and Sabteca. And the sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan.

⁸One of the sons of Cush was Nimrod who became a mighty warrior and the founder and monarch of the first extended empire. ⁹He was not only a mighty warrior but also a fearless hunter. His name and reputation became proverbial, so much that men would say to each other, "May you become like Nimrod!" But Nimrod was against the Lord. ¹⁰At first the center of Nimrod's empire included Babylon, Erech, Accad and Calneh in the land of Shinar. ¹¹From here he went on to con-

quer Assyria and built the cities of Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah ¹²and the great city of Resen which was located between Nineveh and Calah.

¹³The descendants of Ham who lived in Egypt and migrated out from there were the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites and the Naphtuhites. ¹⁴The Pathrusites, the Casluhites (from whom the Philistines came) and the Caphtorites made up the rest of the descendants of Ham.

¹⁵The sons of Canaan were Sidon, the oldest, and Heth. They were ancestors of the Sidonians and Hittites. ¹⁶And Canaan's other sons were the ancestors of the Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, ¹⁷Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, ¹⁸Arvadites, Zemarites and the Hamathites.

These descendants soon scattered, ¹⁹and the borders of the land of Canaan reached from Sidon southward to Gerar near Gaza and eastward to Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim near Lasha.

²⁰These then are the descendants of Ham according to their tribes, languages and countries.

The Semites

²¹Shem, whose older brother was Japheth, was the ancestor of all the sons of Eber.

²²Shem's sons were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud and Aram, who were ancestors of the people who bear that name.

²³The descendants of Aram became the people of Uz, Hul, Gether and Meshech.

²⁴Arphaxad was the father of Cainan, who was the father of Shelah, who was the father of Eber.

²⁵Eber had two sons: one was Peleg (during his time the people of the earth scattered themselves), and the other was Joktan.

²⁶The descendants of Joktan became known as the people of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, ²⁷Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, ²⁸Obal, Abimael, Sheba, ²⁹Ophir, Havilah and Jobab. All of these were the descendants of Joktan.

³⁰The lands in which they lived ex-

tended from Mesha to Sephar in the eastern hill country.

³¹All these people were descendants of Shem through his sons according to their tribes, living in different areas, each with its own language.

³²All these clans are descendants of Noah's three sons, nation by nation, according to their lines of descent.

The Tower of Babel

11 At first all the descendants of Noah had only one language. ²As they moved east from Mount Ararat where the ark had settled, they made their homes in the plain of Shinar, also called Mesopotamia.

³After some time they said to each other, "Come, let's build permanent places to live. We'll use baked bricks and tar instead of sandstone and mortar."

⁴When this was successful, they said, "Now that we've built this beautiful city, let's erect a huge escape tower to protect ourselves against any future flood. People from other cities will come to see it, and we will become famous."

⁵Then the Lord came down to take a look at the city and the escape tower they were building, ⁶and said, "This is only the beginning of what these people will attempt to do. They all speak the same language, and if they succeed in this, they'll think that they can do anything they set their minds to. ⁷We need to stop them so they don't become proud and forget who created them. Let's confuse their language so they can't communicate so easily with each other."

⁸And that's what happened. Suddenly the people started speaking different languages and couldn't understand each other. Building on the tower and the city stopped, and people moved away. ⁹The area became known as Babylon or Babel, which means "confusion," because that was where the Lord confounded the language of the people. It was from there that they scattered around the world.

Shem's Descendants

¹⁰The line of Shem continued thus: two years after the flood had subsided, when Shem was one hundred years old, his son Arphaxad was born. ¹¹After that he lived another five hundred years and had other sons and daughters.

¹²Arphaxad was thirty-five years old when he had Cainan, whose son was Shelah. ¹³After Cainan was born, Arphaxad lived another four hundred and three years and had additional children.

¹⁴When Shelah was thirty years old, he had a son called Eber. ¹⁵After that he also lived another four hundred and three years as his grandfather did, and had many more children.

¹⁶When Eber was thirty-four years old, he had a son named Peleg. ¹⁷Afterward he lived another four hundred and thirty years and had numerous other children.

¹⁸When Peleg was thirty years old, he had a son called Reu. ¹⁹After that he lived only two hundred and nine years and also had additional children.

²⁰When Reu was thirty-two years old, he had a son called Serug. ²¹After that he lived another two hundred and seven years and had many more children.

²²When Serug was thirty years old, he had a son named Nahor. ²³Afterward he lived another two hundred years and had additional children.

²⁴When Nahor was twenty-nine years old, he had a son called Terah. ²⁵After that he lived only one hundred and nineteen years and left behind many children.

²⁶By the time Terah was seventy years old, he had fathered Abram, Nahor (named after his grandfather), and Haran.

Terah and Abram

²⁷So these are the godly descendants of Shem, beginning with Arphaxad and going down to Terah, the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran (who was the father of Lot). ²⁸Haran died before his father Terah and was buried in the city of Ur where he was born, in the land of the Chaldeans. ²⁹Abram, one of Terah's other

sons, married his half-sister Sarai, and Nahor married his niece Milcah, the daughter of his brother Haran who had also fathered Iscah. ³⁰Sarai, the wife of Abram, unlike the rest of the women in the family, could not have children.

³¹Shortly after Haran died, God spoke to Abram and asked him to leave the city of Ur and go to live in the land of Canaan. When Abram told his father Terah, he agreed. So Terah left the city of Ur with Abram, Sarai who was Abram's half-sister and wife, and with Lot his grandson by Haran, to go to the land of Canaan. They got to a city they named Haran where, because of Terah's health, they decided to stay for a while. ³²Terah died there, at two hundred and five years of age.

Promises to Abram

12 Then the Lord said to Abram, "Now that your father Terah is dead, leave this city and move on to the land that I will show you, because you are still living too close to your relatives. ²My plan is to make a great nation from your descendants, a different people, and I will bless you, and through you all nations of the earth will be blessed. ³I will bless those who bless you and let those who curse you suffer the consequences. My intention is for you to be a blessing to the whole world."

⁴Abram did as the Lord had told him and left the city of Haran, and his nephew Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left to go to the land of Canaan. ⁵So Abram, his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot, took all their goods which they had acquired while living in Haran, all their servants and flocks and left for the land of Canaan.

– ⁶And when they arrived there, Abram traveled through the country until he came to Shechem where today the giant oak of Moreh and the other oaks stand. The descendants of Canaan, the grandson of Noah, lived in this land. ⁷Abram was apprehensive about living there. Then the Lord appeared to him and said,

"Don't be afraid. This is the land I want to give to you and your descendants to live in, and it will belong to you forever." Then Abram built a stone altar to the Lord on that spot because that was where the Lord spoke to him.

⁸From there Abram traveled on toward the hills east of Bethel and set up his camp. Here he built another altar and worshiped the Lord. ⁹Some time later Abram broke camp and traveled south toward the Negeb.

Abram in Egypt

¹⁰Then famine struck the area, so Abram went south into Egypt, because the drought lasted a long time. ¹¹As they neared the Egyptian border, Abram said to his wife Sarai, "I know that you are a very beautiful woman. ¹²When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'She is this man's wife. So let's kill him, then we can have her for ourselves.' ¹³So if they ask who you are, tell them you're my sister. That's partly true because you are my half-sister. And when you tell them that, they'll treat me as your brother and let me live."

¹⁴And that is exactly what happened. When Abram arrived in Egypt, the Egyptians saw how beautiful Sarai was. ¹⁵Even the officials of Pharaoh noticed her and brought her to the attention of the king, who ordered them to bring her to him. ¹⁶Just as Abram predicted, the Egyptians treated him well for her sake because Sarai told them that he was her brother. Though the Lord did not approve of what Abram had done, He continued to prosper him for He knew his heart. Soon Abram had even more sheep, donkeys, camels and servants than he'd had before.

¹⁷But the Lord withheld His blessings from Pharaoh and his house, and soon everyone became sick because Sarai was being kept in the king's palace. ¹⁸So Pharaoh called Abram in and said, "What have you done to me! Why didn't you tell me the truth, that Sarai is your wife?"

¹⁹Why did you say that she is your sister? I might have taken her to be one of my wives. When I wondered why everyone in my house was sick, your God revealed the truth. So now take your wife and go!" ²⁰Then Pharaoh gave orders to his men not to harm Abram, but to send him away in peace, together with Sarai his wife and everything he owned.

Abram's Inheritance

13 Abram left Egypt and went back north into the Negeb with his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot and all their possessions. ²By this time Abram had become very rich, not only in cattle, but also in silver and gold.

³From the Negeb he continued north until he reached Bethel, where he had set up his first camp upon arriving in the land of Canaan. He intended to stay there for a while. ⁴It was here that he had built an altar and now, for the first time, was afraid and called on the Lord for protection.

⁵Lot, who was traveling with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents that he had acquired. ⁶And the place where they camped could not support both of them because they had so many animals. ⁷In addition, there was constant fighting between the herdsmen of Lot and those of Abram, and the Canaanites and Perizzites who lived nearby noticed this.

⁸So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any more quarreling between your herdsmen and mine, especially since we're related. The witness we're giving to our neighbors about God is not good: ⁹This whole country is open to us. Let's live in different areas and that will end all this fighting. You choose first. If you go to the right, I'll go to the left, and if you go to the left, I'll go to the right."

¹⁰Lot looked at the various parts of the country and saw that the plain of Jordan was well watered with some pastures even better than Egypt. To him it looked like the Garden of Eden. This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. ¹¹Then Abram and Lot went

their separate ways, with Lot settling in the plain of Jordan. ¹²Abram stayed in the countryside away from the cities of Canaan, while Lot moved closer and closer to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. ¹³The men of Sodom were extremely wicked and openly defied the Lord with their wicked practices.

¹⁴After Lot had left, the Lord said to Abram, "I want you to stand outside and look north, south, east and west, as far as you can. ¹⁵All the land you can see and more will belong to you and to your descendants forever. ¹⁶Your descendants will be as numerous as specks of dust on the earth, which no one can count. That's how impossible it will be to count your offspring. ¹⁷So go and live anywhere you wish in the length and breadth of this land because I have given it to you."

¹⁸Then Abram broke camp and moved to where the great oaks of Mamre in Hebron are, and there he built another altar to the Lord.

Lot's Rescue

14 At this time there was war among the city kings in the land, and Amraphel, king of Shinar; Arioch, king of Ellasar; Kedorlaomer, king of Elam; and Tidal, king of Goiim, attacked ²Bera, king of Sodom; Birsha, king of Gomorrah; Shinab, king of Admah; Shemeber, king of Zeboiim; and the king of Bela, also known as Zoar. ³These last five kings grouped their forces in the Valley of Siddim, which today is the area covered by the Dead Sea. ⁴For twelve years these kings had paid taxes to Kedorlaomer and his coalition of kings, and in the thirteenth year these five kings rebelled.

⁵In the fourteenth year, Kedorlaomer and his kings attacked and defeated the Rephaites in Ashteroth near Karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham, the Emites in Shaveh Kiriathaim, ⁶and the Horites in the hill country of Seir as far as El Paran near the desert. ⁷Next they turned back and went toward En Mishpat (also known as Kadesh) and conquered the whole terri-

tory of the Amalekites and the Amorites who lived in the area of Hazezon Tamar.

⁸Then the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Bela (also called Zoar) drew up their lines of defense in the Valley of Siddim. ⁹Kedorlaomer, king of Elam; Tidal, king of Goiim; Amraphel, king of Shinar; and Arioch, king of Ellasar, attacked them, and the four kings defeated the five kings. ¹⁰Now the Valley of Siddim was full of open tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah were defeated, some of their troops slipped into these pits, and the rest fled to the hills. ¹¹Then the four kings looted the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, took all their food supplies and went on their way. ¹²They also captured Abram's nephew Lot, who had moved into the city, and took everything he owned.

¹³But someone escaped and came and told Abram what had happened. Abram was living at the great oaks of Mamre, where Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and Aner lived, all of whom had made an alliance with each other and with Abram. ¹⁴When Abram heard that his nephew Lot had been taken captive, he armed three hundred and eighteen of his trained men born in his camp and, together with Amorite reinforcement, pursued those four kings all the way north to the city of Dan. ¹⁵During the night Abram divided his forces, and just before dawn, he launched a surprise attack. The four kings fled and Abram pursued them all the way to Hobah, north of Damascus. ¹⁶He rescued his nephew and recovered all of Lot's possessions, together with the women and the other men taken from Sodom.

¹⁷Then Abram returned to Sodom, having defeated Kedorlaomer and the other three kings, and brought back with him all the captives they had taken. The king of Sodom, who had escaped from the battle before being captured, came out to meet Abram and his armed men in the Valley of Shaveh, known as the King's Valley.

Abram and Melchizedek

¹⁸And Melchizedek, king of nearby Salem which today is called Jerusalem, also came out to meet Abram and his men and brought bread and new wine to refresh them. In addition to being king of Salem, Melchizedek functioned as a priest of the Most High God, teaching his people to serve the Maker of heaven and earth. ¹⁹When he met Abram, he blessed him, saying, "Blessings on Abram, servant of the Most High God, who created heaven and earth. ²⁰And blessed be the Most High God who helped you overcome your enemies and be victorious." Then Abram gave a tenth of all he had to Melchizedek.

²¹The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Just let me have my people back, and you can keep for yourself all the goods Kedorlaomer took from us."

²²Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have made an agreement with the Lord God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and took an oath to confirm the agreement, ²³that my motive to pursue the four kings would not be for booty. I promised not to take so much as a thong of a sandal from you. I did this so your people could never say, 'We helped Abram get rich.' ²⁴The only thing I acknowledge taking is what my men have eaten and what Aner, Eshcol and Mamre, the Amorites, claim as rightfully theirs."

God's Covenant

15 Soon after this the Lord spoke to Abram in a night vision and said, "Abram, do not be afraid of a return attack because I am your shield, and your reward for serving me will be exceedingly great."

²Abram answered, "Lord God, what greater reward can a man have than to live on in the lives of his children? ³I am still without a child, so my rightful heir is Eleazar, my chief servant who was born among us in Damascus."

⁴The Lord said, "Eleazar will not be your rightful heir, but a son coming from

your own seed will be your heir.”⁵ He then asked Abram to come outside. “Look up at the night sky and see if you can count the stars,” God said. “That’s how numerous your offspring will be.”

⁶Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord credited it to him as righteousness. ⁷Then the Lord reminded Abram of what He had done for him. “I am the Lord God who asked you to leave the city of Ur in the land of the Chaldeans, who protected you all along the way and who brought you into this country to possess it.”

⁸Abram responded, “Lord, how do I know that this land will always belong to me and my descendants? Is there some visible evidence you can give me?”

⁹The Lord said, “I will make a covenant with you as is customary among the people around you when two of them decide to become blood-brothers. Bring a heifer, a female goat and a ram, each three years old, and also a dove and a young pigeon.”

¹⁰The next morning Abram brought the animals, sacrificed them and cut them in half. Then he placed each of the halves opposite the other, except for the dove and the pigeon, and walked between the pieces, pledging perpetual obedience to God. ¹¹He sat there all day keeping the vultures from attacking the carcasses, waiting for God’s response.

¹²At sunset Abram fell into a deep sleep and dreamed that a dreadful darkness was closing in on him, and he was terrified. ¹³Then the Lord said to him in vision, “Your descendants through your firstborn son from Sarai will begin to suffer affliction and will eventually be made slaves. All of this will last four hundred years. ¹⁴But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and I will free them. They will return to this land with great possessions. ¹⁵Before this happens, you will live to a ripe old age, die in peace and be buried with your fathers. ¹⁶The fourth generation of your descendants will return to this land to possess it. They cannot possess it now because the wickedness of the Amorites and others

has not yet reached its limit, and their probation is not yet over.”

¹⁷In the middle of the night Abram awoke and saw a blazing torch and a burning lamp pass together between the pieces of the animals. The Lord visibly consumed His part of the sacrifice as well as Abram’s part, acknowledging his faith. ¹⁸Then the Lord said to Abram, “I have made this covenant with you according to the custom of the people, so you can understand that everything I have is yours and everything you have is mine, and whoever touches you touches me. We are in a covenant as blood-brothers. So I will give to you and your descendants the land from the river of Euphrates to the river of Egypt, ¹⁹which includes all the territory inhabited by the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹Amorites, Canaanites, Girschites and Jebusites.”

Hagar and Ishmael

16 Time passed, but Sarai, Abram’s wife, still had not had children. So she decided that Hagar, her Egyptian maid, would make a good mother through whom she could have children. ²She said to Abram, “The Lord has still not given us a child, but maybe we could have one through Hagar and begin our family that way. Why don’t you go and sleep with her?”

Abram agreed, since it was the custom for a childless couple to begin their family through surrogate motherhood. ³Besides, ten years had passed since Abram had come into the land of Canaan, and they had waited all that time, hoping to have children. After Sarai talked to Hagar and she agreed, Sarai brought her to Abram’s tent. He slept with her, and by doing this, she became like a second wife. ⁴Hagar did conceive, and when she was sure she was pregnant, she began acting superior to Sarai and looking on her with disdain.

⁵Sarai was distressed and said to Abram, “You’re responsible for this woman’s attitude toward me. I brought

her to you, and you made her pregnant, but you didn't make me pregnant. So now she looks down on me and expects me to be her maid. May the Lord judge you for what you've done."

⁶Abram said to Sarai, "Hagar is still your maid, so do with her whatever you think is best." Then Sarai exerted her authority as Abram's wife and reminded Hagar that she was still her maid, but Hagar refused to serve Sarai. Instead, she ran off into the desert. ⁷There the Lord's angel found her sitting by the roadside near a spring.

⁸The angel said to her, "Hagar, maid of Sarai, what are you doing out here in the desert? Where do you intend to go?" She said, "I'm running away from Sarai. I intend to go home to Egypt."

⁹The Lord's angel said to her, "Don't do that. You'll perish in the desert. Go back to Sarai. She's your mistress. Simply do what she asks you to do as you've done in the past, and you'll be treated well."

¹⁰Then the Lord's angel added, "And don't worry, I will increase your descendants so they will become too numerous for you to count. ¹¹You will give birth to a son and will call him Ishmael, which means God Hears and Answers Prayer. ¹²He will be a great fighter and as strong as a wild donkey. He will carve out a place for himself against all opposition and live at odds with his brothers. He and his descendants will settle just east of here."

¹³Then Hagar called the Lord's angel who spoke with her, The God Who Sees Me, because, she said, "I have seen the light of the One who sees me and I'm still alive!" ¹⁴That's why the well where she sat is called Beer Lahai Roi, meaning The Well of the Living One Who Sees. It is still there, next to the road between Kadesh and Bered.

¹⁵So Hagar went back to Sarai and bore Abram's son and called him Ishmael, as the Lord's angel had instructed her.

¹⁶Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born.

The Sign of the Covenant

17The years passed, and when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him, saying, "I am the Almighty God; if you continue to walk blamelessly in my paths, ²I will carry out my covenant with you and will greatly multiply your descendants."

³Then Abram fell on his knees and bowed his face to the ground as God continued to talk with him, ⁴"This is the covenant that I have made with you. You will become the father of many nations. ⁵So I am changing your name from Abram to Abraham, which means, The Father of Many, because I have appointed you to be the father of many people. ⁶I will make your descendants fruitful and whole nations will come from them, including princes and kings. ⁷This covenant between us will continue between your descendants and me forever. I will always be their God just as I have been your God. ⁸The whole country of Canaan in which you are a stranger will be yours and theirs. Eventually the entire earth will belong to you and your natural and spiritual descendants, and I will forever be their God.

⁹"The conditions of this covenant apply not only to you, but to your descendants as well. ¹⁰As a present symbol of the covenant I have made with you and your descendants, every male, including the children, shall be circumcised. ¹¹You will begin by circumcising yourself, and that will become a visible symbol of the covenant I am making with you this day. ¹²And among your descendants, every male child is to be circumcised eight days after he is born. All males are to be circumcised, whether they are born into your family, adopted or bought. Each will be considered your offspring. ¹³Whether they are your natural descendants or not, they must all be circumcised. The signature of my covenant with you will be in your own flesh and in the flesh of your descendants as a lasting reminder. ¹⁴Any male not willing to be circumcised will be cut off from the family because he is un-

willing to enter into covenant with me.

¹⁵“Now concerning your wife Sarai, I have changed her name also. You will no longer call her Sarai, but Sarah, which means Princess. ¹⁶I will bless her, and she will give birth to a son and become the mother of nations, including princes and kings.”

¹⁷Abraham, still bowed with his face to the ground, quietly laughed and thought to himself, “How can a man nearly a hundred years old with a ninety-year-old wife have a baby?” ¹⁸Then Abraham said to God, “Why not let Ishmael be our offspring and pass the covenant on to him?”

¹⁹God answered, “Sarah, your wife, will have a baby boy, and she will call him Isaac, meaning Laughter. I will pass on my covenant to him and to his descendants. ²⁰As far as Ishmael is concerned, I understand your concern, and I will bless him also. I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his descendants. He will be the father of twelve great rulers, and his descendants will become a great nation.

²¹“But I will make my covenant with you and with Isaac, who will be carried by Sarah and will be born about this time next year.” ²²With this, God was finished speaking with Abraham and left him still bowed face down.

²³That same day Abraham circumcised himself. Then, beginning with Ishmael, he circumcised all male children born to his employees, including those who had been adopted or bought. He also circumcised every adult male in his household, just as God had told him to do. ²⁴Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he circumcised himself. ²⁵And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old. ²⁶Both Abraham and Ishmael were circumcised the same day. ²⁷And all the men who lived in his household, those born to his employees as well as those bought from foreigners, were also circumcised.

The Son of Promise

18 About three months later, the Lord appeared to Abraham one day as he was sitting at the entrance of his tent which was pitched among the great oak trees of Mamre. ²Abraham looked up and saw three men heading in his direction. Quickly he got up and ran to welcome them. He bowed low with his face to the ground and said,

³“Please don’t pass me by. Come in and stay awhile and refresh yourselves. Come, let me serve you. ⁴I’ll get some water to cool your feet and you can rest in the shade of these beautiful trees. ⁵Then I’ll bring you something to eat to renew your strength before you go on your way. You’ll honor me if you accept my invitation.” The men said, “Thank you. We’ll accept.”

⁶So Abraham hurried back to his tent and said to Sarah, “Quick, we have some guests. Use your best flour and get your maids to help you bake some fresh bread for them.” ⁷Then he ran over to a nearby herd, picked out a fat young calf just a few weeks old, called one of his servants and told him to kill it and quickly roast the best parts for the three guests. ⁸After this he went back to make his guests comfortable and to visit with them. Before long the food was ready and Abraham took the freshly baked bread and the roasted meat, together with milk and butter, and set it before his guests in the shade of the great oaks, and they ate.

⁹Upon finishing, they asked him, “Where is your wife Sarah?” Abraham answered, “She’s in the tent.”

¹⁰Then one of them, the One who was the Lord, said, “Nine months from now, I’ll be back, after your wife Sarah gives birth to a son.” Sarah, who was in the tent, overheard what was said. ¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were very old, and she had stopped having monthly periods long before. ¹²So when she heard this, she laughed and said to herself, “At my age I should become pregnant? And Abraham—he’s almost a hundred years old!”

¹³Then the Lord said to Abraham, “Why is Sarah laughing and saying that she’s too old to have a child? ¹⁴Is anything too hard for the Lord? As I said, I will be back nine months from now after Sarah has had her baby.”

¹⁵When the visitors stood up and were ready to leave, Sarah came out of the tent to say good-bye and said to the One who predicted she would have a baby, “I didn’t laugh at what you said.” He answered, “Yes, you did.”

Abraham Intercedes

¹⁶Then Abraham went with the three men to see them on their way. They walked up one of the nearby hills in the direction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and there they said good-bye. ¹⁷But just as they were parting, the Lord turned to the other two and said, “Shall I tell Abraham what I need to do? ¹⁸After all, I did promise to make him the father of many nations and through him bring a blessing to the whole world. ¹⁹I promised this because I know that he will be an example to his children, his servants and his descendants. He will teach them to obey me and to do what is right and just. They will listen to what he says and follow his example. Then I will do for them what I promised to do for Abraham.”

²⁰Then the Lord told Abraham what He was going to do. He said, “The cry of the terrible things happening in Sodom and Gomorrah calls for my personal attention. ²¹So I have decided to come down with two of my angels to take a firsthand look at the situation.”

²²Before continuing, the Lord told the two who were with Him to go on ahead to Sodom while He stayed behind to talk with Abraham a little longer.

²³That’s when Abraham humbly asked, “You’re not planning to destroy the whole city, including all the innocent people, are you, Lord? ²⁴Suppose there are fifty innocent people in the city? You wouldn’t destroy them too, would you? Wouldn’t you spare the city to save

them? ²⁵It’s not like you, Lord, to destroy innocent people in order to stop the wicked from sinning. If you did, the innocent would die unjustly with the guilty, and that wouldn’t be right. Shouldn’t the One who judges be just Himself?”

²⁶The Lord answered, “I promise that if I find fifty innocent people in Sodom, I’ll spare the whole town.” ²⁷Then Abraham said, “Lord, please excuse my boldness. I know I’m a mere human being who will return to dust, and I have no right to question you, ²⁸but suppose you find only forty-five innocent people in the whole city. Will you still destroy everyone there because the number of innocent people was five less than the fifty we just mentioned?”

The Lord said, “Even if I find only forty-five innocent people there, I won’t destroy the city.” ²⁹Abraham spoke up again, “Lord, suppose there are only forty innocent people in the city?”

The Lord answered, “I wouldn’t destroy the city even if there were forty innocent people.” ³⁰Then Abraham said, “Don’t be upset with me, Lord, but what if there were only thirty people in the city?”

The Lord said, “I wouldn’t destroy the city if there were thirty such people.” ³¹Abraham asked again, “Lord, please forgive me for my boldness, but what would you do if you found twenty innocent people there?”

The Lord answered, “I would not do it if there were twenty.” ³²Then Abraham spoke one last time, “Lord, just one more question; then I’ll keep quiet. What if you find only ten innocent people?”

The Lord said, “I’ll not destroy the city if I find ten such people there.” ³³After this the Lord went on toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and Abraham went back to his tent.

Sodom’s Sin

19It was toward evening when the two angels who had been with the Lord when they visited Abraham, arrived at the gates of Sodom. Lot was sitting by

the gates, as the elders of the city do to welcome strangers. As soon as he saw these two men, he got up to meet them. He bowed with his face low to the ground and said, ²“Welcome. Please come to my house where you can wash your feet and spend the night. Then early tomorrow morning you can be on your way again.”

The men said, “Thank you for your kind offer, but we’ll find a place to stay downtown.”

³But Lot urged them, so they went with him. When they arrived at his house, Lot asked his servants to make fresh bread and prepare other food for his guests. And they ate what Lot had prepared for them. ⁴Not long after they had finished eating and before Lot’s guests went to bed, the men of Sodom surrounded the house, young and old from every part of town, ⁵and called Lot to come out. When he came out, they said, “Are your guests staying with you tonight? If so, tell them to come out. We want them to join us in a homosexual party.”

⁶When Lot heard that, he shut the door behind him, hoping his guests hadn’t heard. ⁷He said to the men of Sodom, “Friends, listen to me. Don’t try to force these visitors to do such evil. ⁸Look, I have two young daughters who are still virgins; let me bring them out and they can go with you to your party. But don’t make my guests go with you, because they came to my house at my urging, so I owe them protection.”

⁹But they said, “Get out of the way! You came here as a stranger, so you’re not our judge. If you don’t get out of the way, we’ll take you along too.” They stepped forward to pull Lot out of the way so they could break down the door.

¹⁰At that moment, the two visitors opened the door, pulled Lot in and quickly shut the door. ¹¹In that instant, they blinded the men outside, young and old alike, so they had to grope their way back home.

Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

¹²With Lot safely inside they said to him, “Do you have any other relatives living in this city besides your two daughters here at home—any sons? daughters? sons- or daughters-in-law? If so, you had better get them out of here, ¹³because we’ve been sent to destroy the whole city. The Lord has heard the evil cry of these sinful people and has sent us to take a firsthand look. The city has come to the point where it must be destroyed. While men have no right to take life, God does, for all life belongs to Him.”

¹⁴So that very night Lot went to see each of his daughters and his sons-in-law and told them what would happen. Then he said to them, “You need to get out of here as quickly as you can. Tomorrow morning the Lord is going to destroy the whole city because of its terrible wickedness.” But they merely smiled at what he said and refused to take him seriously.

¹⁵All night Lot tried to reason with his children, one by one, but they wouldn’t listen. In the wee morning hours when he returned home, the two men said, “We’re glad you’re back. Quick, take your wife and your two daughters and get out of here so you won’t perish. By sunrise the whole city and everyone in it will go up in smoke.”

¹⁶Lot hesitated to leave, but the men took him, his wife and his two daughters by the hand and pulled them out of the city. ¹⁷When they reached the edge of town, the men released them and said, “Now run for your lives! And don’t stop to look back! Keep going right on through the valley and up into the hills.”

¹⁸Lot said, “Please don’t make us go up into the hills. ¹⁹You’ve been very kind to save our lives, but it’s difficult to live in the mountains, and they’re so far away. Besides, we can’t run that far or that fast. We would die before we got there. ²⁰Can’t we go to that little town nearby? Please! It’s only a small village, and we can run that far. Besides, it’s safer than the mountains.”

²¹The men said, “All right, you may go

there, and for your sake we won't destroy that village as we had planned. ²²But hurry! Run! We can't do anything until you're safe." Because Lot referred to the village he went to as little, the place has ever since been called Zoar, meaning Small Town.

²³It was about sunrise when Lot and his family approached Zoar. While most of the people in Sodom slept, the men still bent on evil returned to Lot's house, but found it empty. ²⁴Suddenly the sky exploded with fire, and blazing sulfur and brimstone rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah. ²⁵Both cities were destroyed, as was everything in the valley, including the ripened grain and all the people. ²⁶Lot's wife, who had begged to live in Sodom, looked back longingly toward her home and was instantly turned into a statue of salt.

²⁷Early that morning Abraham returned to the hilltop where he had said good-bye to his guests the day before and where he had talked with the Lord. ²⁸He looked in the direction of Sodom and Gomorrah and saw the whole valley full of fire and smoke. It looked like a blazing furnace.

²⁹The Lord heard the prayers and concerns of Abraham for his nephew and saved Lot and his family from the city before His angels destroyed it.

Lot's Descendants

³⁰After this Lot was afraid to stay even in little Zoar. So he and his two daughters made their way up into the mountains where they had first been asked to go and moved into a cave. ³¹After settling in, the older daughter said to her sister, "There are no men up here for us to marry and have children by; the only one here is Father, and he's getting old. ³²Let's get Father drunk and sleep with him, and he'll never know it. That way we can preserve our family line."

³³The younger sister agreed, and that night they got their father drunk. The oldest daughter slept with her father

without his knowing when she laid down or when she got up.

³⁴The next day the oldest daughter said to her sister, "I slept with Father last night and now it's your turn. Let's see if we can get him drunk again, then you can sleep with him. This way we'll both get pregnant and can have our children together. ³⁵And that's what they did. They got their father drunk and the younger sister slept with him. This time too, he didn't know when she laid down or when she got up.

³⁶In this way both girls got pregnant by their father without his realizing what had happened. ³⁷The older daughter gave birth to a son and named him Moab, and he became the father of the Moabites. ³⁸The younger daughter also gave birth to a son and called him Benammi, who became the father of the Ammonites.

Abraham and Abimelech

20 About this time Abraham moved south from Mamre where he had been and settled between the cities of Kadesh and Shur near the town of Gerar. ²While there he said to those who asked him whether Sarah was his wife, "She's my sister." So Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent for Sarah to make this beautiful woman his wife.

³But during the night, God spoke to Abimelech in a dream and said, "If you so much as touch that woman, you'll die, because she is Abraham's wife."

⁴Abimelech had not even come near her, so he said, "Lord, we did nothing wrong. Surely you're not going to let innocent people who sinned in ignorance suffer. ⁵Abraham told me that she was his sister, and when I asked her, she said, 'Yes, he's my brother.' So in all honesty of heart I sent for her. But even though I sent for her, I'm still innocent because I haven't even touched her."

⁶Then God said to Abimelech in a night vision, "I know you did this in all honesty. But I spoke to you because I

wanted to stop you before you sinned against me by touching her. This is why I'm speaking to you, not because I'm holding you guilty. ⁷Now give Abraham back his wife. He holds the office of a prophet, and he will pray for you and no harm will come to you. If you don't give her back, both you and all those who belong to you will die."

⁸The next morning, Abimelech got up early and called in all his servants and told them about the night vision and what God had said. And they were all afraid. ⁹Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And what have I personally done to you for you to almost bring a disaster on me, my family and my country? No one should ever do what you have done to me. ¹⁰Answer me! Why did you lie to me about your wife?"

¹¹Abraham said, "I didn't think anyone here respected my God so I thought you might kill me to get my wife. ¹²That's why I said she's my sister, which is true. She is my half-sister. We have the same father but not the same mother. We fell in love and got married, so, yes, she is my wife. ¹³And when the Lord asked me to leave my father's house to come east, I said to her, 'Please be kind to me and tell people that I'm your brother, so they won't kill me for you because you're so beautiful.' And she agreed."

¹⁴Then Abimelech gave Sarah back to Abraham and also gave him sheep, oxen and servants as farewell gifts. ¹⁵He said to Abraham, "In addition to these gifts, I'm opening up the whole country for you. Live wherever you like."

¹⁶And to Sarah he said, "I'm giving your half-brother and husband one thousand pieces of silver for him to keep just for you. I want this to be a reminder that I am innocent of having touched you and that you are as innocent as when you came into my house."

¹⁷Then Abraham prayed for Abimelech and asked the Lord to heal him and his family and his servants so they could

have children and the family name would not die out. ¹⁸The Lord answered Abraham's prayer and healed Abimelech's household.

Sarah Conceives and Isaac Is Born

21 The Lord also restored Sarah's ability to conceive, as He had promised. ²She became pregnant and gave Abraham a son in his old age. The baby was born when the Lord had said he would be. ³Abraham named him Isaac, meaning He Made Us Laugh. ⁴When Isaac was only eight days old, Abraham circumcised him as God had instructed. ⁵Abraham was one hundred years old when Isaac was born.

⁶Sarah was so happy, she said, "God has made me laugh for joy and everyone who hears about my joy will laugh with me. ⁷Who could have predicted this and who could have told my husband that his wife, at her age, would be nursing a baby?"

Hagar and Ishmael

⁸Isaac grew, and when he was three years old, he was weaned from his mother. Abraham gave a great feast, and everyone rejoiced with him. ⁹One day Sarah saw young Ishmael, Abraham's teenage son by her Egyptian maid Hagar, making fun of Isaac and telling him that he would inherit nothing since all the wealth goes to the firstborn. ¹⁰She said to Abraham, "You need to send this maid and her son away, because Ishmael thinks that he will inherit everything we have; he's already asserting his supposed rights by ridiculing Isaac."

¹¹This hurt Abraham because he loved Ishmael also. ¹²Then God said to Abraham, "I know you feel hurt, but don't worry about the future of Ishmael and his mother Hagar. I'll watch over them. Do what Sarah asked you to do, because Isaac will be your heir and should be considered your firstborn. ¹³I'll take care of Hagar and will bless Ishmael and increase his offspring, so that he will become a great people because he too is your son."

¹⁴The next day Abraham talked to Hagar and told her what God had said. She accepted God's instruction, and when she was ready to go, Abraham gave her all she needed, including food and water for her trip. So the mother and son made their way south on one of the trade routes toward Beersheba.

¹⁵But soon their water bag was empty, and still no caravan had come. Hagar had been hoping that a caravan would come and give them a ride to Egypt. She found a large bush and told her son to stay in the shade while she went to find some water. ¹⁶She walked only a short distance and fell on her knees and said, "If God wants me to die from thirst, I'm willing, but to watch my son die out here is just too much." Then she started crying.

¹⁷However, God saw Hagar and Ishmael and heard their prayers. So He sent an angel from heaven to speak to Hagar. The angel said, "Hagar, don't be afraid. And don't worry. God has seen your tears and heard your prayers and has sent me to help you. ¹⁸Go back and get your son, but first let me show you where you can find some water. You will both live, and your son will become the father of a great nation."

¹⁹When she looked in the direction the angel was pointing, she saw a spring. She ran to fill her jug. Now she and her son had plenty to drink.

²⁰God took care of Hagar and Ishmael, and they caught a caravan going south and settled just this side of Egypt. That is where the boy grew up and became a very skillful hunter. ²¹When Ishmael reached manhood, he and his mother went to Egypt to find a wife for him, and when they found one, they came back and lived in the area known as Paran.

An Agreement With Abimelech

²²About this time, Abimelech with Phicol, his commander, went to see Abraham and said to him, "We know that God is with you and that you obey Him in everything you do. ²³We would like you

to take an oath and promise by your God that you will never again deceive me, my son or my descendants by telling me only part of the truth. Also, because I was kind to you and protected your people, I want you to take another oath and promise that you will be kind to me and protect my people."

²⁴Abraham answered, "I promise before God that I will do both just as you said."

²⁵They talked awhile, then Abraham pointed out to Abimelech that there was a problem over one of the area wells which Abraham's servants had dug, but which Abimelech's servants had taken away from them. ²⁶Abimelech said, "I didn't know about this. This is the first I've heard about it. I'll take care of it right away."

²⁷Then Abraham gave Abimelech sheep and oxen as a sign of ratification of the agreement the two of them had made.

²⁸In addition, he selected seven special lambs from the flock and offered them to Abimelech. ²⁹Then Abimelech said, "What does this mean? Why this special selection of seven lambs?"

³⁰Abraham said, "Please accept these seven lambs as an acknowledgment by you that I have dug this well."

³¹Abimelech accepted the seven lambs, so they named the place Beersheba, meaning The Well of Agreement, or The Well of Seven.

³²After they had made the agreement, Abimelech and Phicol, his commander, returned to their home in Philistia.

³³Then Abraham planted a grove of tamarisk trees around the Beersheba well, and there he worshiped the Lord and thanked Him for His protection.

³⁴And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

Abraham's Faith

22 Some time after this, when Isaac had grown to be a young man, God decided to test Abraham's loyalty. One night He called to him, "Abraham!" Abraham answered, "Yes, Lord, here I am."

²God said, "Take your son, the only one you have, the one you love so much, and go with him three days' travel to Mount Moriah. There at the top of the mountain I want you to offer up Isaac to me as a human sacrifice."

³Confused and pained over such a command, Abraham nevertheless obeyed. He quietly woke up two young servants and told them to load some donkeys with food, water and wood. Then even more quietly, so as not to wake Sarah, he woke up Isaac, and long before sunrise they were on their way to Mount Moriah. ⁴After two painful days and nights of wrestling with his conscience, on the third day Abraham saw in the distance Mount Moriah, the mountain to which God had sent him.

⁵Later that day, when they got to the base of the mountain, Abraham said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkeys while Isaac and I go to the top and offer a sacrifice to God. We'll be back later." After going over and over the promise God had made to him that he would have descendants, Abraham had come to the point where he had total confidence that God would solve the problem by raising Isaac from the dead.

⁶So he took the wood and put it on Isaac's back, while he carried the sacrificial knife and the live coals for the fire, and they started up the mountain. ⁷As they climbed, Isaac said, "Father?" Abraham answered, "Yes, my son?" Isaac questioned, "We have the wood and the fire, but where is the lamb?"

⁸Abraham replied, "God will provide one, my son." So the two of them silently walked up the mountain together. ⁹Finally they reached the top. Together they found some stones, arranged them to build an altar and put the wood on top. Then Abraham told Isaac what God had said. Though sad, Isaac saw it as a privilege to give up his life for God while he was young. He let Abraham tie his hands, then he willingly lay down on the altar. ¹⁰Abraham offered a prayer, then

trembling, raised the sacrificial knife high above his head so he could bring it down with force to quickly end his son's life. ¹¹At that moment, the Lord called out, "Abraham!"

He turned and answered, "Yes, Lord, here I am!" ¹²The Lord said, "Stop! Don't hurt the young man. You have proven your loyalty to me in the sight of the whole universe, because you have not held back your only son whom I know you dearly love."

¹³Abraham wept for joy, untied Isaac's hands, then saw a ram caught by his horns in some thorn bushes. Quickly they got the animal, and Abraham offered the sacrifice God had provided in place of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham named the place Jehovah-Jireh, meaning The Lord Sees and Provides. Ever since then people have called the place The Mountain Where the Lord Provided.

¹⁵Then the Lord said to Abraham, ¹⁶"I swear by My own name that I will bless you because you listened to me and in your heart offered up your only son as a sacrifice, no matter how painful it was to you. ¹⁷I promise to multiply your descendants until they are as numerous as the stars of heaven or the sand along the seashore. They will conquer the cities of their enemies, and from your offspring will come the Seed who will conquer death. ¹⁸Through Him all the nations on earth will be blessed. The Seed will come from your lineage because you have trusted and obeyed me."

¹⁹Then Abraham and Isaac made their way down the mountain to where the servants were and together went back to Beersheba where they lived.

Nahor, Abraham's Brother

²⁰Some time later Abraham learned that since he had left Ur in the land of the Chaldeans, his brother Nahor with his wife Milcah had had eight sons. ²¹Their firstborn was Uz; next was Buz; Kemuel, who was the father of Aram, was third. ²²Then came Chesed, Hazo, Pildash,

Jidlaph and Bethuel. ²³Bethuel was the father of Rebecca who would become the wife of Isaac. These are the eight nephews of Abraham, sons of his brother Nahor and his wife Milcah. ²⁴Nahor had four other children by Reumah his concubine, which were Tebah, Gaham, Tahash and Maacah.

Sarah's Death

23 Sarah lived another thirty-seven years after Isaac was born until she was one hundred and twenty-seven years old. ²She died in Kiriath Arba which is Hebron in the land of Canaan. Abraham wept over her and decided to bury her there.

³So he prepared her body for burial and went to the descendants of Heth, known as Hittites, and said, ⁴"I'm only a guest in your country, and through your kindness you have allowed me to settle here. My wife Sarah has just died. Would you please sell me a piece of land so I can give her a permanent resting place?"

⁵The descendants of Heth answered, ⁶"We know you are a leader and prince among us. Pick the choicest land you want and give your wife a permanent resting place. Not one of us would keep you from having the piece of land you choose."

⁷Then Abraham stood and bowed his head in gratitude before the Hittites. He said, ⁸"If you are willing that I choose the best land and give my wife a permanent resting place, please speak to Ephron, the son of Zohar, to see if he will sell me a piece of his land. ⁹I would like to bury my wife in the cave of Machpelah which is at this end of his property. I will pay him whatever he thinks it's worth so I may own it and give it to my wife as her last resting place."

¹⁰Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittite leaders gathered there, and he answered Abraham in the hearing of all the men sitting there, ¹¹"I'll be glad to give you that whole piece of land, including the cave. I agree to give it to you openly in front of all of our leaders so you can

have a place to bury your wife."

¹²Then Abraham bowed again in front of the Hittites ¹³and said for all of them to hear, "Please be so kind as to listen to me once more. I would consider it an honor to pay for the land and would like to feel that my last gift to Sarah really cost me something. So do let me pay you for your land."

¹⁴Ephron answered, ¹⁵"Sir, that piece of land is worth only four hundred pieces of silver. Such a small sum would never come between us. Just go ahead and bury your wife there."

¹⁶Then Abraham weighed out the amount that Ephron mentioned, four hundred pieces of silver, using the current value of merchants.

¹⁷So the land which had belonged to Ephron, including the cave and all the trees that were on it, now became Abraham's property. ¹⁸And it was acknowledged by all the Hittite leaders present that this piece of land now legally belonged to Abraham. ¹⁹Then Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre in Hebron in the land of Canaan. ²⁰So the land and the cave which had belonged to the Hittites now belonged to Abraham, and it was ever after accepted as such by the local people as Abraham's burial ground.

Isaac and Rebecca

24 The Lord continued to bless Abraham in all that he did. And when he was very old, ²he called in his household servant to come see him, the one who had been with him the longest, who was in charge of everything he owned. Abraham said, "I want you to make me a promise and confirm it by placing your hand under my thigh and taking an oath. ³Promise me before the Lord God of heaven and earth that you will see that my son Isaac does not marry one of the girls here in Canaan. ⁴I want you to choose a wife for him from my country, from among my relatives."

⁵Then the servant asked, "What if I go to your relatives and find a suitable girl

for Isaac, but the girl doesn't want to come and live here? Should Isaac go back to your country and live there?"

⁶Abraham answered, "Absolutely not! Whatever you do, don't send my son to live there! ⁷The Lord God of heaven told me to leave my country, my relatives and my own brothers. He told me to come to this country to live, and He promised to give this land to my descendants. So I believe that the Lord will help you find a wife for my son and that she'll be willing to come back here with you. ⁸But if you find a girl for Isaac and she doesn't want to come back here to live, you are free from this promise." ⁹So the servant put his hand under Abraham's thigh and took the oath he was asked to take.

¹⁰Since he was in charge of all that Abraham owned, he not only chose everything he needed for the long trip, but also gifts for Abraham's brother Nahor and his family who were living in the city of Nahor in the Haran region. With ten loaded camels he headed for Abraham's homeland in northern Mesopotamia. ¹¹When he arrived, he made his camels lie down by the well just outside the city. It was late in the afternoon about the time the women of the city came to the well to draw water.

¹²Then the servant prayed, "Lord God, the God of my master Abraham, please help me today and be kind to my master, as you promised. ¹³I'm standing here at a well waiting for the young women of the city to come to draw water. ¹⁴I will ask each one as they come to fill their jars, 'Please, may I have a drink of water?' And if one of them says, 'I'll be happy to give you a drink, and I'll even draw water for your camels because they must be thirsty too,' may this be the one that you have picked for your servant Isaac. If this happens, then I'll know that you are really interested in my master Abraham's son as you told him you were."

¹⁵Before he said Amen, the first young woman was coming from the city to the well with a large water jar on top of her

shoulder. Her name was Rebecca, daughter of Bethuel, who was the son of Nahor, Abraham's brother, and of his wife Milcah. ¹⁶She was very beautiful and was still a virgin. She walked down the steps to the well and filled her jar with water. As she came up, ¹⁷Eleazar approached her and said, "Please, may I have a drink?"

¹⁸She answered, "Of course! I'll be happy to give you a drink." So she lowered the large jar from her shoulder and held it while he drank. ¹⁹When he finished, she said, "Your camels must be thirsty too. Let me get some water for them." ²⁰She went over to where the camels were and emptied her jar into the drinking trough, then ran back down the stairs of the well to get more. She did this until all the camels were watered.

²¹The servant of Abraham was amazed, wondering if she would finish watering all ten camels. This would indicate for sure that this was the girl the Lord had chosen for Isaac. ²²When Rebecca finished watering the camels, Eleazar took a small gold nose ring and two large gold bracelets and said to her, "Thank you for what you have done." He put the gold bracelets on her arms and gave her the gold nose ring, ²³then he asked, "What is your name, and whose daughter are you? Do you think that your father would mind if my servants and I stayed at his house tonight?"

²⁴Rebecca answered, "Thank you for these gifts. My name is Rebecca, and I'm the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor and Milcah. ²⁵I'm sure my father will let you stay at our house tonight; there's lots of room for you and your servants. Our barns are full of straw, and there's plenty of food for the camels."

²⁶Then the servant bowed down and worshiped God and said in the hearing of Rebecca, ²⁷"Thank you, Lord. May your name be praised. Truly you are the God of my master Abraham. You have let me see your kindness and truthfulness. You have kept your promise to bless my master Abraham and his descendants, and you have led me straight to his relatives."

²⁸When the young woman heard this, she ran home as fast as she could and told her mother and brothers everything that had happened. ²⁹Then Laban, one of Rebecca's brothers, ran to welcome Abraham's servant who was still at the well. ³⁰Laban noticed the expensive nose ring and the gold bracelets on his sister's arms as she was telling her story, and he took an immediate interest in Abraham's servant. When he got to the well, he said, ³¹"Bless you! You must be the servant of Abraham that my sister told us about. Come on home with me. There's plenty of room for you and your men in the house and room for your camels in our barns."

³²So the servants followed Laban to the house. When they got there, Laban unloaded the camels, took them to the barn and fed them. Then he brought water to Eleazar and his men so they could wash up before the evening meal. ³³Laban invited everyone into the house and ordered his servants to bring on the food so the men could eat. But Eleazar said, "The meal can wait. I will not eat until I've told you why I've come here." Laban said, "Fine, tell us."

³⁴Eleazar answered, "I am Abraham's chief servant. ³⁵The Lord has greatly blessed my master and he has become a very rich man. The Lord has given him huge flocks of sheep and goats, large herds of cattle, plus silver and gold, and numerous men and women servants, not to mention unnumbered camels and donkeys. ³⁶Sarah, my master's wife, gave birth to a son when she was ninety years old, which was a miracle in itself. And Abraham has now turned everything over to his son, Isaac. ³⁷One day recently, my master called me in and said, 'I want you to take an oath and promise me that you will not let my son marry one of the girls here in Canaan, ³⁸but that you will go to the land where I grew up and visit my relatives to see if you can find a suitable young woman for him there.'

³⁹"And I said to my master, 'Suppose I

find a suitable young woman there, but she doesn't want to come here?' ⁴⁰He said to me, 'The Lord whom I serve and whom I have always obeyed will send an angel to go with you and help you find a wife for my son from among my own relatives. ⁴¹After you find a suitable young woman—and you will—ask her family to let her come with you. If they refuse, or if she refuses to come, then you are free from your oath.'

⁴²"So when I got here, I stopped at the city well and prayed, 'O Lord, You are the God of my master Abraham, so please help me find a suitable young woman for my master's son.' ⁴³When I came to this well, I told myself that soon the young women would be coming to draw water. I would ask each one to give me a drink of water from her jar. ⁴⁴And the one who says, 'I'll be glad to, and I'll even water your camels for you,' let her be the one you have chosen to be the wife of my master's son.

⁴⁵"I had hardly finished praying when Rebecca came along with her jar on her shoulder and went down the stairs to draw water from the well. When she came up, I went over to her and said, 'Please, may I have a drink of water?' ⁴⁶She quickly took down the jar from her shoulder and said, 'I'll be happy to give you a drink, and I'll water your camels too.' So I took a drink and watched her as she went up and down the stairs to draw water for my ten camels, which was no small task.

⁴⁷"When she finished, I asked her, 'What's your name and who is your father?' She answered, 'My name is Rebecca. I'm the daughter of Bethuel who is the son of Nahor and Milcah.' As soon as I heard that, I gave her a small gold nose ring and put a gold bracelet on each of her arms.

⁴⁸"Then I knelt down and said, 'O Lord, God of my master Abraham, may your name be praised because you led me straight to my master's relatives and helped me find a young woman for my master's son.' ⁴⁹And now that I've told

you the story, please be so kind as to let me know whether or not you will let Rebecca come with me to my master Abraham's house to be his son's wife, so I can know your answer before I eat."

⁵⁰Then Rebecca's father Bethuel and Laban, her oldest brother, said, "Since this is the Lord's doing, how can we say no? ⁵¹It's up to Rebecca. You need to ask her. She's the one who has to decide whether or not she thinks the Lord led you here and if she wants to marry your master's son."

⁵²So Abraham's servant asked Rebecca. When she gave her acceptance, he fell on his knees and thanked the Lord for all His blessings. ⁵³Then he opened his packs and brought out beautiful dresses and gold and silver jewelry and gave them to Rebecca. He also gave expensive gifts to her parents and to her brothers and sisters. ⁵⁴Only after Abraham's servant had given gifts to everyone, did he and his men sit down to eat.

After a good night's sleep they got up early the next morning and said to Rebecca's family, "We would like to get going as soon as we load our camels."

⁵⁵But her mother and her older brother Laban said, "Let Rebecca stay with us a week or ten days, then she can go."

⁵⁶But the servant said, "Please don't make me stay any longer than I have to. The Lord has made my trip worthwhile and I'm eager to get home." ⁵⁷They said, "Let's ask Rebecca and see what she wants to do." ⁵⁸So they called Rebecca and said, "Are you willing to go with them today?"

She answered, "I'm willing to go today." ⁵⁹Then the men loaded the camels, and that very day the family let Rebecca and her maid go with Abraham's servant back to Canaan. ⁶⁰Before she left, the family blessed her and said, "Rebecca, dear, may God bless you and may you become the mother of many people, and may your descendants always be victorious." ⁶¹Then Rebecca with her maid mounted the

camels and left with Abraham's servant to go to Canaan.

⁶²In the meantime, Isaac had returned from attending the flocks in another area of the country to be with his father Abraham, who was then living near Beersheba. ⁶³One day toward evening, as he took a walk in the field to pray and meditate, he saw in the distance a small caravan of camels. He sensed that it might be his father's servant, so he decided to meet the caravan. This was not far from the well called Beer Lahai Roi, meaning The Well of the One Who Sees Me, the name Hagar gave it after God helped her find water for herself and her child. ⁶⁴Rebecca had been watching too, because Abraham's servant told her that they were nearing home. As she scanned the horizon, she saw a man walking alone in the field. Sensing it might be Isaac, she asked the caravan to stop, and she slipped off the camel.

⁶⁵She asked the servant, "Is that Isaac walking in the field coming to meet us?" The servant answered, "Yes, that's my young master." Then Rebecca took her veil and covered her face, as was the custom for young virgins to do.

⁶⁶When they met, the servant greeted Isaac, introduced him to Rebecca and told him everything that had happened. ⁶⁷Then Isaac led the caravan to his father's encampment and took Rebecca to his mother's tent, and she became his wife. He loved her very much, and she loved him and helped him over his grief from the loss of his mother.

Abraham Remarries

25 About this time Abraham married again. He took a wife whose name was Keturah. ²With her Abraham had six sons: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. ³Jokshan's sons were Sheba and Dedan. The descendants of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim and Leummim. ⁴Midian's sons were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida and Eldaah. All of these were the offspring of Abraham and Keturah.

⁵Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. ⁶But while he lived, he gave gifts to all his sons, and as they grew and married, he asked them to settle toward the east, in order to leave Palestine for Isaac.

Abraham Dies

⁷This then is the life of Abraham: He lived to be one hundred and seventy-five years old. ⁸He lived to a ripe old age and then went to sleep as his ancestors had done. ⁹Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, which had once belonged to Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite. ¹⁰This was the cave that Abraham had bought from the Hittites as a burial site for Sarah, his wife. ¹¹After Abraham died, the blessings and promises of God belonged to Isaac. He had settled with Abraham his father near the well Beer Lahai Roi.

Ishmael and Isaac

¹²The twelve sons of Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar, the Egyptian maid of Sarah, ¹³are here listed in order of their birth: Nebaioth, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, ¹⁴Mishma, Dumah, Massa, ¹⁵Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. ¹⁶These are the heads of twelve tribes, all descendants of Ishmael, and twelve areas of the country are named after them, as are many towns and villages. ¹⁷Ishmael lived one hundred and thirty-seven years and was buried with his people. ¹⁸The descendants of Ishmael lived between Havilah and Shur in the area just east of Egypt. All his relatives were present when he died.

¹⁹The story of the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son by Sarah, is as follows: ²⁰Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebecca, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean, and sister of Laban the Aramean, both of whom lived in Mesopotamia. ²¹Rebecca was not able to have children, so Isaac prayed to the Lord, and the Lord answered his prayer. Soon afterward Rebecca became pregnant. ²²Months passed and

the babies began to struggle inside her. "What's happening to me?" she asked the Lord.

²³God said, "This means that two nations and two kinds of people are in your womb. The twin boys you're carrying are totally different from each other, and there will always be rivalry between them and their offspring. But one nation will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

²⁴So when the time came for her to be delivered, she had twin boys, just as the Lord had said. ²⁵The first boy to come out was reddish with lots of hair, even some on his body, so they called him Esau, which means Hairy. ²⁶The other twin came out holding tightly to his brother's heel, and they called him Jacob, which means Heel-holder. Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.

²⁷As the boys grew, the parents could see that there was considerable difference between the two. Esau was the restless type and interested in hunting, at which he became quite skilled, while Jacob was quiet and preferred to stay at home and care for the sheep. ²⁸As the years went by, Isaac favored Esau because he loved deer meat, while Rebecca favored Jacob.

Esau Sells His Birthright

²⁹One day when Jacob was out in the field tending the sheep and cooking lentils in front of his tent, Esau stopped by, very tired after hours of fruitless hunting. ³⁰He said to Jacob, "Please let me have some of that red stuff because I'm starved and exhausted." That's why the people later called him Edom, meaning Red.

³¹Jacob answered, "First, give me the priestly privileges of your birthright." ³²Esau said, "Look, I need something to eat! What good are the priestly privileges of my birthright if I starve to death? You can have them!"

³³Jacob replied, "Wait! Don't just say, 'You can have them.' Take an oath, so

I'll know that you mean it." So Esau took an oath to show that he meant what he said.³⁴ Then Jacob gave him as many lentils as he could eat, and Esau ate and drank until he was full. Without even thinking about what he had just given away, Esau said good-bye and left. But Jacob had run ahead of God's providence, just as Abraham had in fathering Ishmael.

Isaac and Abimelech

26 Another famine came on the land, similar to the one which happened during the time of Abraham. Isaac moved into the territory of Abimelech, king of the Philistines, and settled near the city of Gerar.² Here the Lord appeared to Isaac in a dream and said, "Don't go to Egypt. Stay here, and I'll tell you where and when to move to survive the famine.³ Stay in this land, and I'll be with you and bless you. This land will belong to you and your descendants as I promised your father Abraham.⁴ I will multiply your descendants, and they will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens. This land will belong to your descendants, and from them blessings will flow out to the whole world.⁵ I made this promise to your father Abraham because he followed my instructions, even though it seemed unreasonable to him. He also kept my commandments and my laws."⁶ So Isaac stayed near the city of Gerar where he and his family had pitched camp.

⁷One day the Philistines in the area asked about his wife, who also was his second cousin. He lied and said, "She's my sister." He said this because he was afraid that if they knew he was her husband, they would kill him so they could have Rebecca, because she was a very beautiful woman.

⁸Isaac and Rebecca lived there a long time. One day the Philistine king named Abimelech, like his ancestor, was looking out the window when he saw Isaac caressing his wife Rebecca.⁹ Then Abimelech had Isaac brought to him and

said, "What have you done? You told us Rebecca was your sister when she's really your wife! How could you do this to us?"

Isaac answered, "I was afraid someone would kill me just to get her if I said she was my wife."¹⁰ Abimelech said, "But by telling us she's your sister, one of our men might have forced her to go home with him, and your God would have punished our whole country for that!"¹¹ Then Abimelech issued an order to all his people that anyone who touched Isaac or Rebecca would be executed on the spot.

¹²So the couple continued to live there, respected by the people and protected by the king. That same year Isaac planted crops, and the Lord blessed him. When harvest time came, he reaped a hundred times more than he had sown.¹³ So Isaac prospered and became one of the richest men in that area.¹⁴ He had many herds of cattle and flocks of sheep and scores of servants, so much so that the local Philistines became jealous.¹⁵ All the wells which Isaac's father Abraham had dug when he was still alive, the Philistines had filled them with dirt.

¹⁶Abimelech finally told Isaac, "Why don't you just move away from here, because you're already so much richer than any of us."¹⁷ So Isaac moved away and set up camp in the Valley of Gerar.¹⁸ He re-dug some of the wells which the Philistines had filled in after Abraham had died. Then Isaac gave them the same names his father had given them.

¹⁹One day Isaac's servants were digging a new well in the valley when they came across a spring of bubbling water.²⁰ The local herdsmen argued with Isaac's servants over who had the right to the spring. They said, "The spring belongs to us because we lived here before you did." So Isaac called the spring Esek, meaning The Place of Quarrel, because the herdsmen were always arguing over it.²¹ Then Isaac's servants dug another new well nearby, but soon the local herdsmen argued over that one too. So Isaac called it Sitnah, meaning The Place of Hatred.²² This time he told his

servants to dig a well in another valley, which they did, and there was no more arguing. So Isaac called this one Rehoboth, meaning Lots of Room, and he said, "The Lord made room for us, and now we can grow and prosper again."

²³Soon after this Isaac made a trip to the area of Beersheba. ²⁴While he was there, the Lord said to him in a dream, "I am the God of your father Abraham, so don't be afraid, because I am with you as I was with your father, and I will bless you and multiply your descendants just as I promised him." ²⁵So Isaac built an altar there and worshiped the Lord. Then he returned home and moved his family and his herds to Beersheba, and his servants dug the needed wells.

²⁶After Isaac had settled there, Abimelech, with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol his commander, left the city of Gerar and went to Beersheba to talk with Isaac. ²⁷Isaac was surprised to see them and said, "Why have you come all this way to see me when you didn't even want me to live near you? In fact, you asked me to leave the area near Gerar, which I did."

²⁸They said, "We now know that the Lord is with you, so we decided to come to see if we could make an agreement between us and seal it with an oath. ²⁹This agreement would simply be that you would not harm our people, but be good to them just as we've been good to you and sent you away in peace. We did it because we knew that the Lord was with you and that He was protecting you."

³⁰So Isaac had his servants prepare a feast, and they ate and drank together. ³¹Early the next morning they made their agreement and sealed it with an oath. Then they said good-bye and parted as friends.

³²That same day, Isaac's servants told him that they had found more water and had dug still another well, enough to take care of his herds and flocks. ³³So Isaac called the new well Sheba, meaning The Place Where I Took an Oath, and this is

how the present city of Beersheba retained its name.

³⁴Now when Esau was about forty years old, instead of marrying one of his distant relatives as his father Isaac had done, he married two Hittite girls. One was Judith, the daughter of Beerli, and the other Basemath (also called Adah), the daughter of Elon. ³⁵They were a constant source of grief to Isaac and Rebecca.

Isaac Blesses Jacob

27When Isaac was old and nearly blind, he called Esau, his firstborn and said to him, "My son, come here; I want to talk to you." So Esau sat down and said, "Here I am, Father."

²Then Isaac said, "I'm now old and nearly blind and don't know how much longer I'll live. ³So why don't you take your bow and go hunt a deer for me. ⁴Roast some of the meat and make it the way I like it. Then you and I can eat together. I want to give you what rightfully belongs to you, a double portion of everything I have before I die."

⁵Rebecca overheard what Isaac said to Esau and then watched Esau take his bow and head out to the fields to find a deer. ⁶She immediately called Jacob in and said to him, "Listen! I just overheard your father talking to your brother Esau. ⁷He told him to hunt a deer and roast the meat the way he likes it, then they'll sit down together and eat. Your father will give your brother a double portion of everything he has, because he's the firstborn. ⁸Hurry and do as I say, so you can have all the rights of the firstborn, temporal and spiritual, as God has said you should have. ⁹Go out to the herd in the field and get the two youngest goats you can find. We'll kill them and roast their meat and make it just as your father likes it. I'll cook it the way Esau cooks venison, and your father won't know the difference. ¹⁰Then you can take it in to him, and the two of you can eat together, and he'll will the inheritance of the firstborn to you."

¹¹Jacob hesitated to deceive his father,

so he said, "Even if I agree to do this, Father will know that I'm not Esau. I hardly have any hair on my arms, and Esau's arms are covered with hair. ¹²All Father has to do is reach over and take my hand and feel my arm. He'll know that I'm not Esau. Then instead of blessing me, he'll pronounce a curse on me for lying to him." ¹³Rebecca said, "Let God's curse be on me; I'll assume responsibility for this. Do as I say and go out to the herd and get a couple of young goats."

¹⁴So Jacob did what his mother had suggested and selected two young goats and brought them to Rebecca. She cooked the meat just the way Isaac loved it. ¹⁵Then she took some of Esau's clothes and told Jacob to put them on. ¹⁶She covered Jacob's hands, arms and neck with the skins from the two young goats. ¹⁷And she gave Jacob the platter of meat she had prepared and told him to take it to his father.

¹⁸Jacob took the meat to his father's tent, and as he came in, he gently called, "Father!" Isaac said, "I can barely hear you, my son. Who are you?"

¹⁹Jacob answered, "I'm Esau, your firstborn, and I've done what you asked me to do. Sit up and let's eat this special dish of venison together. It's made just the way you like it. Then you can give me the double portion that you told me about."

²⁰Isaac sat up and said, "How did you find a deer so soon and prepare this meat so quickly?" Jacob said, "Because God was with me and helped me." ²¹But Isaac had some doubts and said, "Come close to me, my son. I want to feel you to make sure you're Esau."

²²So Jacob came close to Isaac and his father felt him and said, "I'm puzzled, because you sound like Jacob, but your hands and arms feel like Esau's." ²³Isaac was not able to detect the deception because Jacob's hands and arms felt as hairy as Esau's. He said, "God bless you, my son, ²⁴but tell me honestly, are you really Esau?" Jacob answered, "Yes, I am."

²⁵Isaac then believed him and said, "Bring me the meat you prepared so I can enjoy your special recipe one last time, then I'll give you the inheritance of the firstborn." So Jacob brought him the dish of meat, poured out some freshly squeezed wine and watched his father eat and drink. ²⁶When Isaac finished eating, he murmured, "Come close to me again, my son, and give me a hug and kiss."

²⁷Jacob went up to his father and hugged and kissed him, and Isaac sniffed Jacob's clothes and said, "God bless you, my son. You smell just like the open fields which I love and which the Lord has blessed. ²⁸May the Lord God of heaven give you the rains you need to keep your pastures green, and may He give you abundant harvests of grapes and wheat. ²⁹May you have many servants, and may all nations respect you and your descendants. May your brother accept your authority as the firstborn, and may you and your descendants be respected by all who trace their ancestry back to your mother's womb. Cursed be everyone who curses you and blessings on everyone who blesses you. The double portion of the firstborn is now yours."

Esau's Lost Birthright

³⁰No sooner had Jacob thanked his father and given him a good-bye hug and kiss, than Esau came back from hunting.

³¹He skinned the deer and prepared the dish his father liked and brought it to him in his tent. As he came in he said, "Father, sit up and feast on the special dish that I made for you. Then you can give me the inheritance that you promised."

³²Isaac sat up and asked, "Which son are you?" Esau said, "I'm Esau, your firstborn." ³³Then Isaac began to shake, and with a trembling voice, he said, "Who did you say? I just ate a special dish of meat just before you came and gave a double portion of everything I have to him who brought it. There is no way to change that blessing!"

³⁴When Esau heard this, he cried out

in bitterness and pain and pleaded, "O, my father, give me some kind of blessing!" ³⁵Isaac said, "It must have been your brother who came in pretending to be you. He took away the double portion which I intended to give to you."

³⁶Esau said, "Jacob hasn't been called Heel-holder for nothing. That's twice now he's tricked me. First, he took away my privileges as family priest, and now he has taken my inheritance! Father, isn't there one blessing left for me?"

³⁷Then Isaac answered, "Listen, my son. Jacob is now officially in charge of everything, including the servants, and all the future harvests of grapes and wheat will belong to him. So there is nothing left to give you unless he decides to do so."

³⁸With tears in his eyes, Esau pleaded, "Surely you have something for me, Father, at least a blessing, even if there is no inheritance that goes with it. Please, Father, please bless me." And Esau cried.

³⁹Isaac reached out to him, "Yes, my son, I do have a blessing for you. Listen, your future will not be in the harvests of the earth, nor will it depend on the rains from heaven. ⁴⁰But your future will lie in your skill as a hunter and in the use of the sword. Right now you're subject to your brother, but the time will come when you will break away from dependence on him and be totally free."

Jacob Escapes

⁴¹From then on Esau hated his brother Jacob because he had tricked his father into giving him the family fortune. He decided that he would kill Jacob as soon as Isaac his father died.

⁴²But Esau couldn't keep that thought to himself, and he shared it with others. Soon it got back to Rebecca. When she heard it, she sent for Jacob and warned, "Listen, my son, your brother Esau is saying that he'll kill you as soon as your father dies. The way your father's health is, this could happen tomorrow! ⁴³You need to leave immediately and go to visit

my brother, Laban, in Mesopotamia. ⁴⁴Stay there with him until your brother's anger cools off. ⁴⁵I'll let you know when it's safe to return. Knowing your brother, he'll soon forget, and you can come back home. If you stay here, he'll kill you as soon as your father dies, and I couldn't take losing you and your father at the same time."

⁴⁶Then Rebecca went to see Isaac and said, "These Hittite women really bother me. They're constantly after Jacob, and I surely wouldn't want him to fall in love with one of them. If that happens, I'd just as soon die. I think we should send Jacob to my brother, Laban, in Mesopotamia to find a girl there."

28 Isaac listened to Rebecca and agreed to do just as Abraham had done when he sent his servant to find a wife for him. So Isaac called Jacob in and told him not to marry one of the local Hittite girls, ²but to go to his grandfather Bethuel in the region of Haran in Mesopotamia as his mother had suggested. There he should try to find a wife for himself from one of the daughters of Laban, his mother's brother. ³Then Isaac forgave Jacob and prayed, "May the Almighty God bless you and keep you and give you a safe journey. May He give you many children so that your descendants will become a great nation. ⁴May the blessings of God be with you and your descendants forever, and may you eventually inherit the land which He promised to your grandfather Abraham." ⁵Then Isaac and Jacob hugged and kissed each other, and Jacob said good-bye and left for the region of Haran in Mesopotamia to visit his grandfather Bethuel and his uncle Laban.

Esau Marries Mahalath

⁶When Esau heard that Isaac had approved Rebecca's plan for Jacob to go to Mesopotamia to find a wife and that his father had counseled Jacob not to marry a Hittite girl, ⁷and also that Jacob had lis-

tened to both of them and had already left for Mesopotamia, ⁸it finally dawned on him how strongly his parents disapproved of his having married the two Hittite girls. He now understood that they didn't want local women to be part of the family. ⁹So Esau went to visit his uncle Ishmael, Abraham's first son, and married Mahalath, his cousin, one of the daughters of Ishmael, and the sister of Nebaioth, in addition to the wives he already had.

Jacob at Bethel

¹⁰Meanwhile, Jacob headed north from Beersheba, taking the road to Mesopotamia. ¹¹The first night out he was very tired and stopped as soon as the sun began to set. He used a flat stone for a headrest and lay down and fell sound asleep. ¹²That night he had a dream. He saw a long staircase resting on the earth and reaching all the way to heaven, with angels going up and down on it. ¹³At the top of the staircase stood the Lord who said to Jacob, "I am the Lord God of your grandfather Abraham and of your father Isaac. The land you're sleeping on will someday belong to you and your descendants. ¹⁴It will be as difficult to number your descendants as to count the grains of sand on the seashore, and they will spread out to the west, to the east, to the north and to the south. Through them, all people on the earth will be blessed. ¹⁵I will be with you and protect you wherever you go, and I will bring you safely back home. I will never leave you or forsake you, and I will keep my promise to you, the same promise I made to your father and grandfather."

¹⁶Suddenly Jacob awakened and said, "I didn't know the Lord was standing in this very place when I went to sleep last night!" ¹⁷Then he was afraid and said to himself, "This is awesome! This place is holy! It's the gateway into heaven!"

¹⁸The rest of the night he couldn't sleep. So just as it began to dawn, he got up, gathered some rocks, stacked them up and put the stone he had used as a

pillow on top. Then he poured some olive oil on it and made a commitment to the Lord. ¹⁹He called the place Bethel, meaning The House of God, even though the pagan village nearby was called Luz.

²⁰Then Jacob vowed, "Lord God, if you will be with me wherever I go and watch over me as you have promised, and if you will see that I don't go hungry or become a beggar, ²¹and if you will help me return home and find peace, then I'll know that you have accepted my confession and forgiven me. I will know that you care about me, and I will serve you forever. ²²This pillar of piled-up rocks will testify that this place is sacred. It seems as if you already live here; it's like a gateway into heaven. Also, I promise that whatever you give me, I will give one-tenth back to you."

Jacob Meets Rachel

29After many days Jacob arrived in Mesopotamia at the city where his grandfather Bethuel and his mother's brother Laban lived. ²He noticed a well on the outskirts of the city with three flocks of sheep waiting to be watered, but there was a huge stone covering the mouth of the well. ³The custom was that the stone could not be rolled away until all the flocks had come in from the field, and after they had been watered, then the stone would be rolled back again.

⁴He walked over to the shepherds and asked, "Where are you from?" They replied, "We're originally from Haran." ⁵Jacob said, "Do you know a man named Laban, whose grandfather is Nahor?" "Yes, we do," they answered. ⁶Jacob asked, "How is he?" "Fine," they said, "in fact, here comes his daughter Rachel with the family sheep."

⁷Jacob said, "There's something strange about all this. This isn't the time of day to bring in sheep from the field and let them stand here. Why don't you men water your sheep and then take them back to pasture? There's still lots of daylight left." ⁸They said, "We don't do that because it's

the custom that no flock is watered ahead of any other. Only when they're all here do we roll away the stone."

⁹Jacob and the men were still talking about the custom of watering when Rachel arrived with her flock. ¹⁰And when Jacob saw Rachel taking her place in line to water his uncle Laban's flock, he went to the well and rolled away the stone so she and the men could water their sheep. ¹¹While Rachel was waiting her turn, Jacob went over and introduced himself as her cousin, then kissed her on the cheek and began to weep. ¹²When she learned that he was Rebecca's son, she ran home to tell her father, leaving the servants in charge of the sheep.

¹³And when Laban heard that his sister's son was here, he ran to the well to meet him. He hugged him, kissed him on both cheeks, brought him home and did everything he could to make him feel welcome. Then Jacob told the family everything that had happened since his mother left their home. ¹⁴When he finished, Laban said, "You are bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. Stay here for the next month and see if you like it." So Jacob stayed and helped Laban take care of his sheep.

Leah and Rachel

¹⁵One day Laban said to Jacob, "You shouldn't be working for me for nothing, just because you're my nephew. How much do you want me to pay you?"

¹⁶Laban had two daughters; Leah was the oldest and Rachel, the youngest. ¹⁷Leah had weak eyes and little personality, while Rachel was shapely, with beautiful eyes and a sparkling personality. ¹⁸Jacob loved Rachel from the first day he saw her. He said to Laban, "I'm in love with your daughter, Rachel, but I don't have the right kind of security to think about marriage. I'm willing to stay here and work for you for seven years to build up a financial base, if at the end of that time you'll let me marry Rachel."

¹⁹Laban said, "I would prefer that you

marry her to keep our families together than to have some stranger marry her. I'll accept your offer, and we'll look forward to the wedding." ²⁰So Jacob worked seven years for Laban to pay the dowry to marry Rachel. He loved Rachel very much and was so happy to be near her that the seven years seemed like nothing.

²¹When the time was up, Jacob went to Laban and said, "I have kept my part of the agreement and shown myself successful to guarantee Rachel a secure future. I would now like to go ahead and get married."

²²Laban agreed and set a date for the wedding. He planned a big celebration and invited family and friends from near and far. ²³During the reception when the time came for the bride to go to the bridal chambers as a sign of marriage, Laban sent Leah in instead of Rachel, and she willingly took part in the deception. A little while later Jacob followed. In the dark and in his eagerness to consummate their marriage, Jacob made love to Leah without realizing who she was. ²⁴It was the custom to let the bride keep her servant girl with her even after marriage, which Leah did. Her name was Zilpah.

²⁵In the morning when Jacob woke up and looked at his sleeping bride, it wasn't Rachel, it was Leah! He was furious and stormed out of the tent. He went to Laban and said, "What in the world have you done to me? I worked for you for seven years so I could marry Rachel and you agreed. But you've given me Leah! How could you do that to me?"

²⁶Laban said, "Calm down. You've been in our country long enough to know that it's not culturally acceptable to let the younger daughter get married before the older one. ²⁷Let's finish the week-long reception and at the end of the week, I'll announce to everyone that I'm giving you Rachel as well. That is, providing you work for me another seven years."

²⁸Jacob agreed, because he loved Rachel. So he went through the week-long celebration, looking forward to the end of

the week. On the last day of the feast, Laban announced to everyone that he was giving Rachel to Jacob to be his second wife. ²⁹And as the custom was, Rachel kept her servant girl, Bilhah, just as Leah had done. ³⁰After Rachel had gone to the bridal chamber, Jacob followed her and consummated his marriage to Rachel as he had for Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

Jacob's Descendants

³¹When the Lord saw that Leah was being shunned by Jacob, He caused her to get pregnant the very next time Jacob slept with her. But Rachel continued to be childless. ³²Leah conceived and gave birth to a son and named him Reuben, which means Look, a Son! She said to herself, "The Lord saw how I was being shunned and that I had to entice my own husband to sleep with me, but now that I've given my husband a son, he will take greater interest in me."

³³Leah conceived again and gave birth to another son and called him Simeon, which means An Answer to Prayer, because she said to herself, "The Lord saw that I was still being shunned, so He gave me another son."

³⁴Then she became pregnant again and gave birth to a third son whom she called Levi, meaning Attached, because she was convinced that her husband would now love her since she had given him three sons.

³⁵Once more she conceived and gave birth to a fourth son whom she called Judah, which means Let God Be Praised, because she thanked God for having four sons. Then she stopped having children for a while.

30 When Rachel could not get pregnant but saw that her sister Leah had four sons, she was jealous and said to Jacob, "Give me some children, or I might as well die!"

²This outburst upset Jacob, and he said, "Do you think I'm God? I've done my

part. What else do you expect? God controls such things, not me." ³Then Rachel said, "Why don't you sleep with Bilhah, my servant girl, and she can have a baby for me." ⁴So Rachel made arrangements for Jacob to sleep with Bilhah as if she were his wife so she would conceive. ⁵And Bilhah did conceive and gave birth to a son. ⁶Then Rachel said, "The Lord heard my prayer and decided to lift me up by giving me a son." She called him Dan, which means Judged Favorably.

⁷Then Rachel made the same arrangement with Jacob and Bilhah again, and she conceived and gave birth to another son. ⁸Rachel said, "I have wrestled with God in prayer and have won back my wifely respect." And she called the baby Naphtali, meaning Victorious Wrestling.

⁹When Leah saw that she was not getting pregnant anymore, she put pressure on Jacob to sleep with Zilpah. Leah made the same arrangements with Zilpah as Rachel had made with Bilhah. ¹⁰Then Zilpah conceived and gave birth to a son. ¹¹Leah called him Gad, meaning Good Fortune.

¹²Then Leah made a second arrangement with her, and Zilpah got pregnant again and gave birth to a second son. ¹³Leah said to herself, "I'm really happy because all the women now call me blessed of God." So she named Zilpah's son Asher, meaning Happy.

¹⁴One day during the harvest season, Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, came back from working in the field and brought home some wild mandrakes, called love apples. His mother Leah had asked him to find some to help her get pregnant again. When Rachel saw them, she said to Leah, "Please let me have some!"

¹⁵Leah said, "Did it ever occur to you that you've stolen Jacob's affection from me when he was my husband before he was yours? And now you want some of the love apples my son found for me! Forget it!" Rachel said, "I'll give up my turn to have Jacob sleep with me tonight and let him sleep with you if you give me

some of those love apples.” So Leah agreed. ¹⁶When Jacob came home that evening, Leah ran out to meet him and said, “Tonight you’re going to sleep with me because Rachel traded her night with you for some of the love apples Reuben found in the field.”

Jacob agreed, and that night he slept in Leah’s tent. ¹⁷The Lord answered Leah’s prayer, and she conceived and gave Jacob a fifth son. ¹⁸She said, “The Lord has answered my prayer, so now I don’t have to let my servant girl have babies for me anymore.” And she called the boy Issachar, which means There Is a Reward.

¹⁹Leah conceived again and gave Jacob a sixth son of her own. ²⁰She said, “The Lord has given me a rich dowry to give to my husband. Now I know Jacob will love me because I’ve given him six sons.” So she named the baby Zebulun, which means Now I’ll be Accepted. ²¹Then Leah conceived again and gave birth to a daughter and called her Dinah, which means Justice.

²²But the Lord didn’t ignore Rachel’s prayer and He activated her womb also. ²³She conceived and gave Jacob a son and said, “Finally God has heard my prayers and taken away my shame.” ²⁴Rachel named her baby Joseph, which means May He Add and said, “The Lord has given me a son and taken away my shame. Now maybe He will give me another son.”

Jacob’s Agreement

²⁵After Joseph was born, Jacob went to Laban and said, “It’s time for me to go back home to my own country. ²⁶I’ve worked for you for years now, fulfilling my obligation for Leah and Rachel. Now it’s time for me to go back home. I’ve worked hard looking after your interests, and you have more than prospered from my service.”

²⁷Laban answered, “Do stay. I’ve learned that the Lord is with you, and I admit that He has blessed me because of you. So don’t leave, please. ²⁸As far as

your wages go, tell me what you think I should pay you, and I will do it, because I really want you to stay.”

²⁹Then Jacob said, “You know how hard I’ve worked and how carefully I have watched over your herds. ³⁰When I first came here, you had very few animals, and now you can hardly count them. There’s no doubt that the Lord has blessed you. But the question is, When will I be able to have my own herds and build a future for my family?” ³¹Laban asked, “What do you want me to give you?”

Jacob answered, “I don’t want you to give me anything. You’ve always paid me the least you could. I’ll stay on one condition. Start paying me decent wages. ³²Let me go through the herds and pick out all the speckled or spotted sheep and goats and the black lambs. And all the animals born that way in the future will belong to me. ³³Then everyone can see what my wages are and can tell whether or not I’m honest. If you ever find one of your animals in my herds, you can count it as stolen.”

³⁴Laban said, “It’s a deal! We’ll begin today.” ³⁵Then he went out to the field and separated the spotted sheep and goats from his herds and asked his sons to take charge of them. ³⁶He told them to take these herds three days’ walking distance away from Jacob, who would stay and take care of Laban’s solid colored herds. Laban wanted to prevent any crossbreeding from taking place.

³⁷From that day on, Jacob followed a local custom which people believed would change the color of herds. He got some green branches of poplar, almond and other trees, stripped off rings of bark here and there so the branches had white and brown rings on them. ³⁸He then placed these in front of the animals when they came to the water holes to drink, where the animals usually mated. ³⁹When Laban’s animals gave birth, many of their offspring were speckled or spotted, just as Jacob had planned, not knowing that God was really the One at

work. ⁴⁰Jacob continued this practice until the speckled and spotted animals grew and were ready to mate. Then instead of using branches, he made Laban's animals face the speckled and spotted ones as he lined them up to drink, and the same thing happened. Soon Jacob had large herds of his own, and he decided it was time to separate the speckled and spotted animals from Laban's herds.

⁴¹Another way Jacob built his herds was to put ringed branches only in front of the strong animals, not the weak ones. ⁴²Soon Laban had all the weaker animals in his herds while Jacob had the more vigorous ones. God was correcting Laban's injustice by affecting the formation of the speckled and spotted animals. ⁴³In a few years Jacob became very prosperous with large herds of healthy sheep, goats, donkeys and camels. He also had many workers to care for his animals while he continued to work for Laban.

Jacob Flees

31 Before long, Laban's sons were saying, "Everything that Jacob has he's taken from our father. He's become wealthy from what belongs to us."

²And as the months went by, Jacob noticed that Laban was not as friendly to him as he had been before.

³About this time the Lord said to Jacob, "It's time for you to go back home to the land of your ancestors to be with your own kindred, and I'll be with you."

⁴So Jacob sent word to Leah and Rachel to come out to the field to meet him.

⁵There they had some privacy, and he was able to speak to them freely. He said, "I've noticed that your father hasn't been as friendly to me lately as he used to be, but at least the Lord has been with me."

⁶You know how hard I've worked for your father, harder than anyone else he's ever had. ⁷Yet he hasn't always been honest with me. In fact, over the past twenty years, he's changed my wages ten times. But the Lord has been with me

and kept me from harm. ⁸When your father said to me, 'All the speckled animals will be your wages,' then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young. When he changed his mind and said, 'All the spotted animals will be your wages,' then all the flocks gave birth to spotted young. ⁹So the Lord has blessed me and taken large numbers of speckled and spotted animals from your father's herds to pay me what I should have been paid in the first place.

¹⁰"I saw in a dream that when the herds came to water, the only goats that mated were the speckled and spotted ones. That's why so many newborn animals were speckled and spotted. ¹¹In my dream, the Angel of the Lord called, "Jacob!" I answered, "Here I am!" ¹²He said, "Have you seen how the speckled and spotted males prevailed? This is my doing, because I have noticed how Laban has been treating you. ¹³I want you to know that I haven't changed. I'm still the same as when you saw me at Bethel where you set up a pillar of stones and anointed it with oil, vowing to be faithful to me if I forgave you. Well, I've been with you, and now it's time for you to go back to your own land and people."

¹⁴Leah and Rachel said, "There's nothing for us here. We have no inheritance coming, so why stay? ¹⁵In fact, our father treats us more like strangers than like daughters. He sold us to you as he sells property, and the money he made from you, he's already spent. ¹⁶Everything the Lord has taken from our father and given to you is legitimately ours and belongs to us and to our children. So whatever the Lord has told you to do, do it, and let's go."

¹⁷As soon as they said this, Jacob began preparing to leave. He packed and loaded his tents, put his wives and children on camels and started out toward home. ¹⁸He took all his servants and herds with him and whatever else he had accumulated during his stay in Mesopotamia, and headed back to his father Isaac, who was

still alive in the land of Canaan.

¹⁹Just before they left, while Laban was out in the fields shearing sheep, Rachel went to her father's house and took the small figurines of the fertility goddesses. ²⁰When she got back, everything was ready, and Jacob and his wives and children left for Canaan without a word to Laban. ²¹Jacob had with him everything he owned, including his very large herds of animals. They soon came to the Euphrates River and, after safely crossing it, they headed for the hill country of Gilead.

Laban Pursues Jacob

²²Three days later, word reached Laban that Jacob had left for his home.

²³Without a moment's hesitation, Laban took his best men and went after Jacob. Seven days later he found Jacob still camped in the hill country of Gilead. ²⁴That night God said to Laban in a dream, "I don't want you to flatter or threaten Jacob to get him to go back with you. It's time for him to go home."

²⁵The next day Laban reached the hill country, and he and his men set up camp opposite Jacob, blocking his way out.

²⁶Then they crossed the valley to see Jacob, and Laban said, "Why have you kidnapped my daughters? You left so fast that it looked like I had been mean to you!

²⁷Why? Why didn't you tell me you were going? We could at least have had a going-away party with music and dancing, and eaten together one last time. ²⁸I didn't even have a chance to kiss my daughters good-bye as a father should. As far as I'm concerned, what you did was foolish.

²⁹With these burly men of mine I could harm you, but God spoke to me last night and told me not to flatter you or force you to return. ³⁰I can overlook everything you have done in your eagerness to get home to see your father, but did you have to take my fertility goddesses?"

³¹Jacob said, "I was afraid you would try to stop me by taking your daughters back by force. ³²As far as your fertility

goddesses go, I don't know what you're talking about. But go ahead and search all our tents, and if you find anyone in my family or servants who has taken the figurines, that person will pay for it with his life. In fact, if you find anything that's yours, take it. Don't let anyone accuse me of taking anything that belongs to you." (Jacob didn't know that Rachel had taken her father's fertility goddesses just before they left.)

³³So Laban went into Leah's tent first, then into Jacob's tent; next, he searched the tents of the servant women, Bilhah and Zilpah, but in all of them he found nothing. Finally, he went into Rachel's tent. ³⁴Now Rachel had hidden the figurines in her camel's saddlebags and was sitting on the rugs that covered the saddle. Laban searched her tent also and found nothing,

³⁵Then Rachel said, "Father, please don't be upset with me if I don't get up. I'm having my monthly period, and I'm not feeling very well." According to the law of his people, he was not to touch her or whatever she sat on. He had searched for the figurines but had not found them.

³⁶Then Jacob was very angry and said to Laban, "Why are you treating me and my family like common thieves? What have I done to you? What is my sin? Will you please let me know! Why did you chase after me? And why did you bring all these burly men with you? ³⁷Now you have pawed through all our belongings, and you still didn't find anything of yours. If you did, I want to see it! Bring it out and set it in front of us, so we can all see what it is.

³⁸"I've worked for you for twenty years. I was personally out in the field at all hours of the day and night to see to it that not one newborn animal died unnecessarily. Not once did I kill one of your rams to feed my family or myself. ³⁹And if an animal was killed by a wild beast, you made me suffer the loss, accusing me of negligence. If any animals were stolen, you

made me pay for them. ⁴⁰This went on for years and I never complained. Out in the field, the heat scorched me during the day, and at night I was so cold, I couldn't sleep. ⁴¹That went on for twenty years. The first fourteen I worked to pay for your two daughters and the other six to earn herds of my own. Yet during all these years, you changed my wages ten times. ⁴²If the God of my grandfather Abraham, the God whom my father Isaac worships and respects, had not been with me, you probably would have sent me away empty-handed. But God saw how you've treated me and how hard I've worked for you, and that's why He talked to you last night and told you to leave me alone and not to force me to go back with you."

Laban's Covenant

⁴³Laban answered, "You married my daughters, didn't you? Then these children are my grandchildren, aren't they? And your herds were born from my cattle, weren't they? So in one sense everything you have, you got from me. Yet I can't take my daughters and their children back—that wouldn't be right. ⁴⁴So let's make a covenant between us and put a marker right here as a sign of our agreement."

⁴⁵So Jacob walked over to a large stone, picked it up and put it down between them. ⁴⁶Then he told his men to get some more stones and pile them up next to his stone. When the pile was complete, Jacob and Laban picked up the large stone and put it on top of the pile. Then to ratify their agreement, they sat next to the stone marker and ate together. ⁴⁷Laban gave the stone marker an Aramaic name, Jegar Sahadutha, meaning A Pile of Stones to Remind Us. But Jacob gave it a Hebrew name, Galeed, but both names meant the same thing.

⁴⁸Then Laban said, "Let these stones represent the agreement we just made." So the place has always been called Galeed. ⁴⁹Jacob said, "May the Lord watch over us as we separate from each other." So the place is also called Mizpah,

which in Hebrew means, A Place from Which God Watches. ⁵⁰Laban said to Jacob, "If you mistreat my daughters or marry anyone else, even though I might not know it, God will be the witness to what you have done.

⁵¹"Now this marker we're leaving here is just an ordinary pile of stones, but on top is the stone of remembrance which we put there and on which we poured the oil of agreement. ⁵²So this pillar of rocks is a reminder of what we've agreed on. I will never go on the other side of this marker to attack you, and you will never come to this side to attack me. ⁵³And the God of your grandfather Abraham and my grandfather Nahor, his brother, will be the judge as to which one of us has been at fault."

Jacob accepted Laban's proposal and swore "by the fear of Isaac," by the God of heaven and earth, to keep the agreement. ⁵⁴Then he killed a lamb and offered it to God as a sacrifice right there on the mountain and invited the men on both sides to eat together. So Laban's men spent the night camping on the mountain with Jacob.

⁵⁵Early the next morning, Laban kissed his daughters and grandchildren good-bye and blessed them. Then he and his men returned to Mesopotamia.

Esau Meets Jacob

32 Jacob also broke camp and went on his way. As he neared Canaan, he saw a band of angels, some in front of him and some behind him for his protection. ²God had opened his eyes so he could see them. He said, "God's angels have been traveling with me and I didn't even know it!" So he called the place where he first saw them Mahanaim, which in Hebrew means, The Place of Two Groups of Angels.

³Meanwhile, Esau had heard that Jacob was coming back home, so he took four hundred armed men and set out to meet him. As Jacob neared home, he realized the danger he was in, so he sent messen-

gers to Esau who was living in the region of Seir in the country of Edom. ⁴Jacob said to his servants, "This is what I want you to say when you meet Esau: 'Your brother Jacob is your humble servant. He has lived with Laban all these years until now. ⁵He has herds of cattle, donkeys, sheep, goats and camels and many servants, both men and women. He has sent us to ask his lord for grace and mercy.'"

⁶The messengers left, then after a couple of days they returned and said, "We delivered the message to your brother, but he's coming to meet you with four hundred armed men."

⁷When Jacob heard that, he became very fearful and divided up the family, the servants and the herds of cattle, sheep, goats and camels into two groups. ⁸He said to himself, "If Esau comes and kills one group, maybe the other group can get away."

⁹Then Jacob prayed, "O God, the God of my grandfather Abraham and my father Isaac, you are the One who told me to leave Mesopotamia and come back here to my own country and to my own people, and you promised you would take care of me. ¹⁰I know I am not worthy to receive the least of your mercies or faithfulness that you've granted me. Some years ago I crossed Jordan with nothing but a shepherd's stick in my hand, and now I have so much that, divided in two, it would still be more than I need. ¹¹But now Esau, my own brother, is coming after me with four hundred armed men. I know he's coming to kill me and everyone who belongs to me, men, women and children, and I'm afraid. ¹²You said that you would be good to me and protect me and that my offspring would be as difficult to count as the sand on the seashore, but with Esau coming, how can this be?"

¹³Jacob set up camp there that night. The next morning he decided to send presents to Esau, hoping to soften his heart. ¹⁴He grouped together two hundred female goats with twenty male goats, then

two hundred female sheep with twenty rams. ¹⁵Next, thirty female camels still nursing their young, then forty cows with ten bulls, and finally twenty female donkeys with ten males. ¹⁶Then he put servants in charge of each of the five herds and told them to go on ahead to meet Esau, being sure to space themselves in such a way as to give each group time to properly present themselves to him before the next group arrived.

¹⁷He told the servants leading the first herd of animals that when they met Esau and he asked who they were, where they were going and why they were stopping to see him, they were to say, ¹⁸"These animals are a present from your humble servant, Jacob, sent by him to his lord Esau. And your servant Jacob is coming behind us."

¹⁹Jacob told the servants in charge of the other herds of animals to say the same thing when they met Esau. ²⁰He reminded them that each one should end his speech by saying, "And your servant Jacob is coming behind us." Jacob did this because he said to himself, "With these presents I will buy his favor, so when I meet him, he'll forgive me and accept me again as his brother." ²¹So that morning he sent the gifts of animals ahead of him to his brother Esau, but he decided to stay where he was another night.

Jacob Wrestles With the Angel

²²However, before nightfall he sent his two wives, his two servant women and all his children across the Jabbok River. ²³Then he sent everything he owned across the river, but he stayed on this side to spend the night alone with God. ²⁴About midnight a Man appeared out of nowhere. Jacob thought someone had come to kill him. He tried to fight Him off because he didn't want to die before being forgiven by his brother. The two of them wrestled and fought for hours until just before daybreak. ²⁵When the Stranger saw that Jacob would not let Him go, He touched Jacob's hip, and instantly

it was twisted. Then Jacob knew he had been contending with Someone with more than human power. ²⁶So Jacob clung to Him and pleaded for mercy. The Stranger said, "Let me go because it will soon be daybreak."

But Jacob said, "I will not let go until you assure me of forgiveness for what I have done to my brother and promise to bless me when I meet him, so he'll forgive me too."

²⁷The Man asked, "What is your name?" He answered, "Jacob!" ²⁸The Man declared, "I'm changing your name. You'll no longer be called Jacob, but Israel. Because you held on to Me and did not let Me go, I will break the power of evil against you and give you the mercy you longed for."

²⁹Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But the Man said, "Why do you ask my name. You know it." Then He blessed Jacob and disappeared. ³⁰Jacob slumped to the ground saying to himself, "I can't believe it! I've been face to face with the Lord and am still alive." So he called the place Peniel, meaning The Face of God.

³¹Early that morning just as the sun rose, he crossed over the Jabbok River, limping as he went. ³²That's why the descendants of Israel to this day do not eat meat attached to the hip joint, because Jacob's hip was struck by God.

Jacob and Esau Meet

33 As Jacob looked off in the distance, he saw his brother Esau coming with four hundred armed men. So he quickly divided his family, putting the children where they belonged, either with Leah or Rachel or one of the two servant women. ²He put the two servant women with their children first, followed by Leah and her children, and Rachel and Joseph last. ³Then he went ahead of them all. While he was still a distance from Esau, he stopped and bowed low to the ground. Jacob did this seven times until they were very close.

⁴When Esau saw his brother, he ran to meet him, threw his arms around him and kissed him, and soon they were both crying. ⁵Then Esau saw the women and children and said, "What is all this? Who are all these people?"

Jacob said, "These are the wives and children whom God has graciously given to me." ⁶The two servant women and their children dismounted first, bowed low to the ground and introduced themselves. ⁷They were followed by Leah and her children, who also bowed low to the ground, and finally came Rachel and Joseph who did the same.

⁸Then Esau said to Jacob, "Now what about all the herds of animals, what does that mean?" Jacob answered, "Those are my presents to you because I need your mercy and forgiveness for what I did to you."

⁹Esau said, "I have enough, my brother. Keep what's yours."

¹⁰But Jacob insisted, "Please take my gifts because that will be evidence to me that you've forgiven me. It's a great burden lifted to know that you accept me as your brother. It's as if God Himself has forgiven me. It's just so good to see you and to know that you're not angry with me. ¹¹So please, take my gifts. They're for you from me. God has been good to me and I've got more than I need." Jacob kept urging Esau to accept the gifts until he finally took them.

¹²Then Esau said, "Let's go now, and I'll lead the way." ¹³Jacob said, "My brother, you're my leader, but the children can't walk as fast or as far as you can. And there are so many young animals in the herd that if we drive them hard for just one day, many of them would die. ¹⁴So please go on ahead, and, as your servant, I will follow as fast as we can. Then we can lead gently as the young animals and the children can bear it until we catch up with you near Edom.

¹⁵Then Esau agreed, "All right, I'll go on ahead, but let me leave some of my armed men with you to protect you."

Jacob answered, "There's no need for that. God has heard my prayers and He will protect me, just as He has heard my prayers for protection until I could meet you and know that you've forgiven me."

¹⁶So Esau took his men and Jacob's gifts and headed back home. ¹⁷And Jacob went on from there to Sukkoth where he built a shelter for himself and for the animals that needed it. And the place is called Sukkoth to this day, because it means Shelter.

Jacob Comes Home to Canaan

¹⁸After staying there for a short while, he moved near Shechem, one of the cities in Canaan, and set up camp there. This wasn't long after he had arrived in the country from Mesopotamia. ¹⁹He bought the land on which he camped for a hundred pieces of silver from the relatives of Hamor, the father of Shechem, after whom the city was named. ²⁰He also built an altar there and called the place El-Eloh-Israel, meaning Dedicated To the God of Israel.

Dinah and Shechem

34 One day, Dinah, the daughter of Jacob by Leah, went to the city of Shechem to make friends with the girls there. ²When Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, who was the crown prince and for whom the city was named, saw Dinah, he fell in love with her. He invited her to his house where he seized her and forced her to have sexual relations with him, taking away her virginity. ³Shechem loved Dinah very much and spoke to her kindly, treated her gently and respected her. ⁴Then he said to Hamor, his father, "Please make arrangements for me to marry this girl. I love her and want her to be my wife."

⁵Word got back to Jacob about what had happened and that Shechem wanted to marry Dinah. When the news reached Jacob, his sons were out in the field with the flocks and herds. So he decided not to make a commitment until his sons came

home and he could talk it over with them.

⁶In the meantime, Hamor, the father of Shechem, agreed to go to see Jacob to talk about his son's wishes and to make the necessary arrangements for the wedding.

⁷When the sons of Jacob came home from inspecting the flocks and herds and heard that Shechem had had sexual relations with their sister and disgraced the family, they became very angry.

⁸Hamor came and said to Jacob and his sons, "My son Shechem loves your daughter Dinah very much. He wants to marry her. Please give your permission and let them get married. ⁹Personally, I see no reason why this should not be, and as the years go by, your sons can marry our daughters and our sons your daughters. ¹⁰We can live together in peace, and this land will then belong to you as well as to us, and you can live here and trade and do business just as we do."

¹¹Then Shechem, who was with his father, said to Jacob and his sons, "Please be kind to me and let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you ask me to do, I'll do it. ¹²And whatever amount you want for the dowry payment, ask for it, and I'll gladly pay it. Just let Dinah be my wife."

¹³The sons of Jacob felt they had a right to be vengeful since Shechem had forced himself on their sister Dinah. So they said, ¹⁴"We can't let you marry Dinah because our sister is not allowed to marry a man who has not been circumcised. To do otherwise would be a disgrace to the family. ¹⁵We will give our consent only if you and all the males in your city agree to be circumcised. ¹⁶Then we can go ahead with the marriage, and in the future our daughters can marry your sons and our sons your daughters, and we can live together in peace and become one people. ¹⁷But if you decide not to be circumcised, then we cannot give our consent for Dinah to become your wife. We will have to take her back and move on."

¹⁸Their proposition pleased Shechem and his father Hamor, and they agreed to have all the males in their city circumcised. ¹⁹Shechem did not want to waste any time in carrying out this request because he loved Dinah very much. And his father knew he would be faithful in carrying out the order for circumcision, because Shechem was the most honorable and trustworthy of Hamor's sons.

²⁰So Hamor and Shechem went back home and said to the city fathers, ²¹"These Hebrews are peaceable men, so let's allow them to settle here and do business and trade. After all, the country is big enough for both our people and we'll all benefit. Our sons can marry their daughters and our daughters their sons. ²²These men will consent to settle here and become one with us on one condition; that is, if all of our males are circumcised as they are. ²³Just think, whatever they own, we'll own, because we'll be one people. So let's accept their condition and they'll agree to stay."

²⁴The city fathers listened to Hamor and his son Shechem and agreed to be circumcised. Then they asked every male who could walk in and out of the city gates without assistance to come back to be circumcised, and all of them did.

²⁵On the third day after all the males were circumcised, when they were too sore to move, two sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's older brothers, quietly came into the city, took their swords and killed every man in sight. ²⁶They even killed Hamor and his son Shechem, pulled their sister out of Shechem's house and went back to camp. ²⁷Then the other sons of Jacob went into the city and plundered the houses, even taking things from the bodies of dead men. They justified their actions because of what Shechem had done. ²⁸But they didn't stop there. They took the people's sheep, cattle and donkeys, whether the animals were tied up at home or loose in the field. ²⁹In addition to all the material wealth, they also took the wives and children of the dead men and

made them their servants, stripping their houses of anything valuable.

³⁰When Jacob heard this, he was sick. He called in Simeon and Levi and said to them, "You surely have brought a lot of trouble on us. What witness do you think you have given to the Canaanites and Perizzites as to the kind of people we are? What sort of heroes are you, attacking wounded men? When this news gets around, the people of the land can easily band together and kill all of us. If that happens, that will be the end of the house of Israel."

³¹They answered, "You mean to tell us that we should have let our sister be used as a prostitute and just sit here and do nothing?" So they felt justified in what they had done.

Jacob Returns to Bethel

35 Then God said to Jacob, "Better break camp and go on up to Bethel to live. When you get there, build an altar for Me. That's where I appeared and talked to you when you were running away from your brother Esau."

²So Jacob called everyone together, including his servants, and said to them, "We'll be moving on to Bethel to meet God there. So get rid of any statues you have of any gods, bathe and change your clothes. ³We'll be going there because God told me to go and build an altar for Him. That's where God appeared to me when I was so distressed the first night after I ran from my brother and God promised He would go with me." ⁴So they gave Jacob all the statues of their gods, their earrings and other jewelry, and he buried them underneath a big oak tree near the village of Shechem. ⁵Then they broke camp and headed south, and God restrained the people in the area so that no one pursued Jacob and his sons as they left.

⁶Jacob and all those who were with him arrived safely at Bethel, also called Luz, which is in the land of Canaan. ⁷He built an altar there and called it El-Bethel, meaning

Dedicated to the God of Bethel, because that's where God appeared to him when he fled from his brother.

⁸It was here that Deborah, Jacob's mother's old nurse, died, and Jacob buried her under an oak south of Bethel and called the site Allon-bacuth, meaning Oak of Tears.

⁹During this time God appeared to Jacob again, just as he had before and blessed him, saying, ¹⁰"Remember that your name has been changed to Israel and you are no longer Jacob." Whenever God spoke to him, He called him Israel and not Jacob.

¹¹God said, "I am God Almighty. I will bless you and you will be fruitful and multiply. Your descendants will grow into a nation and eventually into a group of nations, and kings and rulers will come from among them. ¹²And the land which I promised to your grandfather Abraham and to your father Isaac, I am promising also to you." ¹³Then God went up from the place and vanished from sight.

¹⁴So Jacob gathered stones, made a pillar and set a memorial stone on top of it. He dedicated the pillar to the Lord by pouring unfermented wine and olive oil over it. ¹⁵Then he said, "From now on, we will call the city of Luz, Bethel."

Death of Rachel

¹⁶From Bethel Jacob went to Ephratha, and on the way Rachel went into labor. ¹⁷But complications set in and Rachel had problems delivering the baby. The nurse encouraged her through her pain by saying, "Don't worry, it looks like a fine healthy boy, and you'll deliver it just as you delivered the first one." ¹⁸But Rachel didn't survive the birth, and as she was dying, she named her baby Benoni, which means Son of My Sorrow, but Jacob renamed the baby Benjamin, meaning Son of My Right Hand.

¹⁹So Rachel was buried beside the road to Ephratha, later called Bethlehem. ²⁰Then Jacob stacked a pile of rocks over

her grave, which still marks the place to this day.

²¹From there Jacob continued south and camped just on the other side of the Tower of Eder. ²²While there, Reuben, Jacob's oldest son, had sex with Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid and his father's servant woman. When Jacob heard about it, he was very upset.

Jacob's Sons

²³Jacob had twelve sons.

The sons of Leah were Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun.

²⁴The sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin.

²⁵The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's servant, were Dan and Naphtali.

²⁶The sons of Zilpah, Leah's servant, were Gad and Asher.

All these sons were born to Jacob while he was still in Mesopotamia, except Benjamin.

The Death of Isaac

²⁷From the Tower of Eder, Jacob and his household went on and arrived in Mamre, near Hebron, where Abraham had lived and where Isaac was still living. ²⁸By now Isaac was one hundred and eighty years old. ²⁹Soon after Jacob's arrival Isaac died of old age. His two sons, Esau and Jacob, were there to say goodbye, and they buried him.

Esau's Descendants

36 These are the descendants of Esau who lived in Edom and who married Canaanite women.

²Esau married Adah, daughter of Elon who was a Hittite; Oholibamah, daughter of Anah who was the son of Zibeon the Hivite; ³and his cousin Basemath, a sister of Nebaioth and a daughter of Ishmael (Esau's uncle by Abraham and Hagar).

⁴Adah gave birth to Eliphaz; Basemath bore Reuel; ⁵and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam and Korah. Each of these five sons was born to Esau while he lived in Canaan.

⁶About this time Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters and all his servants, together with everything he owned, and left the area to put some distance between himself and Jacob.

⁷The reason Esau moved out of the area was because the fields could no longer support their huge flocks and herds. ⁸So Esau moved to the hill country of Seir and became the father of the Edomites.

⁹These are the descendants of Esau, whom people called Edomites. ¹⁰These were his sons and their descendants:

Esau's wife Adah bore him a son named Eliphaz, and Basemath bore him a son called Reuel.

¹¹The sons of Eliphaz were: Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam and Kenaz. ¹²Eliphaz's concubine was Timna, and she bore him a son called Amalek. These were grandsons of Esau and his wife Adah.

¹³Now the sons of Reuel, Esau's son by Basemath, were: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah and Mizzah.

¹⁴It should be mentioned that Esau's wife, Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon, bore him three sons: Jeush, Jalam and Korah.

Chiefs of Edom

¹⁵The chiefs of the tribes that sprang from Eliphaz, Esau's firstborn, are: Teman, Omar, Zepho and Kenaz, ¹⁶Korah, Gatam and Amalek. All these chiefs trace their maternal ancestry back to Adah.

¹⁷Esau's son Reuel was the ancestor of the following chiefs: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah and Mizzah. All these trace their maternal ancestry back to Basemath.

¹⁸Also, the following chiefs traced their ancestry back to Esau and Oholibamah, who was the daughter of Anah: Jeush, Jalam and Korah.

¹⁹All of the above chiefs were descendants of Esau.

Sons of Seir

²⁰The original inhabitants of the land of Edom were divided into tribes which

traced their ancestry back to Seir, the Horite.

The chiefs of these tribes were: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, ²¹Dishon, Ezer and Dishan.

These were the chiefs of the Horites, the descendants of Seir who lived in Edom.

²²Lotan was the father of Hori and Hemam, and Lotan's sister was Timna.

²³Shobal was the father of Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho and Onam.

²⁴Zibeon had two sons called Aiah and Anah. This was the same Anah who had discovered hot springs in the desert while herding his father Zibeon's donkeys.

²⁵Anah was the father of Dishon, and Oholibamah was Anah's daughter whom Esau married.

²⁶Dishon was the father of Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran and Cheran.

²⁷Ezer was the father of Bilhan, Zaavan and Akan (or Jaakan).

²⁸And Dishan was the father of Uz and Aran.

²⁹These then are the Horite chiefs: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, ³⁰Dishon, Ezer and Dishan who ruled the tribes in the land of Edom and were the descendants of Seir.

Kings of Edom

³¹These are the kings who ruled in Edom before Israel had a king:

³²Bela, the son of Beor, ruled from the royal city of Dinhabah.

³³After Bela died, Jobab, the son of Zerah of Bozrah, took over.

³⁴After Jobab died, Husham, one of the Temanites, ruled in his place.

³⁵When Husham died, Hadad, the son of Bedad, ruled the country. He defeated Midian in the country of Moab, and his capital was Avith.

³⁶When Hadad died, Shamlah from Masrekah took over.

³⁷After Shamlah died, Shaul from Rehoboth by the river, ruled in his place.

³⁸After Shaul died, Baalhanan, the son

of Achbor, ruled the country.

³⁹When Baalhanan died, Hadad took over, and his capital was Pau. His wife was Mehetabel who was the daughter of Matred and the granddaughter of Me-Zahab.

Chiefs Descended From Esau

⁴⁰The following are the chiefs of the Edomite tribes who descended from Esau: Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, ⁴¹Oholibamah, Elah and Pinon, ⁴²Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, ⁴³Magdiel and Iram. Now the area where each of these tribes lived was called by the name of the tribe, and Esau was their ancestor.

Joseph's Dreams

37 Jacob lived in Canaan as a stranger just as his father and grandfather had.

²Here is more history of the family of Jacob (or Israel).

Joseph was a young man seventeen years old. He watched over the herds with some of his brothers, sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. When he came home, he told his father some of the evil things his brothers had been doing.

³Israel listened to Joseph and believed him. He loved him more than any of his other sons because Joseph was tenderhearted and honest, and he was Rachel's firstborn. Israel made Joseph a long robe with sleeves, the kind usually worn by persons of distinction. But none of his other sons had such a robe.

⁴When they noticed this preferential treatment, they hated Joseph and never spoke kindly to him, even though he was their brother.

⁵About this time Joseph had a dream which he told his brothers. When they heard what it was, they hated him even more. ⁶Joseph said, "Listen, my brothers. I had a dream. ⁷In this dream we were all harvesting in the field and tying the wheat into bundles. Suddenly, my bundle stood up and your bundles made a circle around mine. Then they started

bowing toward mine which was standing upright in the middle."

⁸Then his brothers said, "Do you think we're ever going to bow down to you and let you rule over us? Are you planning to make a little kingdom for yourself and have us be your servants?" After he told his dream, they hated him still more.

⁹Then Joseph had another dream and told it to his brothers also. He said, "I had another dream. In it I was looking up into the night sky and suddenly the sun, moon and eleven stars appeared, and they all bowed to me."

¹⁰After telling these dreams to his brothers and his father, Israel said, "What kind of dreams are you dreaming? Do you think that I, your mother's sister Leah and your eleven brothers will come and bow before you?" ¹¹Joseph's brothers were jealous of him. But Israel, when he heard these dreams, thought about what they could mean.

Joseph Sold

¹²Soon afterward, Joseph's brothers went to inspect their father's herds grazing near Shechem. Time passed, but they sent back no report. ¹³So Israel said to Joseph, "Come, I want you to go up to Shechem to find your brothers and bring me a report of what's going on." Joseph said, "Certainly, Father, I'll be happy to go."

¹⁴Israel said, "I'm concerned about your brothers' safety, as well as about our herds, because of what Simeon and Levi did to the Shechemites. I'm sure the people there have not forgotten that. Go and find out how things are and come back as quickly as you can."

Joseph left Hebron early the next morning and after a few days, finally reached Shechem. ¹⁵But the area was so large that he couldn't find his brothers. A man noticed him wandering the fields as if he were looking for someone, so he stopped him and said, "What are you looking for? Maybe I can help you."

¹⁶Joseph said, "I'm looking for my

brothers who are taking care of our herds somewhere near here. Have you seen them? Can you tell me where they are?" ¹⁷The man said, "Yes. They left here a few days ago, and I heard them say they were taking the herds to pastures near Dothan."

Joseph thanked him and went on to Dothan, about another day's journey. Finally he spotted them. ¹⁸When they saw him in the distance, they said, "Hey, look who's coming! The dreamer!" And they agreed to kill him as soon as he came into camp.

¹⁹They sneered, "That dreamer is coming to spy on us, then he'll go and tell father how bad we've been. ²⁰So let's kill him and throw his body into a dried-up well, and we'll say that a wild animal killed him. Then we'll see what happens to his dreams."

²¹But Reuben overheard their plans and decided to save Joseph. He said, "Let's not kill him. After all, he's our brother!" ²²Then he suggested, "Instead of killing him and becoming murderers, let's just throw him alive into one of these empty wells and let him die. There are a number of them right here." He made this suggestion because he intended to rescue Joseph and send him back to his father before anything else happened to him.

²³As Joseph neared the camp, they waved at him, but when he got there, instead of hugging him, they grabbed him, ripped off his robe, ²⁴dragged him over to a nearby dry well and dropped him into it. ²⁵Then they sat down to eat, and while they were eating, they saw a caravan in the distance. It was coming their way, heading south toward Egypt. When the caravan got nearer they recognized the men as Ishmaelite traders coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with all kinds of goods, including spices of balm and myrrh.

²⁶Then Judah said to his brothers, "If we let our brother starve to death in this well, we're actually killing him, even if we

say otherwise. After all the trouble he's caused us, we at least ought to get something out of this. ²⁷Why don't we sell him to these Ishmaelites. Then no one can accuse us of killing our own brother. After all, he is our flesh and blood." And the brothers agreed.

²⁸As the Ishmaelites and their Midianite friends came nearer, the brothers motioned to them. When they came, the brothers lowered a rope to Joseph and pulled him out of the well. Then they bargained with the Ishmaelites over Joseph's worth. No matter how much Joseph pleaded with his brothers not to sell him as a slave, they would not listen. Finally, the brothers agreed on twenty pieces of silver and gave Joseph to the traders who took him to Egypt.

²⁹Reuben was away when his brothers sold Joseph, and when he returned to the well to rescue Joseph, it was empty. He knew something had happened to Joseph, so in anguish he ripped his tunic in half. ³⁰Then he returned to camp and confronted his brothers. "I went to the well to look for Joseph, and he isn't there! Where is he? If he's dead, what will I tell Father?"

³¹Then they told him what had happened. After a discussion, they all agreed to take Joseph's robe, kill a goat, dip the robe in it ³²and take it to their father as evidence that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. And that's what they did. When they got home, they showed the bloodstained robe to Jacob and said, "We found this robe on the way home. Do you think it's Joseph's?"

³³Immediately Jacob recognized it, and in anguish he cried out, "Yes! It is! And by the looks of it he was attacked by a wild animal and torn to pieces!" ³⁴Then Jacob took off his own robe and ripped it to pieces. He then put on sackcloth and mourned over Joseph for many, many days. ³⁵All his sons, daughters and grandchildren tried to comfort him, but it was useless. He simply responded, "Let me go down to the grave with him."

That's how grieved Jacob was over the loss of his son Joseph.

³⁶When the Ishmaelite traders arrived in Egypt, they put Joseph on the slave market and sold him to Potiphar, one of the king's officers in charge of the palace guard.

Judah and Tamar

38 About this time back home, Judah, Jacob's son by Leah, left his brothers in the field and went to visit Hirah, who lived in Adullam. ²While there, Judah met a Canaanite woman whose father was Shuah, and he married her. ³She conceived and gave birth to a son and called him Er. ⁴Then she conceived again and gave birth to another son and called him Onan. ⁵She had a third son and called him Shelah. Now Judah was away at Chezib when his third son was born.

⁶When Er was grown, Judah found a girl for him whose name was Tamar. ⁷Er's behavior was so wicked that it pained the Lord to see what he was doing to himself and to others, so He took his life.

⁸Then Judah said to Er's brother, Onan, "Go and sleep with Tamar, your brother's widow, and father a child. This way you'll carry out your responsibility as his brother by making sure he has descendants to inherit his land and to carry on his name." ⁹But Onan knew that Tamar's firstborn would belong to Er and be no credit to him. So he went in to sleep with her to consummate the marriage, but let his seed spill on the ground because he didn't want to raise a child for his brother. ¹⁰His deception and abuse of Tamar displeased the Lord, and He took Onan's life to stop his influence from spreading.

¹¹Then Judah said to Tamar, "You had better go back home to your parents and wait until Shelah gets a little older, then he can father a child for you, and we will see to it that he does." Judah said this because he didn't want Shelah to lose his life as Onan had. So Tamar left and went home to live with her parents.

¹²Time passed and Judah's wife died. After a time of mourning, he and his friend Hirah of Adullam went up to Timnah to see how the flocks and herds were doing.

¹³Someone told Tamar that her father-in-law was coming to Timnah to shear his sheep. ¹⁴So she took off the clothes that marked her as a widow and dressed as a prostitute. Then she covered her face with a veil and sat at the entrance of Enaim, on the way to Timnah. She did this to tempt Judah, because Shelah his son was now grown, yet she had not been given to him in marriage.

¹⁵When Judah approached Enaim, he saw her sitting there and solicited her, because he thought she was a prostitute with her head covered. ¹⁶He said, "Let me come to see you." He didn't realize he was talking to his daughter-in-law. She said, "How much are you willing to pay?"

¹⁷He said, "I'll send you a young goat from my own flock." She said, "OK, if you'll leave something with me as a deposit."

¹⁸He said, "Like what?" She said, "Give me your seal and its cord. Give me your shepherd's rod." He said, "All right," and gave them to her. So they slept together, and the next morning Judah went on his way. ¹⁹She went home and changed back into her widow's clothes and some weeks later found that she was pregnant.

²⁰Now when Judah got to his flocks and herds, he picked out a young goat and asked his friend Hirah to take it to the prostitute and get back his personal seal and his shepherd's rod. But Hirah could not find her. ²¹He asked some of the men who lived there where the prostitute was.

They said, "No prostitute has ever lived here." ²²So Hirah took the young goat back to Judah and told him that he tried to find the prostitute but couldn't. He then told Judah how he had searched for her and asked the people around the place about her, but they knew of no prostitute who lived and worked there. ²³Judah said, "Let her keep my things.

We don't want to keep looking for her and make fools of ourselves. Let's just forget it."

²⁴About three months later, someone told Judah that Tamar, his daughter-in-law, had apparently played the prostitute, because she was pregnant. When Judah heard this, he was angry and ordered two of his men to go with him to get her and publicly burn her to death.

²⁵So they went to her house, and Judah sent them in to drag her out, but she said, "Go and tell Judah that I am pregnant by the man who owns these things. Have him look and see whose they are, this seal and shepherd's rod."

²⁶They took the seal and the shepherd's rod outside and showed them to Judah. He recognized them and said, "They're mine! Leave her alone; she's all right. I'm the guilty one, because I failed to give her to my son Shelah as I promised. She did this to get back into the family. She now belongs to me."

So he took her but never had sexual relations with her again. ²⁷When it came time for her to give birth, she found she had twins. ²⁸While she was in labor, one baby put out its hand as if it were coming and the nurse tied a red thread around its little wrist so they would know which one came out first. ²⁹But suddenly it pulled its arm back in, and the other baby came out first. It was a boy, and the nurse said, "You're a little pusher, pushing your way out like this." So they called him Perez, meaning The One Who Breaks Through. ³⁰Then the baby with the red thread came out next, and it, too, was a boy, and they named him Zerah, meaning The First Rays of Dawn.

Joseph a Slave

39 Joseph had been taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelites and sold to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officers and captain of the palace guard.

²Joseph determined to be faithful to the Lord no matter what, and the Lord was with him. Soon Potiphar learned

that Joseph could be trusted, and allowed him to live with him in his house.

³He noticed Joseph's efficiency and was convinced that Joseph's loyalty to his God caused him to prosper. ⁴Potiphar was so pleased with Joseph that he made him his personal servant and put him in charge of all his household. ⁵Then the Lord blessed his Egyptian master so that he prospered both in his domestic affairs as well as in his increase in herds and flocks. ⁶Next Potiphar put Joseph in charge of everything he owned, both at home and elsewhere, and paid no attention to anything, except when he came home to eat.

By this time Joseph had developed into a well-built, handsome young man. ⁷Potiphar's wife was lonely and took a liking to Joseph. She asked him to come to bed with her. ⁸But he refused, saying, "My master has put me in charge of everything he owns, both here at home and elsewhere, and he doesn't worry about anything because he trusts me completely. ⁹I have as much authority as he has, and he has not kept anything from me except you. And I promised my God that I would not disappoint my master. How then can I go to bed with you, even though I am your slave? I would be sinning against God."

¹⁰She persisted and kept asking Joseph day after day to come to bed with her, but he kept refusing. ¹¹One day as Joseph went around the house doing his work, no one was there except his master's wife. ¹²She came up to Joseph, grabbed his tunic and said, "Come to bed with me! I've arranged for everyone to be out of the house. No one is here but us, so my husband will never know."

But Joseph slipped out of his tunic and ran from the house. ¹³When she realized that he had left her holding his tunic, ¹⁴she started screaming. And when the servants came running back into the house, she said, "Look at this! That Hebrew slave, whom my husband trusts so much, attacked me! He came into my

bedroom and tried to rape me! So I screamed as loud as I could, ¹⁵and when I did, he got scared and ran and left his tunic on my bed."

¹⁶She kept Joseph's coat until her husband came home. ¹⁷Then she told him the story and said, "That Hebrew slave you brought here came into my bedroom and attacked me! ¹⁸When I screamed, he ran and left his tunic on my bed!"

¹⁹When Potiphar heard his wife's story, he pretended to be furious, even though he doubted what she said. ²⁰He ordered his men to go to Joseph's room, arrest him and put him in the palace prison for the rest of his life. He didn't order him to be executed, because Joseph had not run away. That was evidence to Potiphar of Joseph's innocence.

²¹In prison, Joseph was just as faithful to God as he had been before. The Lord blessed him, and the prison warden noticed that Joseph was different. ²²Soon the warden was so pleased with Joseph that he put him in charge of all the prisoners and he became their spokesman. The warden put all the prison responsibilities on Joseph. ²³The warden didn't check on anything that Joseph did because he trusted him. He knew that Joseph's God was with him because he was so faithful to Him.

The Prisoners' Dreams

40 After Joseph was in prison for some time, it so happened that the chief steward and the chief baker offended the king of Egypt. ²And the king became very angry with both of them. ³So he asked Potiphar, captain of the palace guard, to put them in prison until he decided what to do with them. This was the same prison where Joseph was kept. ⁴Potiphar had the two men turned over to the warden, and the warden turned them over to Joseph.

⁵They had been in prison for some months when one night they each had a dream. Each dream had a different meaning. ⁶The next morning when Joseph was

making his rounds, he noticed that both men looked very sad. ⁷He asked, "Why are you men looking so sad?"

⁸They answered, "We each had a dream and we desperately want to know what they mean, but there's no one here to interpret them for us. Then Joseph said, "Only the God of heaven can interpret dreams, but tell me your dreams anyway."

⁹The chief steward told his dream first. "In my dream I saw a grapevine. ¹⁰The vine had three branches, and I saw it bud, then bloom. I watched the clusters form, and soon the vine was full of ripe grapes. ¹¹Next I was standing before Pharaoh with his cup in my hand, taking these grapes and squeezing them into the cup. I reached out and gave the cup to him."

¹²Then God gave Joseph wisdom to interpret the dream, and he said to the steward, "This is what your dream means. The three vines represent three days. ¹³Within three days Pharaoh will call for you, take you out of prison and reinstate you as his chief steward. You will serve Pharaoh as you did before, taking his cup, filling it and personally giving it to him. ¹⁴When this happens and you're reinstated, please be kind and say a word to Pharaoh about me to get me out of this prison. Otherwise, I'll be forgotten and will be here all my life. ¹⁵You see, I am a Hebrew. I was taken by force and brought to Egypt. I have not done anything to deserve being in this dungeon."

¹⁶Now when the chief baker heard Joseph's interpretation of the steward's dream and how favorable it was, he said to Joseph, "Let me tell you my dream! In my dream I was walking along and I had three white wicker baskets on my head. ¹⁷In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods which I had baked for Pharaoh. But as I was carrying them, suddenly some birds came out of nowhere and ate up all the baked goods."

¹⁸Again God gave Joseph wisdom to interpret the dream, and he said, "The three baskets represent three days. ¹⁹In three days Pharaoh will issue an order to

have you hanged, and the vultures will come and eat your body.”

²⁰Three days later Pharaoh had a birthday and gave a party for all of his servants. During the party he ordered the chief steward and the chief baker to be brought in to face the court. ²¹Pharaoh discussed their cases with his officials and then announced his decision. He reinstated the steward, ²²but he had the baker hanged just as Joseph had predicted.

²³The chief steward was so happy to be free and to have his job back that he completely forgot about Joseph and his promise to speak to Pharaoh for him.

Pharaoh's Dreams

41 Two years passed, then Pharaoh had a dream which really disturbed him. In his dream he was standing by the river Nile. ²Seven well-fed cows came up out of the river and started grazing in the nearby meadow. ³Then he saw seven thin cows come up out of the river and for a moment stand next to the well-fed cows. ⁴Suddenly the skinny cows started eating the well-fed cows. Pharaoh was shocked by what he saw and woke up.

⁵After some time he got back to sleep and promptly had another dream. This time he saw seven full ears of corn attached to one stalk. ⁶Then he saw seven thin ears of corn spring from another stalk; they looked like they had been scorched by a desert wind. ⁷Suddenly the seven thin and shriveled ears of corn leaned over and ate the full ears, and again Pharaoh was jolted awake.

⁸By now it was nearly morning, and Pharaoh couldn't sleep because he was troubled by his dreams. So he sent for those who claimed to speak with the dead, as well as for all his wise men, and he told them his dreams and asked these men to interpret them, but none of them could.

⁹When the chief steward who was serving Pharaoh his wine overheard the conversations, he said, “I have something to confess, Your Majesty, which might be of

help. I should have drawn this to your attention before. ¹⁰About two years ago, as I and the chief baker were serving Pharaoh, he became upset and sent us both to prison, holding the warden personally responsible if we should escape. ¹¹One night each of us had a dream, but each dream had a completely different meaning. ¹²There was a young Hebrew slave in the prison who was the warden's personal assistant. He took a special interest in each prisoner. When he noticed that we were troubled over our dreams, he encouraged us to tell him what we dreamed, so we did. Then he interpreted our dreams for us, but each one had a totally different meaning. ¹³Three days later everything happened just as this young Hebrew had said it would. I was reinstated and the chief baker was executed.”

¹⁴Then Pharaoh ordered Joseph to be brought to him immediately. The warden was notified, and Joseph was told to get ready to meet Pharaoh. Joseph shaved, changed his prison clothes and was hurried off to court.

¹⁵Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had two dreams that trouble me, and these men cannot interpret them for me. I've been told that you interpret dreams. Is that true?”

¹⁶Joseph answered, “I cannot do so, Your Majesty, but my God can.” ¹⁷Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “In my dream I stood on the bank of the Nile. ¹⁸Suddenly seven well-fed cows came up out of the river and started feeding in the meadow. ¹⁹Then seven thin cows came up out of the river. I was shocked because I had never seen cows so thin in all Egypt. ²⁰And the seven skinny cows went over to the meadow where the well-fed cows were, attacked them and ate them. ²¹But after they ate them, they were as thin as they had been before. Then I woke up.

²²“In the second dream I saw seven full ears of corn growing on one stalk. ²³Then I noticed seven thin ears of corn growing on the next stalk. They looked as if they had been blasted by the desert winds.

²⁴Suddenly the seven thin ears of corn leaned over to the stalk with the fat ears of corn and started eating them. That's when I woke up. Now I told these two dreams to my wise men and to those who communicate with the dead, but not a one of them could tell me the meaning."

²⁵Then Joseph said, "Both dreams have the same meaning. The God of heaven is letting Your Majesty, Pharaoh of Egypt, know what is about to happen.

²⁶The seven well-fed cows and the seven fat ears of corn represent a seven-year period. ²⁷And the seven skinny cows and the seven thin ears of corn blasted by the desert winds also represent a seven-year period.

²⁸"It is the God of heaven who is showing Pharaoh what He is about to let happen to Egypt. ²⁹First there will be seven years of plenty throughout the land.

³⁰After this there will be seven years of famine so severe that the seven good years will be hard to remember. The whole country will feel the effects. ³¹The famine will be so severe that whatever the good years produced will be used up during the bad years. ³²The dream was given twice to show that this will happen and begin very soon.

³³"My suggestion is for Your Majesty to put someone in charge of planning for the future. ³⁴Assign officers to help him, and together they should see to it that one-fifth of all the food grown in Egypt during the seven good years is stored and saved. ³⁵They should be faithful in doing this. These officers should see to it that storage facilities are built near every major city, then transport all surplus food there to be stored. Let the food belong to Pharaoh. ³⁶The stored food should be saved for the seven years of famine and should in no way be touched during the seven good years, because the future of Egypt will depend on it."

Joseph Made Governor of Egypt

³⁷Pharaoh believed Joseph's interpretation of the dreams, and it seemed to the

king, as it did to all the king's counselors, that Joseph's suggestions as to how to prepare for the famine were sound.

³⁸Then Pharaoh said to his counselors, "Where can we find a man like this through whom the spirit of the God of heaven works? We should put him in charge of this project, don't you think?"

³⁹Turning to Joseph, he said, "Since the Supreme God has given you this insight into the future and wisdom to interpret dreams, ⁴⁰I'm putting you in charge of everything. Whatever you tell the people to do, they are to do, beginning right here in the palace. Only in matters of government and royal concern will I be greater than you.

⁴¹"Yes, I'm putting you in charge of the entire country of Egypt." ⁴²Then Pharaoh took off his royal ring and put it on Joseph's finger. He ordered Joseph to dress in the fine linen of Egypt's elite and to wear the gold chain of government around his neck. ⁴³Pharaoh ordered a chariot for Joseph, and they rode through the streets of the city. Joseph, as second-in-command, rode his chariot just behind Pharaoh's, and men walked ahead of them, shouting, "Kneel before the king and his governor, the one who has been appointed to govern all of Egypt!"

⁴⁴After the procession, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Now remember, I'm still the king of Egypt, and I am the one who appointed you as governor and gives you authority over all the land of Egypt. No one will dare to lift up his hand against you anywhere in our country." ⁴⁵Then Pharaoh changed Joseph's name to Zaphenath-Paneah, which means God Speaks and the Land Lives, and gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera the high priest of Heliopolis, to be his wife. He told him again that as governor he was now officially in charge of all the land of Egypt.

⁴⁶Joseph was about thirty years old when Pharaoh made him governor. He bowed to Pharaoh as he left his presence to take charge of the land of Egypt.

⁴⁷During the seven good years the land produced abundantly. ⁴⁸Joseph collected one-fifth of all the crops in Egypt and stored them near the major cities in each district. ⁴⁹Soon there was so much grain that Joseph decided to stop measuring it. There was such abundance that the piles of grain looked like huge mounds of sand from the seashore.

⁵⁰During these years, Joseph's wife, Asepath, bore him two sons. ⁵¹Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, for he said, "God has made me forget all my sufferings, including what happened to me in my father's house." ⁵²And he named the second son, Ephraim, for he said, "God has given me a lovely family in a land away from home."

⁵³Finally, the seven years of plenty ended, ⁵⁴and the seven years of famine began just as Joseph had predicted. Not only was Egypt affected, but also all the countries bordering Egypt. No crops were harvested anywhere. ⁵⁵When the local people went to Pharaoh and begged for food, he said, "Go see Joseph, and whatever he tells you to do, do it."

⁵⁶The famine worsened, and soon that entire area of the world suffered. So Joseph opened all the storage facilities and sold Pharaoh's grain to people as they needed it. The famine didn't end the first year, nor the second year, but continued as Joseph had said it would. ⁵⁷Soon people from other countries came to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was everywhere.

Joseph's Brothers Go to Buy Food

42 When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "You need to stop talking about how awful this famine is and do something about it. ²¹ Hear that Egypt has stored up a lot of food and is now selling it. Go there and buy some so we can eat and live."

³So Joseph's ten brothers went down to Egypt to buy what food they could. ⁴But Jacob kept Benjamin, Joseph's younger brother, at home because he

was afraid something might happen to him. ⁵The other sons of Jacob headed for Egypt to buy food as their neighbors were doing, because the famine had affected the whole country of Canaan.

⁶Joseph, who was governor of Egypt, was in charge of all the food supply and was selling grain to people who came to purchase it. All foreigners had to see him personally to get permission to buy food. His brothers came and bowed before him just as all the others did. ⁷As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he acted as if he didn't.

He spoke roughly to them through an interpreter, saying, "Where do you men come from?" They answered, "We're from Canaan and have come to buy food." ⁸Even though Joseph knew who they were, they didn't recognize him. ⁹He remembered the dreams he'd had years ago and what had happened when he had told his brothers. He wanted to see if their cruel attitudes had changed. So he spoke sharply again. "You men are spies and have come here to find the weak spots in our defenses!"

¹⁰"No, sir!" they insisted. "We are humble people and are here to buy food for our families. ¹¹We are all brothers, Your Excellency. We are honest men, not spies."

¹²Joseph shot back, "No! You have come here to find any weak spots in our defenses!" ¹³They answered, "Sir, we are twelve brothers, sons of the same father who lives in Canaan. One of our brothers is dead and the youngest is at home."

¹⁴Joseph questioned, "How do I know you're telling the truth? I still think you're spies. ¹⁵But I will test your honesty. As surely as the Pharaoh lives, you had better pass the test. You will not leave until your youngest brother comes here so I can know you're telling me the truth. ¹⁶One of you can go home and get him, and the rest of you will stay here under guard. If he doesn't come, it will prove that you are spies. I'll give you a couple of days to think about it." ¹⁷With this statement he ordered them locked up.

¹⁸After three days, Joseph had them brought in and said, "Since I'm a God-fearing man, I have changed my mind. ¹⁹If you are really honest men, one of you can stay here, and the rest of you are free to buy the food you need and return to your families. ²⁰But you must come back with your younger brother, or the one who stays here will be executed as a spy, because it will prove to me that you were lying to me. Now you decide among yourselves which one of you will stay here."

²¹They said to each other, "The reason this is happening is because we're guilty of killing our own brother. When we sold him to the Ishmaelites, we saw how desperately he begged us not to sell him into slavery, but we wouldn't listen."

²²Then Reuben, the oldest, said, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against your own brother? But you were stubborn and wouldn't listen. Now the Lord is requiring blood for blood." ²³The brothers didn't know that the governor was Joseph and that he could understand everything they were saying, because he had used a translator.

²⁴Then Joseph excused himself and went to his office, where he wept. Later he came back, self-composed, as if nothing had happened. Then he interrupted the brothers and picked Simeon, the second oldest, to remain. He ordered his hands tied right there in front of his brothers, and Simeon was taken off to prison between two guards.

The Brothers Return Home

²⁵Joseph sent a message to the granary manager asking him to fill the brothers' sacks with grain and to give them extra food for along the way. He was also to return their money. ²⁶So the brothers loaded the sacks of grain on their donkeys and left for home.

²⁷At the place where they spent the first night, one of them opened his sack to give some grain to his donkey, and there right on top was his money. ²⁸"Look!" he shouted. "My money is back in my sack!"

They all came running, and when they saw the money, their hearts sank. They were too scared to look in their own sacks. They said to each other, "Now what are we going to do? What else will God let happen to us? Let's hurry home."

²⁹When they got back to Canaan, they told Jacob everything that had happened to them. They said, ³⁰"The man in charge of Egypt was very hard on us. He thought we were spies and wasn't kind to us at all. ³¹We told him we weren't spies but honest men from Canaan there to buy food. ³²We also told him that we were twelve brothers, all from the same father, that one of our brothers was dead and that the youngest was at home.

³³"But the governor didn't believe us and still accused us of being spies. He said, 'OK, I'll test you to see if you're telling the truth. I'll keep one of you in prison, and the rest of you can buy grain for your families and go back home. ³⁴But all of you need to come back and bring your youngest brother with you. Then I'll know that you're honest men telling the truth, because you're willing to risk your lives by coming back here just to save your brother. If you bring your other brother, then I'll set this brother free, and you can trade in Egypt all you want.'"

³⁵Then the other brothers emptied their sacks, and each man found his money in his sack of grain. When they and their father saw that the money had been returned, they were very fearful. ³⁶In distress, Jacob cried out, "Do I have to lose another of my sons? Joseph is dead, Simeon is in prison, and now you want to take Benjamin back to Egypt. I'm not sure I can take it!"

³⁷Then Reuben said, "I promise, on the lives of my own two sons, that when we return to Egypt with Benjamin, we will bring him back with us. Trust me with Benjamin, and I will bring him back."

³⁸Jacob said, "Benjamin will not go to Egypt with you. Joseph, his brother, is dead, and Benjamin is Rachel's only son left. If something should happen to him

along the way, I couldn't take it at my age. I would die."

Benjamin Goes to Egypt

43 The famine didn't end, but got worse. ²When Jacob's family had used up all the grain which his sons had brought from Egypt, he called them together and said, "You need to go back to Egypt and buy more food for us."

³Then Judah said, "Father, remember last time when we were in Egypt, how the governor told us not to come back without our younger brother whom he wants to see face to face. ⁴Now if you're willing for us to take Benjamin with us, we can go and buy some more food. ⁵But if you're not willing for us to take Benjamin with us, we can't go back, because the governor told us that we had better not come to see him again unless we bring our younger brother with us."

⁶Then Jacob asked, "Why did you put me in such a predicament by telling the governor that you had a younger brother?" ⁷They answered, "Because he asked us straight out about our family, whether our father was still alive, whether we had a younger brother, how he was doing, and so on. So we simply answered his questions. How could we know that he would ask us to bring our younger brother with us the next time we came?"

⁸Then Judah said to his father, "Let us take Benjamin along because we need to get going. The days are passing and we need more grain; otherwise we'll all die, especially you, Father, and our little ones. ⁹I promise to protect Benjamin and give you my word that if I don't bring him back to you, you can extract whatever you want from my own family. ¹⁰If we hadn't hesitated so long these last few weeks, we would have already been there and back."

¹¹Then Israel said, "If it has to be that way, take some of the best that we've been able to grow as a personal present from me to the governor. Also take a little balm, honey, spices, pistachio nuts and

almonds. ¹²And take double the money with you—the money you found in your sacks which may have been an oversight on the part of the servants and additional money for more grain. ¹³And take Benjamin with you and get going. We are running out of time. ¹⁴I'm praying that God will make the governor show mercy to all of you and release Simeon, so he can return with you."

¹⁵So the brothers packed their donkeys, took double the money, their father's personal presents to the governor, and their brother Benjamin, and left for Egypt. Soon they stood before Joseph. ¹⁶When Joseph saw Benjamin he said to his steward, "Tell my servants to kill a young animal and prepare for an additional eleven guests, because these men will be having lunch with me today."

¹⁷The steward did as he was told and took the ten brothers to Joseph's house. ¹⁸Now because they were being taken to the governor's palace, they were afraid and said to each other, "It's because we didn't pay for our first load of grain that we're being taken to the governor's house. When we get there, he'll have us arrested as thieves. Then he'll take all we have and make us his personal slaves!"

¹⁹When they got to the door of the palace, they said to Joseph's assistant, ²⁰"Pardon us, Sir. We came to Egypt once before to buy grain, ²¹and on our way back home, when we got ready to camp, we opened one man's sack of grain and found his money. Later, we all found our money in our sacks. So now we have brought the money back with us to pay for our first load of grain. ²²We also brought more money to pay for a new load of grain. We still have no idea how each man's money got back into his sack."

²³Then the steward said, "Relax and don't worry. Nothing will happen to you. Maybe God put your money back into your sacks. All I know is that your first haul of grain was paid for." Then he took them into the house, and Simeon was waiting for them.

²⁴Once inside, the men were given water to wash their hands and feet, while the servants watered and fed their donkeys outside. ²⁵The brothers got their presents ready to give to Joseph when he would arrive to have lunch with them.

²⁶When Joseph got home, they took their gifts into the reception room and politely bowed to him. ²⁷He then asked about their families, "How is your father, the old man you told me about? Is he still alive and well?" ²⁸They answered, "Yes, our father is still alive and well, and he asked us to tell you that he is your servant to do your bidding." Then they knelt in front of Joseph and bowed to the ground.

²⁹When they got up, Joseph saw Benjamin and said, "So this is the young brother you told me about. Now I can see that you are not spies but that you have told me the truth. You will be treated as honest men, and I will allow you to come and go and buy food." Then he turned to Benjamin and said, "God bless you, and may He be gracious to you, my son." ³⁰Suddenly Joseph excused himself and left the room because he couldn't hold back his tears any longer, especially after seeing his younger brother.

³¹Then he washed his face and came back under control and ordered lunch to be served. ³²Joseph sat at one table, his brothers at another, and the Egyptian officials at still another table. It was a curse for the Egyptians to eat with certain foreigners, including the Hebrews. ³³The brothers were seated facing Joseph according to age from the oldest to the youngest. When the brothers noticed this, they were amazed that the governor knew how to seat them. ³⁴Then they were served from the food on Joseph's table. Benjamin was offered five times as much as his brothers, but not one of the brothers showed any jealousy. They all ate and drank happily together.

Joseph's Silver Drinking Cup

44 When the meal was over, Joseph said to the steward in charge of his house, "Fill the sacks of these men with as much food as they can carry and put each man's money back into his sack. ²Also, put my own silver drinking cup on top of the grain in the youngest man's sack, in addition to his money." The steward did as he was told.

³At daylight the next morning, the brothers were sent on their way with their donkeys loaded down with grain. ⁴They had not been gone long when Joseph said to the man in charge of his house, "Take some armed guards and go after those men, and when you catch up with them, say, 'Why have you been so wicked as to take advantage of the governor's kindness and hospitality?' ⁵One of you has stolen my master's silver drinking cup. How ungrateful can you be!"

⁶So when the steward overtook the brothers, that is exactly what he said to them. ⁷They were stunned, and said to him, "Sir, why would you think that one of us stole the governor's silver cup? God forbid that we should do such a thing! ⁸Didn't we bring back the money that was found in our sacks the first time we bought a load of grain? Does that sound like we're dishonest, wicked men eager to steal the governor's own cup? ⁹If one of us has the governor's cup, let him be executed and the rest of us will be the governor's slaves!"

¹⁰Then the steward said, "All right, but I'll not take as drastic a measure as you suggest. Only the man who has the cup will become my slave, and the rest of you can go free."

¹¹So each man quickly took down his sack of grain and opened it, to prove that the steward was wrong. ¹²He searched each man's sack, beginning with the oldest and going to the youngest, and he found the governor's cup in Benjamin's sack. ¹³In anguish, the brothers ripped their tunics in half, reloaded the grain on their don-

keys and headed back to the city.

¹⁴Judah led the way, and when they got to the governor's house, they fell on their knees and bowed to the ground.

¹⁵Joseph said, "What have you done? Don't you know that I have ways to find out what people do?"

¹⁶Judah said, "What can we say, Your Excellency? What can we do to clear ourselves? The evidence is there! God has brought our guilt home to us. We are in your power and we know that you can make all of us your slaves, not only the one in whose sack the cup was found."

¹⁷Joseph said, "God forbid that I should punish all of you. But the man in whose sack the cup was found, he will be my slave. The rest of you are free to go back to your father."

Judah Intercedes for Young Benjamin

¹⁸Then Judah got up off his knees, stepped forward and said, "Sir, let me speak just one more time and don't be angry with us. Please listen to our story.

¹⁹Sir, when we came the first time, you asked if we all had the same father and if we had any younger brothers. ²⁰We told you the truth when we said that we all have the same father who is now an old man and we have a younger brother. We also said that originally we were twelve brothers, but one of our brothers is dead. He had the same mother as the younger one. Father loves our younger brother very much.

²¹"Then you asked us to bring this brother the next time we came, so you could see him for yourself and know whether or not we were telling the truth.

²²We mentioned that our younger brother could not leave home without endangering the life of his aged father, because if anything happened to him, our father would die. ²³Sir, you told us that unless we brought our younger brother with us, there would be no next time. ²⁴So when we got back home, we told Father everything you said, and he is like your own servant, willing to do anything to please you.

²⁵"It was hard for him to accept your wish, but when our food ran out, he told us to come back and buy more grain.

²⁶We told him we couldn't return to Egypt, because you had said we couldn't buy more grain unless we brought our brother and you saw him for yourself.

²⁷"Then our father said, "The wife I loved dearly gave me only two sons.

²⁸The oldest went out to the field and was killed by a wild animal, and I never saw him again. ²⁹Now if you take his younger brother from me and something happens to him, the sorrow and pain would kill me, because I'm already an old man.'

³⁰"Sir, if I get back home to our father and he sees that our young brother is not with us the sorrow and pain will be too much for him and he will die. ³¹And when this happens, we will feel as if we have killed our own father. ³²Also, I pledged my own life to our father for the safety of our brother. I told him that if I did not bring him back with me, to let the blame be on me the rest of my life. ³³Please, let me be your slave and let the young man go back with his brothers. ³⁴How can I go back home to our father without him? What I've told you, sir, is true."

Joseph Reveals Himself to His Brothers

45 By this time Joseph was no longer able to control his emotions, and he ordered his servants, "Everyone but these brothers, leave the room!" He wanted to be alone when he told his brothers who he was. ²After his servants left, Joseph broke down and cried out so loudly that the servants could hear him throughout the whole house. They carried word to Pharaoh what Joseph had told them about his brothers.

³The brothers didn't know what to make of the governor's actions. Finally, Joseph brought himself under control and said in Hebrew, "I am Joseph! Praise God my father is still alive!" His brothers were so stunned, they were speechless.

⁴Then Joseph said, "Come closer! Come!" When they finally did, he said, "I

am really Joseph, your own brother, the one you sold as a slave into Egypt! ⁵You can now stop condemning yourselves over what you did in a fit of anger when you sold me to the Ishmaelites. God has turned what you did into a blessing to preserve your lives. ⁶This is only the second year of famine and there are still five more years to go, during which there will be no plowing, sowing or reaping. ⁷God brought good out of your anger and sent me here to preserve our lives and those of our families.

⁸“So it wasn’t you who sent me here, but God. And He has made me the highest official in the land, next to Pharaoh, who has put me in charge of all the business affairs of the palace and made me governor of all of Egypt. ⁹Hurry home and tell Father that his son Joseph is still alive and that I’m governor of Egypt. Then as quickly as you can, move down here so you can make it through the next five years of drought. ¹⁰In the northern part of Egypt, close by, is the land of Goshen, and it will be an ideal place for you to settle and raise your children and grandchildren. It has good pasture-land for your flocks and herds. ¹¹I’ll see to it that you’re taken care of for the next five years, so that you and your families survive.”

¹²The brothers were so shocked that they could hardly believe what they were hearing. Joseph said, “Can’t you see that I am really your lost brother? Can’t you tell by the way I talk? You can, can’t you, Benjamin? ¹³Now go and tell Father how much authority the king of Egypt has given me. Tell him everything you have seen, then move here as quickly as you can.”

¹⁴Then he hugged his brother Benjamin and cried, and so did Benjamin. ¹⁵Next he hugged all of his brothers and cried with each one of them. Then the brothers got up their courage and talked to him.

¹⁶When word reached Pharaoh that Joseph’s brothers had arrived, Pharaoh and his servants were happy for Joseph’s

sake. ¹⁷Pharaoh sent a message to him, saying, “I’m glad that your brothers are here. Tell them to load their animals, return to Canaan, ¹⁸then bring your father here along with each man’s family. They may settle in any part of Egypt that is best for them, and be fed from my personal granaries.

¹⁹“Provide transportation for them to make traveling for their wives and children easier. And be sure that your father comes with them. ²⁰Tell them not to worry about leaving some things behind, because all the riches of Egypt are open to them.”

²¹So Joseph gave his brothers wagons to travel in, as Pharaoh ordered, and also food for along the way. ²²He also gave each man a new set of clothes, but to Benjamin he gave five changes of clothes and three hundred pieces of silver. ²³For his father he sent ten donkeys loaded with the choicest merchandise of Egypt and ten additional donkeys loaded with food for the trip back. ²⁴So Joseph sent his brothers on their way and as they left, he said, “Don’t stop to quarrel, but keep moving along as fast as you can.”

²⁵Then they said good-bye and left Egypt, heading back to Canaan to their father. ²⁶When they got home, they told Jacob that Joseph was still alive and that he was governor over all Egypt. Jacob’s heart nearly stopped because he simply couldn’t believe it. ²⁷They told him everything that had happened and took him outside to see the Egyptian wagons which Joseph had sent with them by order of the Pharaoh. Their own donkeys were also loaded with gifts. Finally, Jacob believed them, and his spirits were lifted. ²⁸He said, “It is enough! I’m convinced that Joseph is alive! Let’s go! I will yet see him before I die.”

Jacob Comes to Egypt

46 So Jacob moved to Egypt with everything he had, and when he came to Beersheba, he stopped and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

²That night God called to Israel in a vision, "Jacob, Jacob." And he answered, "Yes, Lord, here I am."

³Then the Lord said, "I am the Lord God, the God of your father Isaac. Don't be afraid to move down to Egypt because I have not forgotten my promise to make your descendants a separate nation. ⁴I will go down to Egypt with you and bring you back home again, and you will see your son Joseph and he will be there to close your eyes when you die."

⁵Jacob took courage and left Beer-sheba, heading for Egypt. His sons transported their father and their wives and children in the royal wagons which Pharaoh had ordered. ⁶They also took their flocks and herds with them from Canaan and finally arrived in Egypt. ⁷So Jacob, his sons, his sons' children, his daughters and their children—all his offspring—finally arrived in Egypt.

⁸Here are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt with him: Reuben, Israel's firstborn, ⁹with his sons, Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron and Carmi. ¹⁰Simeon and his sons, Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar (or Zerah), and Shaul, who was the son of a Canaanite woman.

¹¹Levi and his sons, Gershon, Kohath and Merari.

¹²Judah and his sons, Shelah, Perez and Zerah (his other sons, Er and Onan, had died in Canaan). Perez's sons, Hezron and Hamul.

¹³Issachar and his sons, Tola, Puah, Jashub and Shimron.

¹⁴Zebulun and his sons, Sered, Elon and Jahleel.

¹⁵All these were sons of Leah who were born in Mesopotamia, not counting her daughter Dinah. So there were thirty-three descendants of Jacob by Leah.

¹⁶Then there was Gad and his sons, Zephon, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi and Areli.

¹⁷Asher and his sons, Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah and their sister Serah. Beriah's sons were Heber and Malchiel.

¹⁸So there were sixteen descendants

of Jacob by Zilpah, Leah's maid.

¹⁹Now Jacob's wife Rachel had two sons, Joseph and Benjamin.

²⁰Joseph had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, born to him in Egypt by his wife Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara, the high priest of Heliopolis.

²¹Benjamin's sons were: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim and Ard.

²²So there were fourteen descendants of Jacob by Rachel.

²³Then there was Dan and his son Hushim.

²⁴Naphtali and his sons, Jahziel, Guni, Jezer and Shillem.

²⁵These seven were the descendants of Jacob by Bilhah, Rachel's maid.

²⁶The total number of Jacob's sons, grandsons and unmarried daughters when he came to Egypt was sixty-six, not counting his sons' wives. ²⁷Including the two sons born to Joseph in Egypt, together with Joseph and Jacob himself, brought to seventy the total number of Jacob's family who were going to be in Egypt.

The Sons of Jacob Settle in Goshen

²⁸Jacob sent Judah ahead to tell Joseph that they were coming and that they were going directly to Goshen.

²⁹Then Joseph ordered his chariot to be made ready and rode north as quickly as he could to meet his father, Israel, in Goshen. When they met, Joseph threw his arms around his father's neck, and they both cried for a very long time.

³⁰Finally, Israel said to Joseph, "Let me look at you, son." And when he had filled his eyes with Joseph, he said, "Now I can die in peace because after fifteen long years, I have seen you again, and you are still alive."

³¹Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father, "Let me go back to Pharaoh and tell him that my brothers and my father are here. They have arrived in Goshen and the whole family is finally together again.

³²"I will also tell him that you are shep-

herds and cattlemen and that you have brought your flocks and herds with you. ³³And if Pharaoh requests that you come to Heliopolis to see him and asks what your occupation is, ³⁴say to him, 'We are your servants, Your Majesty, willing to live wherever you choose, but by occupation, we are shepherds and have been since we were young, just as our fathers before us. We are planning to stay in Egypt only a little while.' You need to be honest with Pharaoh, for all shepherds are looked down on by the Egyptians. Then he'll let you live by yourselves in the land of Goshen."

47 Joseph then went back to Heliopolis, asked for an audience with Pharaoh and said, "My father and brothers with their flocks and herds have come all the way from Canaan and are now in Goshen."

²Joseph arranged for Pharaoh to meet his father and brothers, and when the time came, he took five of his brothers and introduced them to Pharaoh. ³When Pharaoh met them, he asked, "What do you men do for a living?"

They answered, "We are shepherds, just as our fathers were before us. ⁴We've come to Egypt because back home all the pastures are dried up, and the famine is even worse than it is here. So please, Your Majesty, let us settle in Goshen, and we will be forever grateful."

⁵Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "It's good to see the whole family reunited and to have your father and brothers here with you. ⁶The whole land of Egypt is in front of you. Choose the part that is best suited to their needs, and if they prefer Goshen, let them settle there. If they want to, you can put the most capable of your brothers in charge of my own cattle."

⁷Joseph thanked Pharaoh, then brought his father in and introduced him to the king. ⁸Pharaoh asked Jacob, "How old are you?" ⁹Jacob answered, "I'm one hundred and thirty years old, but I'm not going to live as long as my ancestors did.

The days of my life have been difficult, so my years will be few." ¹⁰Then Jacob lifted up his hands and blessed Pharaoh before he left his presence.

¹¹So Joseph took his father and brothers back to Goshen and gave them properties in the best part of that northern area called the district of Rameses, as Pharaoh had directed. ¹²Joseph made sure that his father and brothers had enough food and were well provided for, according to the number of their children.

The Famine

¹³The drought was so bad in Egypt and in the land of Canaan that no one could grow grain anywhere. ¹⁴Egyptians, as well as people from other nations, came to Joseph to buy food. He sold grain to the Egyptians and the foreigners alike and deposited the money in the king's treasury. ¹⁵When the people ran out of money, they came to Joseph and said, "We have no money, but you must give us food or we will die!"

¹⁶Joseph said, "Bring the cattle you have, and I'll trade your food for cattle." ¹⁷So they brought their cattle, horses, donkeys and other animals to Joseph and used them in exchange for food. And Joseph sold them the food they needed.

¹⁸The next year the people came back to Joseph and said, "There is no use pretending. We have nothing left with which to buy food. Our money is all gone, our cattle and animals are gone; we have nothing left to offer you in exchange for grain except ourselves and our land. ¹⁹Why should we starve to death in sight of food? We will give you our bodies and our land in exchange for food, and we will gladly serve Pharaoh. Just let us have some food and grain so we can live. Maybe we can plant a little grain and water it by hand so we can at least have something to feed our families."

²⁰In that way Joseph bought all the property in Egypt and turned it over to the state. Every family in Egypt had to sell their land in order to survive, and

soon it all belonged to Pharaoh. ²¹From one end of the country to the other, many people were now working for the government and were not much better off than slaves. ²²The only property not bought by the government were those owned by the priests, because Pharaoh had ordered the priests to be fed from his own royal granaries, so they didn't have to sell their land.

²³When the people came to Joseph again asking for food, he said to them, "Since you have nothing more to sell and you're already working for the government, I'll give you food and grain on the following condition: ²⁴I'll assign you a piece of land which belongs to the state, and you work it—the only stipulation is that one-fifth of all you reap will belong to the state and four-fifths will be yours to trade with and to feed your wives and little ones."

²⁵The people said, "That's a deal! You have saved our lives! You have virtually given us back our property, and for this we are grateful. We want you to tell Pharaoh that we are his willing servants."

²⁶Now Joseph had made it a law throughout Egypt, one which is still in existence as this book is being written, that one-fifth of all harvests go to the state, except harvests from the lands of the priests which Pharaoh did not buy.

Joseph's Vow to Jacob

²⁷Jacob and his family lived in the northern part of Egypt in the land of Goshen. After the famine was over they acquired property there and grew in number.

²⁸Jacob himself lived another seventeen years after he came to Egypt, so he was one hundred and forty-seven years old when he died. ²⁹When he knew he was about to die, he asked Joseph to come to see him. When he came, Jacob said, "Be kind to your old father and place your right hand under my thigh and swear to me that you will not bury me in Egypt, ³⁰but that you will take my body back to

Canaan and bury me with my fathers in the land God promised us."

Joseph said, "I will do as you say."

³¹Then Jacob said, "Now seal your promise with an oath." So Joseph took an oath, and Jacob got up, leaned on his staff and bowed in thanksgiving to the Lord.

Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons

48 Not long after this, Joseph heard that his father wasn't well and probably wouldn't live much longer. So Joseph took his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, and went to see Jacob. ²When Jacob was told that Joseph and his two sons were coming to see him, he pulled his last ounce of energy together and sat up in bed to look as good for Joseph as he could.

³When they came in, he welcomed them and said to Joseph, "The Almighty God appeared to me at Bethel in the land of Canaan and blessed me. ⁴He said, 'I promise to be with you and multiply your descendants so your offspring will become an entire nation. And I will give this land to you and to your descendants as your possession forever.'

⁵"Now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, even though they were born to you before I came to Egypt or saw them, yet I consider them my own sons just as much as Reuben and Simeon, so their inheritance will be the same. ⁶And if you should have any additional sons or consider others to be part of your family, their inheritance will come through Ephraim and Manasseh. ⁷When I came back to Bethel after leaving Mesopotamia, your mother Rachel died, and I had her buried off the road which goes to Bethlehem. She wanted to give me more sons, but couldn't. So I'm accepting your sons as my own offspring."

⁸Then Jacob looked up toward heaven, closed his eyes and said, "Joseph, tell me in the sight of God, are these your very own sons?" ⁹Joseph answered, "Yes, father, they are. These are the sons God gave me here in Egypt." Jacob said, "Bring them close to me, so I can put my

hands on their heads and bless them.”
¹⁰Jacob couldn't see very well, for his eyes were weak because of his age. So Joseph brought his boys up close to him, and Jacob hugged and kissed them.
¹¹Then Jacob said to Joseph, “You know Joseph, I never expected to see you again, and now I have not only seen you, but also your sons.”

¹²Joseph was so awed by the emotion in his father's words that he took his sons by the hand and together they knelt by Jacob's bed and bowed their heads to the ground. ¹³Then Joseph, anticipating Jacob's blessing on his sons, told Manasseh to go over to the right side of their grandfather's bed and Ephraim to go to the left. ¹⁴But Jacob reached out and crossed his arms, placing his right hand on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger of the two, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, who was the firstborn.

¹⁵As he did so, he said in Joseph's hearing, “May the God of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, bless these two boys. May the God who has been with me all my life bless them abundantly. ¹⁶May the Angel who has redeemed me from evil, bless these boys. May my name and the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, live on through them and their offspring. May they be fruitful and may their descendants be many.”

¹⁷At the beginning of the blessing, Joseph noticed that Jacob had crossed his arms and placed his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left hand on Manasseh's head. He thought his father had made a mistake since he couldn't see very well, so he tried to move his father's right hand from Ephraim and place it on Manasseh. ¹⁸He said, “Father, you got the boys mixed up. I put the firstborn on your right so you could put your right hand on him more easily.”

¹⁹But Jacob refused to change, saying, “I know it, my son, I know it. Manasseh's descendants will also become numerous, but the younger brother's descendants

will multiply faster, and they will become a small nation.” ²⁰So Jacob kept his hands on Joseph's two sons and finished his patriarchal blessing by saying, “And the children of Israel will bless your names. They will greet each other and say, ‘May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.’” Thus Jacob put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

²¹Then Jacob concluded the visit by saying to Joseph, “It won't be long now before I die. But God will be with you as He has in the past, and He will bring you back to the land of your fathers. ²²I have given you one portion more than your brothers. The whole Shechem area will be yours. I don't want your brothers to settle there because of what they did to the local people. This is a fertile region which I defended against the Amorites with my own bow and sword.”

Jacob's Last Words

49 Then Jacob called for all his sons to come in and said to them, “Come and gather around my bed, so I can tell you what the Lord has told me about your future and the future of your descendants. ²Listen carefully, my sons, to what your old father, Jacob, has to say.

³“Reuben, you are my firstborn, the firstfruit of my strength, the product of my young manhood. You are the proudest and strongest of all my sons. ⁴But you can also be as unstable as a raging flood, brimming with passion. You slept with Rachel's maid, your brother's mother, and by so doing you dishonored your father's name. The personality of your descendants will be just like you—strong, proud and passionate.

⁵“Simeon and Levi, you two are brothers, and you're just alike. Both of you have violent tempers, and you've used your weapons to kill and commit acts of aggression. ⁶The two of you held secret meetings to plan violence, and you've killed at the slightest provocation. You crippled bulls just for sport. ⁷Expressing your violent temper has done you no

good; it's been a curse to you. It is fierce and its fury is cruel. Your descendants will have the same personality. They will be just as restless as you are, and God will scatter them throughout Israel.

⁸“Judah, your brothers respect you. When you get your enemy by the neck, you will not let go, and your brothers know this. ⁹You are like a lion who kills, not for fun, but for food, then returns to his den to sleep. And when you're lying down, who would dare disturb you? ¹⁰Your descendants will be leaders and kings. The scepter will come to your descendants and the ruler's staff to your children, and it will not depart until Shiloh comes to whom everyone's obedience belongs. ¹¹You will tie your donkey to the best of vines and your colt to the choicest branch. You will be so prosperous, you could wash your clothes in wine. ¹²Your strength will be evident to everyone, for your eyes will sparkle like wine and your teeth will be as white as milk.

¹³“Zebulun, you love the ocean. Your descendants will live along the Mediterranean coast as far up as Sidon. Their cities will be a welcome haven for ships and a needed rest to shipwrecked mariners. ¹⁴Issachar, you are like a strong donkey that can be loaded down until its legs seem to bend. You work hard and enjoy it. ¹⁵You know where the land is good, where it's delightful to live, and you're willing to work for it. You put your shoulder to the wheel, but you often become a slave to your own ambitions. Your descendants will be just like you.

¹⁶“Dan, you like to rule over people. You like being in charge and would love to rule over your own brothers. ¹⁷Your actions are as crafty as a snake which lies by the side of the road and strikes at the horses' heels so that the horse rears up and throws off its rider. You enjoy the feeling of power, and your descendants will be just like that.”

¹⁸Jacob got this far and prayed, “O God, please help me to go on!” ¹⁹Then he continued,

“Gad, you are a peaceful man and an easy prey for robbers and for those who want to take advantage of you, but you are not afraid to go after them and catch them. Your descendants will be just like that.

²⁰“Asher, you like to farm and produce rich crops. You love to eat delicacies fit for a king, and you enjoy serving such dainties to others. Your descendants will do the same and be as hospitable as you.

²¹“Naphtali, you are like a graceful deer running free. You love the beauty of nature, works of art, and the flow of gracious words. Your descendants will be just like you.

²²“Joseph, you are like a fruitful vine planted near a well with its branches running over the wall. You also have a free spirit like a wild colt on a hillside. ²³When your enemies attacked and pursued you with bows and arrows and provoked you, ²⁴your arms remained steady and strong. You are known to depend on the power of the mighty God of your fathers. You are a type of the Good Shepherd, the Rock of Israel. ²⁵Your father's God will continue to help you. The Almighty God will bless you; He will bless you with rain from above and wells of water from below. He will increase your cattle and bless your children. ²⁶He will bless you with grain and bring good things into your life. His blessings are as sure as the mountains and as enduring as the everlasting hills. These blessings will rest on the head of Joseph, the prince among his brothers, and on his descendants forever.

²⁷“Benjamin, you are like a wolf, willing to kill to stay alive. You will attack morning or night to sustain yourself. Your descendants will be just like that.”

²⁸These men and their descendants eventually made up the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what Jacob said to his twelve sons about their descendants just before he died.

Jacob Dies

²⁹When he finished speaking to them, he said, "I'm about to die. I want you to bury me next to my fathers in that cave in the middle of Ephron, in the land of the Hittites, ³⁰the same cave which Abraham bought from Ephron, the Hittite, as a burial place. The cave of Machpelah is close to the oaks of Mamre in the land of Canaan. ³¹Abraham and Sarah are buried there, and Isaac and Rebecca, and that's where I buried Leah. ³²This cave originally belonged to the descendants of Heth before Abraham bought it."

³³Then Jacob, who had been sitting up in bed, lay down, curled up and died.

50 Joseph fell across the bed, kissed his father's face and cried uncontrollably. ²When he finished crying, he went back home and asked the morticians to embalm his father's body, which they did. ³The time required to embalm a body, according to Egyptian custom, was about forty days, with thirty days spent in mourning. But the total time the Egyptians mourned for Jacob was seventy days.

⁴When the days of mourning were over, Joseph went to Pharaoh's advisors and said, "In my heart I'm still mourning and cannot see Pharaoh. Would you please speak to him for me? ⁵Tell him that my father Jacob made me promise before he died that I would bury him in the tomb of his fathers in the land of Canaan. Ask Pharaoh to please let me go and bury my father, then I will come back and assume my duties."

⁶Pharaoh answered, "Joseph has my permission to go and bury his father in Canaan as he promised him before he died." ⁷So Joseph left Egypt to bury his father in Canaan, and many of Pharaoh's officials, dignitaries and other high officials of government went with him. ⁸Also in the funeral procession were nearly all of Joseph's servants, his brothers, and all of those close to Jacob except the children. They were left behind in

Goshen with some of the servants to watch the flocks and herds. ⁹Even a military escort with chariots and horses went along for protection.

¹⁰They took the long way, traveling south around the Dead Sea all the way to the harvesting center of Atad on the other side of the river Jordan. They stayed there for a full week mourning the death of Jacob, going through ceremonies and rituals for the dead. ¹¹When the Canaanites saw it, they said, "This is a great mourning the Egyptians are holding." So they called the place Abel Mizraim, which means The Great Mourning of the Egyptians.

¹²While the Egyptians waited by the river Jordan, the sons of Jacob transported the body of their father the rest of the way into Canaan as he had requested. ¹³They took his body to the cave of Machpelah near the oaks of Mamre which Abraham had bought as a burial plot from Ephron the Hittite. ¹⁴After the burial ceremonies, Joseph, his brothers and all the others who had accompanied them returned to Egypt.

Joseph Loves His Brothers

¹⁵Then Joseph's brothers said to each other, "Now that our father is dead, what if Joseph still holds a grudge against us for selling him as a slave and wants to get even for what we did to him?" ¹⁶So they sent a messenger to Joseph in Heliopolis with a letter which said, "Remember that Father spoke to you about forgiving us just before he died. ¹⁷And remember that he said, 'Please forgive your brothers for what they did to you, for they have admitted they did wrong in selling you to the Ishmaelites as a slave.' So please tell us that you have forgiven us, for we are all servants of the same God our fathers worshiped." When Joseph read the letter, he wept.

¹⁸A few hours later, his brothers arrived. After they were ushered in, they fell on their knees, bowing before him, and said, "We are willing to be your slaves!"

¹⁹Joseph shook his head and said to them, "Don't kneel down in front of me! Get up!" When they were up, he said to them, "I'm not in the place of God to carry out judgments on anyone. Don't be afraid; I'm not going to do anything to you. ²⁰You were angry at the time you sold me into slavery. You wanted to get rid of me, but as you can see, God turned it to our good and has kept our families alive. ²¹I've forgiven you, and will continue to feed you and your families from the royal granaries as I've been doing, just as Pharaoh instructed." He spoke kindly to his brothers and comforted them.

Joseph Dies

²²Joseph stayed on in Egypt with his family, as did all the brothers and their families. He lived to be one hundred and ten years old ²³and saw Ephraim's

children and their children, even the children of his grandson Makir, the oldest son of Manasseh. He was privileged to hold them on his knee and bless them.

²⁴One day Joseph called his brothers to him and said, "I am about to die. But God will continue to take care of you and lead you out of here and take you back to the land He promised to give to our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

²⁵Then Joseph asked them to take an oath that when the time came for God to lead them out of Egypt and back to their own land, they would take his body with them. The brothers agreed and took the oath to do so.

²⁶Shortly afterward, Joseph died at one hundred and ten years of age, and they embalmed him and placed his body in a coffin in Egypt.

EXODUS

The Children of Israel in Egypt

1 These are the names of the sons of Jacob who, each with his household, came down to Egypt with him: ²Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, ³Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, ⁴Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher. ⁵Actually, there were seventy heads of families who came to live in Egypt, counting Jacob and including Joseph and his two sons who also were heads of families. ⁶In time, Joseph died, as did his brothers. ⁷The descendants of Jacob continued to multiply and became so numerous and strong that they took up the whole land of Goshen. But they did not keep God's commandments as Abraham had, so the Lord allowed them to be placed in bondage.

⁸Then a foreign king began to rule over Egypt who didn't want to know about Joseph and what he had done to save Egypt. ⁹He said, "There are so many of these Israelites that soon they'll be more powerful than we are. ¹⁰In case of war, they might join the enemy and fight us, or they might leave the country, which would greatly jeopardize our economy. We need them but we must stop them from having so many children." ¹¹So the Egyptians sent troops into the land of Goshen and set slave masters over the children of Israel to crush their spirits with hard labor, forcing them to build cities like Pithom and Rameses which became supply centers for Pharaoh. ¹²But the harder they were forced to work, the more they multiplied, and the more land they needed to live on. Soon the Egyptians became afraid of them. ¹³They tried to protect themselves by making their Israelite slaves work even harder. ¹⁴They made life extremely difficult for the Israelites by ruthlessly forcing them to work on the king's building projects and in his fields in the bitterly hot sun.

¹⁵One day Pharaoh called in Shiprah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives in charge of those who delivered babies,

and said to them, ¹⁶"When you and your assistants help a Hebrew woman deliver her baby, if it's a boy, kill him, but if it's a girl let her live. That's an order."

¹⁷But the midwives respected the Lord more than they feared the king so they didn't do as the king said but let the baby boys live. ¹⁸Then the king sent for the midwives again and said, "Why are you letting the baby boys live when I ordered you to kill them? Answer me!"

¹⁹The midwives said, "The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; they're vigorous and give birth much more easily. Many times their babies are born before we can even get there." ²⁰So God blessed the midwives and protected them, not because He approved of their partial truths, but because of their kindness to the mothers and their babies. The children of Israel increased until they became extremely numerous.

²¹Because the midwives put God first and did what He said rather than what the king said, the Lord blessed them with families of their own. ²²Then Pharaoh issued this order to all Egyptian slave masters: "Take every Hebrew baby boy that you find and throw him into the Nile as a sacrifice to our river god. But don't harm the baby girls."

Moses Is Born

2 An Israelite man from the tribe of Levi had married a woman from the tribe of Levi. ²They had a daughter named Miriam and then a son named Aaron. The woman became pregnant again and gave birth to a second son. He was a good baby and she succeeded in hiding him for three months. ³When she could no longer hide him, she made a small basket out of reeds, coated it with tar and pitch to make it watertight and put the baby inside. Before sunrise she set the basket in the water by the reeds at the edge of the Nile. ⁴Pharaoh's daughter often came here to bathe and to pay

her respects to the river god. The baby's sister hid nearby to see what would happen to her little brother.

⁵That morning the king's daughter came down to the river to bathe and worship. As she and her attendants were walking along the river bank, she saw a basket floating among the reeds near the edge of the river. She asked one of her servant girls to go in and get it. ⁶When the princess opened the basket, there was a baby inside. He immediately began to cry. She could tell it was a Hebrew baby and felt sorry for him and for the mother who had abandoned him.

⁷Then the baby's sister, who had been hiding nearby, came and said, "If you need someone to take care of the baby, I can get a Hebrew woman to nurse it for you. Would you like for me to do that?" ⁸"Please do," said the princess. So the girl ran home and got her mother. ⁹When the child's mother came, Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me and I'll pay you for it. Take good care of him until he's old enough to come live with me at the palace." So the mother took the baby and nursed him for her.

¹⁰The years passed quickly. Periodically the princess came to visit, and when the boy was twelve years old, she decided it was time for him to come live with her. So he became the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. She said, "I drew him out of the Nile when he was a baby, so I will call him Hapimoses, meaning The One Given to Me by the Nile-god, Hapmose. But the boy preferred the shortened form, Moses, simply meaning The One Drawn Out.

Moses Flees

¹¹As a young man, Moses was trained in all the wisdom and military art of the Egyptians. He often saw how harshly his fellow Hebrews were treated. One day when he was about forty years old, he saw an Egyptian slave master beating a Hebrew so severely, the man could easily

have died. ¹²Moses looked around and noticed that all the other Egyptian slave masters were gone for the day. So he ran over, grabbed the Egyptian and killed him. When he realized what he had done, he hid the man's body in the sand and went back to the palace. He hoped that the Hebrew people would recognize this as a signal for them to revolt, accept him as their leader and fight to free themselves.

¹³The next morning Moses went out to see his fellow Hebrews, expecting them to eagerly accept him as their leader. When he got there, he saw two Hebrews fighting with each other. He separated them and said to the one who seemed to be the stronger, "Why are you beating up on a fellow Hebrew?"

¹⁴The man looked at Moses and angrily retorted, "Who asked you to judge us? Are you going to settle this by killing me like you killed the Egyptian?" Immediately Moses knew by the man's attitude how the people felt toward him. He thought, "They know what I did, but they're not willing for me to set them free."

¹⁵Meanwhile, Pharaoh heard that Moses had saved a Hebrew slave by killing an Egyptian. Pharaoh suspected that Moses had done this to begin a revolt against the government. So he issued an order for his arrest and execution. But Moses fled Egypt and headed east for the land of Midian. There he spotted a well and sat down to rest, hoping that someone would come along to give him a drink.

¹⁶There was a priest living in that area of Midian who was a descendant of Abraham. He had seven daughters who came to the well to draw water for their father's sheep and goats. ¹⁷But as they had done before, the shepherds drove the flock of Jethro's daughters away. Moses defended the young women and watered their sheep and goats for them. ¹⁸That afternoon when Jethro's daughters got home, their father was surprised and said to them, "How come you're home so early?"

¹⁹They said, "An Egyptian was at the well and didn't let the shepherds push us away. So we didn't have to wait. He even drew the water for us."

²⁰Jethro was grateful and asked, "Where is this Egyptian? Why didn't you invite him home? Go back and find him and invite him to come and eat with us."

²¹So Moses went to Jethro's house. There he fell in love with Jethro's daughter Zipporah and eventually married her. ²²Zipporah gave birth to a son and Moses called him Gershom, meaning A Stranger In A Foreign Land, to remind himself that Midian was not his home. (It was during his stay in Midian that Moses, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, began to write Genesis and Job.)

²³Years went by and the king of Egypt died, but the children of Israel still suffered under slavery and cried to the Lord for help. ²⁴The Lord heard their prayers as they pleaded for deliverance and decided that the time had come to set them free. He had not forgotten the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ²⁵So the Spirit of the Lord spoke to the hearts of the people to let them know that the time of their deliverance was near.

The Burning Bush

3 One day Moses was taking care of the sheep and goats of his father-in-law Jethro, a priest of the Lord in Midian, when he took them across a stretch of wilderness to graze near Mount Sinai. ²Here the Angel of the Lord spoke to him from the middle of a burning bush. When Moses first saw the bush on fire, he wondered why it didn't burn up. ³"That's strange," he thought. "I'm going up there to see what's going on."

⁴So Moses went up the slope, and as he approached, the Lord called out from the middle of the fire, "Moses! Moses!"

He answered, "Yes, here I am."

⁵"Stop!" the Lord said. "Don't come any closer. Take off your sandals, because you're standing on holy ground. ⁶

am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Moses quickly removed his sandals, fell on his knees, covered his face with his hands and bowed until his head touched the ground. He was afraid to look at the One who spoke.

⁷Then the Lord said, "I have seen how the children of Israel are being treated in Egypt. I have heard their cries of pain and their pleas for help. They are finally ready to let me deliver them from the oppression they're under. ⁸I have decided that this is the time to bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that's rich and fertile. Right now the Canaanites live in that land, as do the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, but the land is mine and I want to give it to my people. ⁹Their cry for help has not gone unheard. I have seen their hardships and the way the Egyptians are treating them. ¹⁰So I want you to go back to Egypt to see Pharaoh and ask him to release my people. Then I want you to lead them out of Egypt to freedom."

¹¹Moses trembled as he heard this and said, "Lord, look at me! Who am I to go to Pharaoh? Who am I to free Israel and bring all these people out of Egypt? No, Lord, you need to find someone else."

¹²The Lord said, "I will go with you, and when you lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, bring them here to this mountain to worship, and when they hear me speak, they will know that I am the One who has sent you."

¹³But Moses still doubted God's wisdom in choosing him and said, "Suppose I go back to Egypt and say to the Israelites, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to set you free,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I tell them?"

¹⁴The Lord answered, "I Am Who I Am. Tell them that I Am has sent you, the eternal God of heaven and earth. ¹⁵Also tell them that the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has sent you. I am Yahweh, I Am Who I Am. This is the name by which I will be known

from generation to generation. ¹⁶Go and call together the elders and leaders of the people and tell them that the Lord—the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to you in the wilderness. I have seen their suffering, and I know how cruelly they’re being treated by the Egyptians. ¹⁷Tell them I have decided that the time has come to bring them out of Egypt into the rich and fertile land now inhabited by the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ¹⁸Don’t worry—the leading elders will listen to you. Then go together to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘The Lord God of the Hebrews has spoken to us and asked us to take a three-day journey into the wilderness to worship Him in the Sinai mountains where He will meet us. Please let us go and offer the necessary sacrifices to our God.’ ¹⁹The king of Egypt will not let you go. He has no intention of losing his slaves unless he’s forced to do so. ²⁰Only after I stretch out my hand against him and do many terrifying things in the land will he let you go. ²¹The Egyptians will learn to respect you because of me, and when you leave, you will not go out empty-handed. ²²Every Hebrew woman is to ask her Egyptian neighbor, or the woman in whose house she lives, for a gift of clothing and jewelry. The women are to put them on their sons and daughters and in this way you will carry the wealth of Egypt with you.”

Miracles for Pharaoh

4 Moses said, “But what if the elders and leaders don’t believe me and don’t do what I ask them to? What if they say, ‘The Lord didn’t really appear to you. You’re just making this up so you can take charge like you tried to do before?’”

²Then the Lord asked him, “What is that in your hand?” Moses answered, “That’s my shepherd’s rod.” ³The Lord said, “Throw it down on the ground.” Moses threw it down and it turned into a huge snake. He jumped back and ran to get away from it.

⁴The Lord called to him, “Come back and catch the snake by its tail.” Moses caught the snake, and as soon as he touched it, it turned back into a shepherd’s rod. ⁵The Lord said, “If the elders and leaders of Israel doubt that the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, appeared to you, then do this same thing in front of them to prove that your story is true.”

⁶The Lord gave Moses another sign, saying, “Now put your hand inside your robe, then take it out and look at it.” Moses obeyed. He put his hand inside his robe, pulled it out and when he looked at it, it was covered with leprosy. ⁷The Lord said, “Put your hand back inside your robe, then pull it out and look at it.” Moses obeyed and put his hand back inside his robe and when he pulled it out and looked at it, it was clean, just as before. ⁸Then the Lord explained, “Some of the elders of Israel will not believe the first sign. They’ll think it’s some kind of magic. But when they see this second sign, they’ll believe you.”

⁹“But there will be some who will still doubt. So if you need to give them more evidence, then take them to the Nile, draw out some water and pour it on the ground. As soon as it hits the ground it’ll turn into blood.” ¹⁰In spite of all this, Moses still hesitated to go back to Egypt, and said, “Lord, please don’t ask me to go. I’ve never been a good speaker, and I’m certainly not one now after being with sheep and goats all these years. You know that my words don’t flow smoothly when I speak.” ¹¹The Lord said to him, “Who made man’s mouth? Who can restore his ability to speak when he’s dumb or his hearing when he’s deaf? Who can restore his sight when he’s blind? Only I, the Lord. ¹²So go to Pharaoh and I will be with you and teach you what to say.”

¹³But Moses pleaded again with the Lord, “O, Lord, please send someone else; let me stay here and take care of my sheep.” ¹⁴The Lord was displeased with Moses’ lack of faith and said to him,

“What about Aaron, your older brother? He’s a Levite and can speak fluent Egyptian. He can speak for you. I have told him where you are and he is coming to find you. ¹⁵You can speak to him in Hebrew and he can translate into Egyptian. I’ll be with both of you to tell you what to say. ¹⁶Aaron will be your spokesman. He’ll be like a mouth to you and you can tell him what I want said. ¹⁷Be sure to take your shepherd’s rod with you because it is to be a symbol of my power.”

Moses Returns to Egypt

¹⁸Then Moses took the flock home to Jethro, his father-in-law, and said, “I feel it’s time to go back to Egypt to visit my relatives to see how many of them are still alive and how they’re doing.” Jethro agreed, saying, “Go, and may God be with you.”

¹⁹The Lord spoke to Moses again, “Don’t be afraid to return to Egypt because all those who wanted to kill you are dead.” ²⁰So Moses took his wife and two young sons and headed for Egypt. He also took God’s shepherd’s rod. ²¹Again the Lord spoke to Moses, “When you get to Egypt, be sure to perform all the miracles in front of Pharaoh that I tell you to. I’ll give you power to do them so don’t be intimidated by him. He’ll be stubborn and will not give in easily. ²²Say to Pharaoh, ‘The Lord God of the Hebrews says: Israel is like a firstborn son to me. ²³I want you to let him go so he can come and worship me. If you refuse to let him go, I will not hesitate to take the life of your firstborn son.’”

²⁴So Moses and his family left, and at one of the places where they camped, the Lord sent an angel to speak to Moses in a dream. The angel pointed out to him that he had listened to his wife instead of the Lord and had not circumcised his youngest son. He had not carried out the sign of the covenant that God had made with Abraham. The angel told him that he would not let them go on until this

was done. He spoke in such a stern way that Moses thought the angel might kill him. ²⁵When he told Zipporah about it the next morning, she took a stone knife, cut off her son’s foreskin, threw it at Moses’ feet and said, “You surely love to see blood!” ²⁶So the angel let him go. Then Zipporah called Moses a “bridegroom of blood,” but Moses knew that if he had disobeyed, he couldn’t expect the Lord to protect him. He then sent his family back home.

²⁷Before all this, the Lord had said to Aaron, “Moses now has a family, but he is returning to Egypt alone. I want you to go out and meet him.” So Aaron had left to find his brother, and they met not far from the mountain of God. They threw their arms around each other, exchanged a brotherly kiss and wept. ²⁸Then Moses told Aaron everything that had happened to him since he had left Egypt, how the Lord had appeared to him in the burning bush, what He had told him to say to Pharaoh and all the miracles that He had performed.

²⁹When they finally got to Egypt, Moses and Aaron called together all the leading elders. ³⁰Aaron told them everything that the Lord had said to Moses. Then Moses performed the same miracles for them that the Lord had shown him. ³¹When they heard the report and saw the miracles, they believed that the Lord was about to set them free. They were very grateful that the Lord had heard their prayers and observed their misery. They bowed their heads and worshiped Him.

Encounter With Pharaoh

5 After this Moses and Aaron went to see Pharaoh and said, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Let my people go so they can hold a religious festival and worship me in the wilderness.’”

²Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord that I should listen to Him? He’s not my God! It’s our gods who have prospered our country. I know nothing about your God,

and I will not let your people go.”³ They said, “The God of the Hebrews has shown Himself to us and told us what to do. We need to go for three days into the wilderness and offer sacrifices to the Lord. If we don’t do what He says, He may send a plague or the sword of war.”

⁴Pharaoh said, “What right do you two have to come here and promise these slaves relief from their work? Go back and tell your people to forget their dreams and do what they’re told to do. ⁵You’ve created enough problems by making them rest on your Sabbath. That’s a lot of lost labor. Have them get back to work!”

⁶The next day Pharaoh called in his officers and gave them the following orders: ⁷“Stop giving straw to the Hebrew slaves for their quota of brick. From now on, let them go to the fields and find their own straw, ⁸but they are to make the same number of bricks. I don’t want one brick less from our daily production. They’re not working hard enough as it is or they wouldn’t keep talking about going away for some religious festival. ⁹Make them work hard and they’ll soon forget about going anywhere. They’ll also stop believing these lies that Moses and Aaron are telling them about a God waiting for them somewhere out in the wilderness.”

¹⁰The Egyptian officers went to the Hebrew foremen and said, “This is the latest from Pharaoh: ‘Do not give the people any more straw. ¹¹Let them find it themselves, but they must make the same number of bricks as before.’”

¹²So the people scattered everywhere looking for straw to make their daily quota of bricks. ¹³The Egyptian officers kept pressuring the Hebrew foremen, saying, “Don’t you dare fall behind in your quota. We expect the same number of bricks from your people as when we gave you the straw.” ¹⁴When the people failed to reach their quota, the officers had the foremen whipped and said to them, “Why haven’t you made the same number of bricks? You fell behind yester-

day and again today!” ¹⁵Then the foremen went to see Pharaoh and said, “Why are your officers doing this to us? We can’t possibly make the same number of bricks we made before. ¹⁶We’ve been asked to find our own straw, but that takes time, and yet we’re expected to keep producing the same daily quota. Your officers keep shouting at us, ‘Make bricks! Make bricks!’ When we fall behind, they beat us unmercifully. But it’s not our fault. It isn’t easy to go out in the field to find all the straw we need and bring it back to the worksite. Your officers are being unreasonable.” ¹⁷Pharaoh said to them, “You’re just lazy, that’s all. You just don’t want to work. That’s why you keep talking about going out to the wilderness to hold a religious festival. ¹⁸Now get back to work! You’ll have to find your own straw, but keep making the same number of bricks as before.”

¹⁹The Israelite foremen realized they were in real trouble when Pharaoh himself wouldn’t listen to reason but demanded the same quota of bricks. ²⁰As they left the palace grounds, they met Moses and Aaron who were waiting to hear what Pharaoh had said. ²¹The foremen blurted out, “May the Lord punish both of you for what you have done to us! You’ve made Pharaoh and his officers hate us even more than they did before, and now they have an excuse to kill us.”

Israel’s Deliverance Promised

²²Moses and Aaron listened but said nothing. After the foremen left, Moses turned to the Lord and said, “Lord, why have you done this to your people? They’re being treated worse now than they were before. ²³Ever since I went in to see Pharaoh to speak in your name, things have gotten even harder for them, and you’ve done nothing about it, Lord. Why?”

6 The Lord answered Moses, “You’ll now see what I will do to Pharaoh. I will force him to let my people go. In fact,

he will beg them to leave.”²The Lord further said, “I am the God of Israel.”³I spoke to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the Almighty God, but I did not reveal myself to them as Yahweh, the covenant-keeping One. ⁴I promised to give them the land of Canaan, the same land in which they lived as strangers and foreigners. ⁵I have heard the groanings of my people whom the Egyptians have enslaved, and I have not forgotten my covenant promise. ⁶So say to the children of Israel, ‘The Lord says: I am the God of your fathers. I will bring you out of Egypt and into Canaan. I will free you from slavery and redeem you from the house of bondage. I will do so with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. ⁷I will openly claim you as my people and show the nations that I am your God. You will no longer doubt that I am the living Lord, because I will bring you out of Egypt and will set you free. ⁸I will bring you into the land I promised to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I will give it to you as an inheritance because I am the Lord.’”

⁹So Moses went and told this to the people, but they would not listen to him because their desire for freedom had been crushed by the cruelty of Pharaoh. ¹⁰Then the Lord said to Moses, ¹¹“Go tell Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to let my people go.” ¹²Moses said, “If the Israelites don’t believe me, why should Pharaoh? To him I’m just another Hebrew, which makes it even more unlikely that he’ll pay attention to what I have to say.” ¹³Then the Lord again told Moses and Aaron to speak to the Israelites about leaving Egypt and to Pharaoh about letting His people go.

Moses’ Ancestry

¹⁴Notice Moses’ ancestry. The first three sons of Jacob with their descendants were: Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn whose sons were Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron and Carmi. These are the ancestors of the clans which bear their names. ¹⁵The descendants of Simeon, Jacob’s second

son, were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar and Shaul, who was the son of a Canaanite woman. These are the ancestors of the clans which bear their names. ¹⁶The descendants of Levi, Jacob’s third son, were Gershon, Kohath and Merari. These are the ancestors of the clans which bear their names. Levi himself lived one hundred and thirty-seven years. ¹⁷The sons of Gershon were Libni and Shimei. ¹⁸The sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. Kohath himself lived to be one hundred and thirty-three years old. ¹⁹The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi. They were ancestors of the clans of Levi with their descendants. ²⁰Amram, the grandson of Levi through Kohath, married Jochebed, his father’s younger sister, who bore him Aaron and Moses. Amram lived to be one hundred and thirty-seven years old. ²¹The sons of Izhar were Korah, Nepheg and Zichri. ²²The sons of Uzziel were Mishaël, Elzaphan and Sithri.

²³Aaron, the son of Amram, married Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, and she gave birth to Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ²⁴The sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah and Abiasaph. These were ancestors of the clans descended from Korah which bear their names. ²⁵Eleazar, son of Aaron, married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she gave birth to Phinehas. He was the ancestor of the families which bear his name. ²⁶It was this Aaron and his brother Moses to whom the Lord had said, “Take the tribes of Israel out of Egypt.” ²⁷So they went and talked to Pharaoh about letting Israel go.

Aaron Becomes Moses’ Spokesman

²⁸When the Lord spoke to Moses from the burning bush in the wilderness, ²⁹He said, “I am the Lord. I want you to tell the king of Egypt everything I tell you.” ³⁰But Moses answered, “Lord, I feel unclean in your presence, a sinner with uncircumcised lips. Why should the king of Egypt listen to an ordinary man like me?”

7 The Lord replied, “You will stand in the eyes of Pharaoh as if you were God, and Aaron your brother, as if he were your prophet. ²Say what I tell you to say, and your brother Aaron, who speaks Egyptian fluently, will make it plain to Pharaoh that I want him to let Israel go. ³Pharaoh will be stubborn and will not let Israel go. He won’t change his mind, no matter how many miracles I perform. ⁴Then I will have to do something drastic to get his attention, but I will bring Israel out of Egypt. I will not force Pharaoh to resist me, but as he turns against me, he will become more and more stubborn. ⁵The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when they see what I do to their country to free my people.”

⁶Moses and Aaron did everything the Lord commanded them to do. ⁷Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they confronted Pharaoh.

Aaron’s Rod

⁸The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ⁹“When Pharaoh asks you to perform a miracle to prove that what you’re saying is true, give Aaron your shepherd’s rod and ask him to throw it down in front of the king and it will turn into a snake.” ¹⁰So Moses and Aaron went to see Pharaoh and did just what the Lord had said. The king asked for a miracle and Aaron threw down the shepherd’s rod in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it turned into a snake.

¹¹Then Pharaoh called for his wise men and magicians and they used demonic power to make it appear that they could do the same thing. ¹²Each man threw down his rod and each rod looked as if it had turned into a snake. Then Aaron’s snake swallowed the other snakelike rods and turned back into a rod. ¹³But Pharaoh would not give in and he refused to let Israel go. He thought that Moses and Aaron’s magic was simply more powerful, but not a miracle from the Lord. So he dismissed them.

The First Plague

¹⁴The Lord said to Moses, “It’s just as I told you. Pharaoh is being stubborn and will not let Israel go. ¹⁵In the morning I want you to go down to the Nile River. Pharaoh will be going there to worship the river god as he usually does. Take your shepherd’s rod with you, the one that I turned into a snake, and wait there for him.

¹⁶“When he comes, say to him, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to tell you to let His people go so they can worship Him in the wilderness. You don’t seem to understand how important this is to us. ¹⁷If you want to know who the God of the Hebrews is, just watch. When I hit the waters of the Nile with this shepherd’s rod, He’ll turn the whole river into blood. ¹⁸The fish will die and your river god Hapi will begin to stink. The waters of the Nile will turn red and have the consistency of blood and your people will not be able to drink it.’ ¹⁹Then give Aaron your shepherd’s rod and have him stretch it out as a sign to include all streams, canals, ponds and reservoirs in the land, for they, too, will turn into blood. Wherever there is water, it will become the consistency of blood, even the water in stone jars and wooden buckets.”

²⁰Moses and Aaron went to meet Pharaoh by the Nile, and in the presence of the king and his advisers, Moses told Pharaoh what the Lord had said. Then Moses gave Aaron his rod. Aaron struck the surface of the river and the water became the consistency of blood. ²¹The fish in the Nile died and floated to the surface. The river smelled so bad that the people wouldn’t come near it, much less drink it. This happened throughout the land of Egypt. ²²The king ordered his servants to dig along the edge of the Nile until they found some clear water. When they did, he called for his magicians and asked them to use their magic to do the same thing. And they did. This made the king as determined as ever not to let the Hebrews go, and he refused to listen to

Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said he would.

²³So Pharaoh went back to his palace and dismissed it all from his mind as if it had never happened. ²⁴The Egyptians either had to dig along the Nile for fresh water, or dig wells. This was the only way they could get any water to drink. ²⁵The plague of the river lasted for a whole week.

The Second Plague

8 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go back to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go so they can worship me in the wilderness as I want them to. ²If you refuse to let them go, I will openly show that Heqa, your frog-headed goddess, is of your own making. I will fill your whole country with frogs. They’ll be everywhere. You won’t be able to walk without having to kick them out of the way. ³The Nile will be so full of frogs that they will leave the river and come into your palace, your bedroom and even into your bed. They’ll also invade the houses of your officials and your people and will get into their kitchens, their brick ovens and all over their baking pans. ⁴They’ll jump on you, your officials and your people, whether you’re sitting up or lying down.’”

⁵So Moses and Aaron went to see Pharaoh and told him what the Lord had said. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, “Give Aaron your shepherd’s rod and tell him to stretch it out as a sign of my power over streams, canals and ponds, and I will make frogs come out of them all over Egypt.” ⁶Aaron did so and frogs came up from the streams, canals and ponds and covered the land of Egypt. ⁷Then Pharaoh’s magicians used their magic and brought frogs out of the water. The king dismissed Moses and Aaron and asked his magicians to rid the land of the frogs, but that they couldn’t do.

⁸So Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron back to the palace and said, “Pray to the God of the Hebrews to take away these

frogs from me and my people. I can’t stand it anymore. As soon as they’re gone, I’ll let your people go to offer their sacrifices to the Lord.” ⁹Moses said, “You set the time for me to pray for you, your officials and your people that your houses and your lands be rid of the frogs, except for those in the Nile River.” ¹⁰Pharaoh said, “At this time tomorrow.” Moses replied, “It will be just as you say. Tomorrow at this time the frogs will be gone. Then, hopefully, you’ll realize that there is no other god like our God. ¹¹The frogs will leave your house and the houses of your officials and your servants, but there will still be frogs in the Nile River.”

¹²Then Moses and Aaron left the presence of the king, and Moses prayed to the Lord and asked Him to remove the frogs. ¹³The Lord did what Moses asked and the next day, at the exact time that Pharaoh wanted the frogs to be gone, they all died. They died wherever they were—in the houses, in the courtyards and in the fields. ¹⁴The people piled them into great heaps, and the whole country stank because of the dead frogs. ¹⁵When Pharaoh saw that the frogs were gone, he was relieved, but he refused to keep the promise he had made to Moses to let the people go, just as the Lord had said he would.

The Third Plague

¹⁶Again the Lord spoke to Moses, “Take Aaron and go back to Pharaoh. When you get there, give Aaron your rod and tell him to stretch it out as a sign of my power. Then he should strike the ground, and all over the country particles of dust will become tiny, stinging gnats.” ¹⁷Moses and Aaron went back to Pharaoh and when Aaron stretched out the shepherd’s rod and struck the ground, dust particles all over Egypt turned into tiny, stinging gnats. ¹⁸Pharaoh called the magicians and they used their magic and tried to turn dust into gnats, but they couldn’t. The tiny gnats were everywhere. ¹⁹Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger

of God!" But when the gnats were gone, the king became stubborn and refused to listen, just as the Lord had said. He wouldn't even listen to his officials.

The Fourth Plague

²⁰The next morning the Lord said to Moses, "Get up and go down to the Nile and confront the king as he goes to worship the river. Say to him, 'The Lord God of the Hebrews says: Let my people go so they can go into the wilderness and worship me.' ²¹If you don't, I'll send millions of flies into your land. They will be on you, on your officials and on your people. Your houses will be full of them and the ground will be covered with them. ²²But I will not bring the flies into the land of Goshen where my people are, so you will know that I am the Lord of the earth. ²³From now on I will make a difference between your people and my people. This will go into effect tomorrow.'

²⁴So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and told him everything the Lord had said. The next day great swarms of flies appeared in the land and swarmed into the king's palace and into the houses of his officials. The whole country was contaminated with flies, except the region of Goshen.

²⁵Then the king called for Moses and Aaron and said, "Go ahead, offer sacrifices to your God, but it must be done here in Egypt, not out there in the wilderness." ²⁶Moses answered, "That will never work, because the animals we need to offer to our God are sacred to Egyptians and they'll be offended. When they see us sacrificing these animals, they'll stone us. ²⁷We need to obey the Lord and take a three-day walk into the wilderness to offer our sacrifices there just as He commanded us to do."

²⁸Pharaoh said, "All right! I'll let you go into the wilderness to offer your sacrifices, but don't go very far. And pray for me!" ²⁹Moses agreed, "As soon as I leave, I will pray to the Lord and tomorrow at this time the flies will leave the palace,

the houses of your officials and the homes of your people. But the king must not change his mind again and refuse to let our people go to offer their sacrifices to the Lord." ³⁰Then Moses left the palace and prayed to the Lord to remove the flies out of the land. ³¹The Lord did what Moses asked and took away the flies from the king, his officials and his people. Not one was left in all the land of Egypt. ³²But the king changed his mind and refused to let the people go.

The Fifth Plague

9 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'The Lord God of the Hebrews says: Let my people go so they can worship me. ²If you refuse again and continue to hold them here, ³I will send a terrible plague on the animals in the open field, on your horses, donkeys, cattle, camels, sheep and goats. ⁴But I will not let the plague touch the animals of the Hebrews. I will make a difference between what belongs to them and what belongs to the Egyptians. Not one animal belonging to the Hebrews will die. ⁵I, the God of heaven and earth, have set tomorrow as the time when I will do this.'

⁶The next day the Lord did what He had said, and all the animals in the fields belonging to the Egyptians died, but not one animal belonging to the Hebrews died. ⁷Pharaoh sent men to investigate the situation and they found that none of the animals belonging to the Hebrews had died. But the king was as stubborn as ever and would not let the people go.

The Sixth Plague

⁸Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take a handful of soot from a furnace and take your brother Aaron with you and go to see Pharaoh. Then throw the soot into the air, ⁹and it will turn into fine dust and spread throughout the land. Wherever it goes, festering sores will break out on men and animals alike."

¹⁰Moses went to a furnace, took a handful of soot and together with Aaron went

to see Pharaoh. He threw the handful of soot into the air and it turned into fine dust and spread throughout the land. Wherever it went, large sores broke out on the bodies of men and animals, just as the Lord had said. ¹¹Even Pharaoh's magicians broke out in festering sores, so much so that they couldn't come to the palace to confront Moses and Aaron. ¹²But Pharaoh was still stubborn and became more determined than ever not to give in to the God of the Hebrews, just as the Lord had said. Pharaoh would neither listen to Moses and Aaron nor would he let the people go.

The Seventh Plague

¹³The Lord spoke to Moses again, "Early tomorrow morning take Aaron and go to Pharaoh and say, 'This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go so that they can worship me. ¹⁴From now on I will increase the force of the plagues against you, your officials and your people so you will know that I am the Lord and will let my people go. ¹⁵Any time before this I could have raised my hand against you and struck you and your people with a plague that would have killed all of you. ¹⁶But I have not done so because I want all the earth to know who I am. ¹⁷In spite of this, you have set your mind against me and become more stubborn than ever. You have refused to let my people go. ¹⁸I have no choice but to use still harsher measures until you let my people go. So this time tomorrow I will bring something very unusual on Egypt. I will send a violent hailstorm upon your land such as Egypt has never seen. ¹⁹Ask your people to come inside and bring in all their farm animals and pets that are left and anything else they want to save. The hail will be so severe that it will kill any man or animal caught outdoors.'"

²⁰By now some of the king's officials had begun to fear the God of the Hebrews and to believe what Moses said. They quickly sent word to their servants

to get all the livestock under cover and come inside because a terrible storm was on its way. ²¹But others ignored the warning and didn't tell their servants to bring in the farm animals for protection. ²²The next morning the Lord said to Moses, "Point your shepherd's rod toward the sky and I will send a hail-storm over all the land of Egypt. The hail will be so severe that it will destroy all the men and animals that are outside and anything else that's been left unprotected." ²³Moses did as the Lord had said, pointed his rod toward the sky and the Lord sent a violent storm over the land of Egypt with huge hailstones, earth-shaking thunder and lightning that rolled in balls of fire along the ground. ²⁴The hail fell everywhere and the thunder and lightning were more severe than anything that had occurred in all the history of Egypt. ²⁵All over Egypt the hail killed all the men and animals that stayed in the field, destroyed plants and crops and stripped the leaves off trees. ²⁶The only place in Egypt where the hail did not fall was in the land of Goshen where the Hebrews lived.

²⁷As soon as there was a lull in the storm, while more clouds were gathering on the horizon, the king sent for Moses and Aaron and said, "I have sinned against the Lord your God. Your God is right and I and my people are wrong. ²⁸Do pray to your God for us! We have had enough thunder and hail. I'll let your people go to worship your God and will not hold you back any longer." ²⁹Moses replied, "As soon as we reach the outskirts of the city, I will lift up my hands to the Lord in prayer and the thunder will stop; the dark storm clouds will go away, and there will be no more hail. Then you'll know that both the earth and the sky belong to the Lord. ³⁰But I know that you and your officials will still not accept the God of the Hebrews for who He is." ³¹The flax and barley harvests all over the country were ruined, because the barley had been ready to harvest and the

flax had already bloomed when the hail-storm hit. ³²But the wheat and the spelt were not destroyed, for they were late in coming up.

³³So Moses and Aaron left the presence of the king and as soon as they reached the outskirts of the city, Moses spread out his hands to God in prayer, and the thunder and the rain stopped, and the storm clouds blew away. ³⁴When Pharaoh realized that the rain and thunder had stopped and there would be no more hail, he and some of his top officials became as stubborn as ever. ³⁵So the king hardened his heart and refused to let the people go just as the Lord had predicted.

The Eighth Plague

10 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to see Pharaoh again. I know that he and some of his top officials have hardened their hearts against me. If they continue to be stubborn, I will show them still more of my power. ²The next three plagues will not only impress Pharaoh and his servants, but will remain in the memory of the children of Israel forever. They will never forget what I had to do to get Pharaoh to let my people go. They will all know that I am the Lord."

³So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh again and said to him, "This is what the Lord says. 'How much longer will you refuse to listen to me? Let my people go so they can worship me as they should! ⁴If you refuse to let them go, I will bring locusts into your country first thing tomorrow morning. ⁵They will cover the ground so that no one can see it. They will eat everything that was left by the hail, including any leaves left on the trees. ⁶They will come into your house, the houses of your officials and the houses of all the people in this part of Egypt. It will be a plague of locusts greater than anything your fathers have ever seen.'" Then Moses and Aaron turned and left the palace.

⁷Some of the king's officials said to

Pharaoh, "How much longer will you let this man Moses give us trouble? At least let the Israelite men go to worship their God. Don't you realize that the country's economy is already in shambles? Why make things worse?" ⁸So the king called Moses and Aaron back to the palace and said to them, "I'll let you go and worship your God, but tell me again who will be going." ⁹Moses said, "All of us will go. We will go with our very young and our very old. Our wives and our sons and daughters will go, as well as our flocks and herds, because the Lord has told us that this is the way we should come and worship Him." ¹⁰Pharaoh said, "I swear by the Lord your God, that I will never let you go with your women and children! From what you just said, it's clear to me that you're planning to leave the country for good. And if that's the case, you're asking for trouble. ¹¹So my answer is no! I will only let the men go. You've been asking for permission to go to worship your God and this is what I'm giving you." With this, he ordered Moses and Aaron to leave.

¹²Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your shepherd's rod as a sign of my power over the land of Egypt to bring on the locusts. They will swarm over the land and devour everything growing in the fields that was left by the hail." ¹³Moses stretched out his rod and the Lord caused an east wind to blow across the land all that day and all that night. By morning it had brought the locusts. ¹⁴They came in huge swarms and settled over all of Egypt, except Goshen. It was the largest swarm of locusts that had ever been seen or would ever be seen again. ¹⁵There were so many of them that they covered the ground. They began to eat everything that the hail had left, everything growing in the fields and anything green left on the trees.

¹⁶Then Pharaoh quickly called for Moses and Aaron and said, "I have sinned against the Lord your God and against your people. ¹⁷Forgive me and ask the Lord your God to take away this plague

from me and my people.”¹⁸ So Moses left Pharaoh and prayed for him and for the people of Egypt. ¹⁹The Lord heard Moses’ prayer and changed the east wind into a strong west wind that picked up the locusts and blew them across the land and into the Red Sea. Not one locust was left in all of Egypt. ²⁰But when the locusts were gone, Pharaoh changed his mind again and would not let Israel go.

The Ninth Plague

²¹Then the Lord said to Moses, “Point your shepherd’s rod toward the sky as a sign of my power and I will send darkness over all the land of Egypt. It will be so dark that people will feel it.” ²²Moses pointed his shepherd’s rod toward the sky and total darkness enveloped the land of Egypt for the next three days. ²³It was so dark that the Egyptians couldn’t see each other’s faces. For three days not one Egyptian left his house. But in the land of Goshen where the Israelites lived it was light. ²⁴Pharaoh called Moses to the palace and said to him, “Go! Get out of here and worship the Lord your God. Even take your women and children with you, but your sheep and goats and cattle must stay here. You can’t use them for worship.”

²⁵Moses answered, “You must let us have animals for sacrifices and offerings in order to worship the Lord. ²⁶We need to take our animals with us and not leave any of them behind. Besides, we don’t know which animals the Lord will tell us to use in worship until we get there; then He’ll tell us.”

²⁷When Pharaoh heard this he changed his mind again and would not let them go. ²⁸Then he said to Moses, “Get out of my sight! Don’t ever let me see you again! If you dare come into my presence, I’ll kill you!” ²⁹Moses said, “Just as you say. Unless the Lord tells me otherwise, you’ll never see my face again.” Then he turned and left the palace.

Death of the Firstborn

11 The Lord said to Moses, “I’m going to bring one more plague on the king of Egypt and his people. After that, he will let you go and take everything with you that you have. He’ll be so glad to get rid of you that he’ll drive you out of the country. ²The women of Israel shall go to their Egyptian mistresses and ask for their back pay in clothing and jewelry. The men shall go and ask their Egyptian masters to give them their back pay in silver and gold. Then they should go to their neighbors and ask them for their help.” ³By now the Egyptians had great respect for the Israelites and their God and they did everything they could for them. Even Pharaoh and his officials had learned to respect Moses and they considered him to be a very powerful man.

⁴Then God said to Moses, “Go back to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘The Lord says: About midnight tonight, I will go through the land of Egypt, ⁵and every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the young slave woman who grinds at the mill, as well as the firstborn of all the cattle. ⁶There will be loud crying and mourning in all of Egypt such as there never has been before and never will be again. ⁷But nothing will happen to anyone in Israel; not even a dog will growl at them or at their animals. Then you’ll know that the Lord makes a distinction between those who worship other gods and those who worship me.’” ⁸So Moses went to see Pharaoh in spite of the king’s threat to kill him and told him everything the Lord had said. Then he added, “When this happens, your officials will come and bow to me and beg me to take my people out of Egypt. After that we will leave with our families and with everything we have.”

Moses was very angry over Pharaoh’s stubbornness and turned and left him. ⁹Before Moses had gone to see Pharaoh this time, the Lord had said to him, “Don’t be afraid. I will not let the king

harm you. He will let you in and will even let you speak to him, but he will not listen to you. He will not let my people go until after this plague that I will bring on him and on all the people of Egypt.”

¹⁰Before each plague Moses and Aaron had told Pharaoh what would happen, but each time the king had hardened his heart. It wasn't until the death of the firstborn that Pharaoh gave in and let the people go.

The Passover

12 The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron before the children of Israel left Egypt, saying, ²“This month is to be the first month of your religious year. ³On the tenth day of this month, each man is to choose a lamb as a sacrifice for himself and his family and for the sacrificial meal that is to be eaten on the fourteenth. ⁴If his family is too small to eat the lamb, then let a couple of small families get together for the sacrificial meal. They should take into account the number of people in each family and the amount of lamb's meat each person usually eats. ⁵They can choose a young goat if they don't have a lamb, but in either case it must be a one-year old male without defects. ⁶Take special care of the animal for a minimum of four days before it's killed. Then just before sundown on the fourteenth of the month, the children of Israel shall kill the animals that they selected and roast them.

⁷“The people are to take the blood of the lamb or the young goat and put some of it on the sides and tops of the door frames of the houses where they'll be eating. ⁸That night they are to roast the meat over an open fire and eat it together with bitter tasting herbs and bread baked without yeast. ⁹They are not to eat any of the meat raw or boiled, but roasted. They are not to cut off part of the meat and roast it alone, but the whole animal is to be roasted with its head, its legs and its inner parts. ¹⁰The people can eat as much as they want, but nothing should

be left over until the next morning. If any meat is left, it must be burned that same night. ¹¹They are to eat quickly, as if they were in a hurry to go somewhere. They should also be dressed for travel, with their long cloaks tucked up in their belts, sandals on their feet and walking sticks in their hands. ¹²That night I will go through the land and every firstborn male of both men and animals will die. This plague will be a judgment on Egypt and on the gods they worship and everyone will know that I am the Lord. ¹³The blood on the doorposts will mark the houses of my people. When I see the blood, I will pass over that house and no harm will come to anyone who's inside. That same night I will go through the land of Egypt and strike their firstborn and they will die.

¹⁴“So the fourteenth is to be kept as a day of remembrance for you, and it is to be kept throughout your generations to remind you and your children what the Lord has done for you. ¹⁵Beginning the next day, the fifteenth, no one is to eat bread made with yeast for a whole week. The people are to eat only unleavened bread. On the first of these seven days, you are to get rid of all yeast in your house, and if anyone eats bread made with yeast during these seven days, he will be cut off from Israel because of his disobedience. ¹⁶The first and the last days of that week are to be special days of rest and worship. No work is to be done on those days except what is needed to sustain life. ¹⁷This week-long festival shall be kept every year at this exact time in memory of the day I brought you out of Egypt. It is to be kept throughout your generations. ¹⁸Beginning at sundown on the fourteenth—the day I will pass over the houses of the children of Israel—until sundown on the twenty-first day of the same month, you are not to eat any bread made with yeast. ¹⁹For seven days no yeast is to be found in any of your houses. If anyone eats bread made with yeast, whether he is an Israelite or an alien who has come to live

with you, he will be cut off from Israel.
²⁰You are to eat only bread that has been made without yeast, whether you live in Israel or in some other country."

²¹When the day came, Moses called together the leaders of Israel and said, "Go and get a lamb, or if you have trouble finding one, get a young goat; slaughter it and get your family ready to keep our first religious festival to be known as the Passover. ²²Take a small branch of hyssop, dip it in the bowl that holds the animal's blood, then put some of it on the doorposts of your house. Make sure that every member of your family is inside and don't let anyone leave the house until morning. ²³At midnight the Lord will go through the land to bring the last plague on the Egyptians, and when He sees the blood on your doorposts, He will pass over your house and will not let death come in and touch any of your family. ²⁴The rituals of this new festival will be a permanent law for you and your children for generations to come. ²⁵Even after you're in the land the Lord promised to give you, you are to keep the Passover and carry out these rituals. ²⁶When your children ask, 'What does all this mean?' ²⁷you are to say to them, 'These rituals are part of the Passover. They help us remember the time when the Lord passed over our houses when we were in Egypt and saved our firstborn sons. That night the Lord brought the plague of death on the Egyptians to set us free.'" When Moses finished speaking, the leaders and the people bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord.

²⁸Then they went home and did exactly what the Lord had told them to do.

The Tenth Plague

²⁹At midnight the Lord went through the land of Egypt and brought the plague on all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoners in prison and the firstborn male of all the animals.

³⁰That night, the king, his officials and the people of Egypt were awakened from sleep and found their firstborn sons dead. There was loud crying and mourning throughout the land because there was a death in every family.

The Exodus

³¹It was still dark when Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron to the palace and said to them, "Get out! You and your Israelites! Leave my people and go to worship the Lord, as you said. ³²Take your wives and children, your sheep and goats and cattle with you and be gone! But pray for me."

³³The Egyptians urged the Israelites to hurry and leave, because they were afraid that something like this could happen to others in their families. They said, "We'll all be dead if you don't leave, so please go!" ³⁴The children of Israel had done what Moses had asked them to do. They had their unleavened dough in wooden kneading bowls, all wrapped up, ready for the next day's use. ³⁵They also had gone to the Egyptians asking for their back pay in silver or gold and needed articles of clothing. ³⁶The Lord gave His people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians and the children of Israel received more than they had asked for. So the Israelites took with them much of the wealth of Egypt.

³⁷They set out on foot and went south from Rameses, then southeast to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, not counting women and children. ³⁸There were also Hebrews who had intermarried with Egyptians, plus a vast number of sheep, goats and cattle. ³⁹The dough they had made without yeast while in Egypt, they now baked at Succoth. They hadn't had time to bake it because they had left in such a hurry.

⁴⁰Altogether, the children of Israel lived as strangers in Canaan and slaves in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years. ⁴¹At the end of the four hundred

and thirty years—the length of time Abraham and his descendants were strangers and slaves—the children of Israel became a free people. ⁴²That same night the Lord passed over the houses of the Israelites and brought them out of Egypt. That's why the Passover has been solemnly observed by the Hebrew people from then on.

The Passover Meal

⁴³The Lord also said to Moses and Aaron, "An alien who does not want to become an Israelite is not allowed to eat the Passover meal. ⁴⁴But if an alien or the bond-servant who belongs to you agrees to be circumcised, he is to eat the Passover meal with you. ⁴⁵No temporary resident or hired worker is allowed to eat the meal. ⁴⁶The meal must be eaten in the house in which it was prepared. None of the animal's bones are to be broken while cutting up the meat, and no one is to eat the meal outside. ⁴⁷All the tribes of Israel are to celebrate the Passover and never forget the day of their deliverance. ⁴⁸The aliens living among you who want to celebrate the Passover with you should make sure that all the males in their households are circumcised before they take part. If they do this, they are to be treated just like full-blooded Israelites and invited to participate in all the festivities. No male who refuses to be circumcised has a right to participate. ⁴⁹The same rule applies to Israelites and to the aliens who live among you."

⁵⁰All Israelites and those who chose to live among them obeyed and did what the Lord through Moses and Aaron told them to do. ⁵¹So on that very day the Lord brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. They left by tribes named after the twelve sons of Jacob.

The Firstborn Dedicated

13 The Lord said to Moses, ²"I want you to dedicate to me every firstborn male who opens the womb. Every

firstborn male from humans and animals belongs to me."

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

³Then Moses spoke to the people, "Remember this day. I want you to remember it as the day you came out of Egypt, the day the Lord freed you from slavery. The Lord brought you out with a show of power. You are not to eat anything made with yeast for a whole week. ⁴This is the first month of our religious year. It's called Abib (later named Nisan). ⁵The Lord promised to give you the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites and the Jebusites for an inheritance. When He brings you into that rich and fertile land, you are to continue to keep the Passover during the first month of every year. ⁶For the next seven days you are not to eat anything made with yeast, and on the last day of this special week you are to hold a festival to the Lord. ⁷For seven days no yeast is to be found among you; all yeast must be put away. And no one is to eat bread made with yeast. ⁸At the beginning of this special week, tell your sons and daughters why you're doing all this. Tell them what the Lord did for you when you were in Egypt and how with His mighty hand He set you free. ⁹This festival will help you remember what happened. It'll be like something tied to your finger, to your hand or even to your forehead. It will remind you that you should look to the word of the Lord for direction and guidance, because He is the One who loved you and brought you out of the land of Egypt with such mighty power. ¹⁰So keep the Passover at the same time each year.

The Firstborn Male

¹¹"After the Lord brings you into the land of Canaan, which He promised your forefathers He would do, ¹²you are to set apart every firstborn male of humans and animals for the Lord. These are the animals that are to be set aside for sacri-

fice. All the firstborn males who open the womb, whether from man or animal, belong to the Lord. ¹³Every firstborn male from animals that are unclean, such as donkeys, can be saved by offering a lamb in its place. If you don't want the donkey, you are to quickly break its neck and bury it. No unclean animal is a fit sacrifice. Also, your firstborn males may be bought back from me for five pieces of silver. ¹⁴When your sons ask you, 'What does all this mean?' tell them, 'The Lord delivered us from slavery and brought us out of Egypt by His mighty acts of power. ¹⁵Pharaoh was stubborn and would not let us go. So the Lord killed every firstborn male from humans and animals in the whole land of Egypt. But not one firstborn male was touched among our people. That's when the king finally let us go. This is why all firstborn male animals who open the womb are set aside for sacrifice, and all firstborn sons who open the womb belong to the Lord and are to be bought back with money. ¹⁶So this festival is a reminder, like something tied to our fingers, to our hands or to our foreheads, that the Lord brought us out of Egypt by His great power.'

The Wilderness

¹⁷After the king of Egypt let the children of Israel go, the Lord did not lead them along the road called The Way Through the Land of the Philistines, even though that was the shortest route. The Lord said to Moses, "I don't want the people to change their minds when they see war and decide to go back to Egypt." ¹⁸So the Lord led the children of Israel eastward along the desert road called The Way of the Wilderness Toward the Red Sea. They left Egypt as an organized people, moving along in columns according to their tribes. ¹⁹Moses also took the bones of Joseph with him just as Joseph had made his brothers promise. He had said to them, "Someday God will take you back home, and when He does, you must carry my bones with you because I

do not want to remain buried in Egypt. I was sold to Egypt as a slave and I don't want my body to stay here." ²⁰So the Israelites left Succoth and turned north and then east until they got to Etham on the edge of the wilderness and set up camp there. ²¹During the day the Lord went ahead of them hidden in a pillar of cloud to show them the way and to shade them from the hot desert sun. At night He kept them warm by turning the same cloud into a pillar of fire to give them light. ²²So the pillar of cloud was in front of them by day and it became a pillar of fire by night. And the Lord was always with them.

Crossing the Red Sea

14 Then the Lord said to Moses, ²"Tell the children of Israel to head north, then turn back and head south. They shall set up camp near Pi Hahiroth between Migdol and the Red Sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. ³Pharaoh will think your divine help has run out and that you're hopelessly lost, following a dead-end trail, hemmed in by the desert. ⁴He'll become stubborn again and will chase after you to bring you back to Egypt. I'll let him come with horses and chariots, but that will only bring me greater honor when they realize that I am the Lord." So the children of Israel kept going and did as they were told.

⁵When Pharaoh heard that the Israelites had no intention of coming back, he and his officials decided to go after them. They said, "We let these Hebrews go, but if we don't bring them back, our economy will be totally ruined. Besides, we don't want other countries to think that we gave in to the Hebrews." ⁶So Pharaoh called up his troops, ordered his war chariots to be brought out and chased after the Hebrews, determined to bring them back. ⁷He took with him all the chariots of Egypt, including six hundred of the finest under the command of his top officers. ⁸The Lord did not interfere with Pharaoh's plan or cor-

rect his stubbornness, but let him pursue the children of Israel who were rejoicing in their new freedom and in the personal presence of their God. ⁹Pharaoh took all his horses and chariots and pursued the Israelites and caught up with them at the Pi Hahiroth Canal, a slight distance from the Red Sea, near the border town of Baal Zephon where they were camped.

¹⁰When the Israelites looked up and saw the king and his chariots coming after them, they were terrified and cried to the Lord for help. ¹¹They said to Moses, "Weren't there enough grave sites available in Egypt that you had to bring us out here to die? Look at what you've done! You brought us out of Egypt and then led us up here to the edge of the Red Sea! ¹²Didn't we tell you before we left Egypt that the king would come after us? It would have been much better to stay in Egypt as slaves and be alive than to be slaughtered out here in the wilderness!"

¹³Moses assured the people by saying, "Don't be afraid! Stand your ground, and you'll see what our God will do to save you. The Lord will deliver you from the hands of Pharaoh and you will never see him or his men again. ¹⁴The Lord will fight for you. All you have to do is to stand still and watch." ¹⁵Then Moses cried to the Lord for help, and the Lord answered, "Why are you crying to me for help? This is a time for action. Tell the people to move forward. ¹⁶When you get to the Red Sea, lift up your shepherd's rod and point it out over the waters, and they'll divide so the children of Israel can walk across on dry ground. ¹⁷Pharaoh is so determined to take all of you back to Egypt that he is personally leading his troops and coming after you. When he comes, I will bring honor to my name by defeating him and his entire army of horsemen and chariots. ¹⁸All of Egypt will know that I am the God of heaven and earth when they hear the news that their army has been destroyed without a fight."

¹⁹Then the Angel of God, who had been leading the children of Israel, moved to the rear, settling between them and the Egyptian army. ²⁰The cloud in which the Angel of the Lord was enveloped became a wall of darkness to the Egyptians, but a wall of light to the children of Israel. All through the night it flooded the camp of the Hebrews with light. So the Egyptian army and the Israelites were separated by the cloud.

²¹The children of Israel broke camp and made their way to the Red Sea. When they got there, Moses stretched out his rod over the waters as the Lord had told him, and the Lord sent a strong east wind, which during the night drove back the waters until the waters were divided and the ground was dry. ²²With light from the pillar of fire, the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea on dry ground. There was a wall of water on both sides of them. ²³By morning all the Israelites had crossed. Then the cloud lifted, moved across the Red Sea and again settled in front of the children of Israel. Once the Egyptian army could see where the Israelites were, they rushed after them. All of Pharaoh's troops with their horses and chariots headed toward the children of Israel on the other side of the Red Sea. ²⁴Just before dawn, the Lord looked down on the army from the pillar of cloud. Suddenly the cloud changed into a pillar of fire, lightning flashed, thunder rumbled, and the earth shook. The Egyptian army, already in the bed of the Red Sea, was thrown into a panic. ²⁵The Lord allowed the water to seep up through the ground again, and in a matter of minutes the horses and chariots of the Egyptians were bogged down in mud. Some of them tried to turn around and go back. They said, "Let's get out of here! The God of the Hebrews has turned against us again!"

²⁶The Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your rod over the waters; the wind will stop and the waters will return and engulf the entire Egyptian army, together

with its horses and chariots.”²⁷ Moses stretched out his rod over the waters; the wind stopped, and the waters came rushing together. The Egyptians tried to escape, but the swirling water pulled them under and swept them away.²⁸ The water completely covered them and all their horses and chariots. The entire Egyptian army was destroyed. Not a man was left, not even Pharaoh.²⁹ But the children of Israel were safe on the other side. They had crossed the Red Sea on firm dry ground with walls of water on either side of them.

³⁰That day the Lord saved His people from the hands of the Egyptians. As the Israelites stood there, they saw the dead bodies of the Egyptian troops being washed up on shore.³¹ When the children of Israel saw the great power of the Lord that He had used against the Egyptians, they stood in awe of their God and believed in Him and in Moses, His servant.

The Song of Moses

15 Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song: “I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously. The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea.² The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. He is my God and I will praise Him. He is my father’s God and I will exalt Him.

³The Lord is a Man of War. The Lord God is His name. ⁴He brought Pharaoh and his chariots into the sea. He drowned the armies of Egypt in the Red Sea. ⁵The waters covered their chariots and they sank to the bottom like rocks.

⁶Your right arm, O Lord, was glorious in power. Your right hand broke the enemy to pieces. ⁷In the greatness of your majesty, you threw down those who opposed you. Your righteous indignation consumed them as fire consumes stubble. ⁸You blew on the sea and the waters piled up. They stood up like a wall and the floor of the sea became firm and dry.

⁹The enemy said, ‘I will pursue them and catch them. I will draw the sword and force them to return. I will recover the wealth I gave them and take it all back.’¹⁰ But one word from you, O Lord, and the wind stopped and the sea closed over them. Like rocks they disappeared in the mighty waves.

¹¹Lord, who is like you? Who among Egypt’s gods is like you in power and majesty, in holiness and glory? Who can work wonders like you and perform such mighty acts? ¹²You stretched out your right arm and the earth swallowed our enemies. ¹³You kept your promise. You rescued the people you promised to redeem. In your strength you will guide them to the Promised Land.

¹⁴The people of Canaan will hear and tremble. The Philistines will be gripped with fear, and anguish will flood their hearts. ¹⁵The chiefs of Edom will be terrified. Moab’s mighty men will tremble. The rulers of Canaan will lose courage. ¹⁶Terror and dread will fall on them all. They will know how strong you are, O Lord. They will stand as still as a rock until your people pass by.

¹⁷You will bring your people into Canaan and plant them in that new land. You will bring them to the mountain of your inheritance, to the country you have chosen for yourself, the place where your Temple will be built. ¹⁸There the Lord will reign for ever and ever.”

¹⁹This was the Song of Deliverance that the men of Israel sang after they had crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, and the Lord had brought the waters together and destroyed their enemies.

The Song of Miriam

²⁰Miriam, a prophetess, the sister of Moses and Aaron, took a tambourine and danced for joy over what the Lord had done. The rest of the women joined her in playing their tambourines and joyously dancing before the Lord. ²¹Miriam led them to sing in response to the men: “Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed

gloriously. The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea.”

Waters Made Sweet

²²From the Red Sea Moses led the children of Israel into the Wilderness of Shur. They walked part of one day and all the next without finding water. ²³The third day they came to an oasis called Marah and found water. They ran to drink from the little lake that was fed by underground springs, but the water was so bitter they couldn't drink it. ²⁴The people became angry and said to Moses, “What are we going to drink? Or are we supposed to die of thirst?” ²⁵Then Moses prayed and asked the Lord what to do. The Lord showed him a small tree and told him to cut it down and throw it into the water. When he did, the water became sweet and the children of Israel had plenty to drink and enough to water their flocks and herds. It was here that the Lord began to give instructions to the children of Israel that would test their faith and obedience.

²⁶The Lord said to Moses, “If you will listen to me and do what is right, if you will keep my commandments and laws, I will not let any of you come down with the diseases of the Egyptians. I will heal you, for I am the Lord.” ²⁷From Marah the children of Israel went on to the Oasis of Elim, a place with twelve springs and seventy palms, and there they set up their next camp.

The Manna

16 After resting at Elim, the children of Israel traveled south, camping along the way. On the fifteenth day of the second month after leaving Egypt, they came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is about halfway between Elim and Sinai. ²Then the people again complained to Moses and Aaron for bringing them out of Egypt. They had already forgotten all the things the Lord had done for them just a few weeks before, thinking only of their present inconveniences. ³They said

to Moses, “We're sorry we listened to you and followed you out here to this wilderness! It would have been better to die by the hand of the Lord in Egypt than to die by starvation out here in this God-forsaken place. In Egypt we at least had plenty of meat to eat and all the food we wanted. But you have brought us out here to starve to death.”

⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, “I'll rain bread from heaven for all the people. The children of Israel shall go out every morning beginning the first day of the week and gather just enough bread for the day. That way I'll test them to see if they're willing to listen and to do what I tell them. ⁵On the sixth day they should gather twice as much as on the other days so as to have enough for the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, the day I set aside for worship and rest.” ⁶So Moses and Aaron said to the children of Israel, “By early evening you will know that the Lord is the One who brought you out of Egypt and that He has not forsaken you. ⁷Tomorrow morning you will see what the Lord will do for you.. The complaints you have made are against Him, because He is the One who brought you out here. We are His servants and have simply done what He asked us to do.” ⁸Then Moses said, “The Lord will give you meat for supper and as much bread as you can eat for breakfast. He has heard your discontent and taken careful note of it. So you're not grumbling against us, but against Him.”

⁹Next he turned to Aaron and said, “Tell the people to get ready to come out of their tents to see the glory of the Lord, because He has not only heard their complaints but also our prayers.” ¹⁰As Aaron was speaking to the people, suddenly their attention was arrested by a dazzling light coming from the wilderness. They turned to look and saw the burning light of the presence of the Lord inside the cloud. ¹¹Then the Lord spoke from the cloud and said to Moses, ¹²“I have heard the grumbling of the people. Tell them

that early this evening before the sun sets, they will have meat to eat, and in the morning they will have all the bread they need. This will give them even more evidence that I am the Lord."

¹³Early that evening before the sun set, a huge flock of quail flew in. There were so many of them that they covered the camp. The next morning a heavy dew covered the ground. ¹⁴When the sun came up and the dew disappeared, there was something flake-like and round, about the size of a pea, all over the ground. It was yellowish-white and easy to handle. When the people tasted it, it tasted like bread made with honey. ¹⁵When they first saw it, they said, "What is it?" because they had never seen anything like this before.

Then Moses said, "This is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. You can eat it as it is, grind it, make it into flour, or cook it for cereal. ¹⁶The Lord said that each of you should gather as much as you need for the day, about two quarts per person. This should give you an idea how much to get for your family." ¹⁷The people did as they were told, some gathered more than two quarts and others less. ¹⁸When each one got home and used it, those who had gathered more did not have too much and those who had gathered less did not have too little. Each family had just what it needed for the day. ¹⁹Then Moses said, "Do not store any of it, for the Lord will give you more tomorrow morning." ²⁰Some of the people didn't believe Moses and tried to keep some of it for the next day, but by morning it was full of maggots and began to smell. Moses was really upset about that. ²¹Early every morning the people gathered as much as they needed and when the sun became stronger, what was left melted and disappeared.

²²On the sixth day the children of Israel gathered about four quarts per person, twice as much as on each of the other days. The leaders came and reported this to Moses. ²³But he said to

them, "This is what the Lord told me to tell the people to do. They should gather what they need for today as well as for tomorrow. They are to prepare for the Sabbath by boiling and baking what they need for two days, not just one. Whatever they gather for tomorrow will keep: it will not spoil." ²⁴That's exactly what happened. The people saved what they needed for the Sabbath and it did not get maggots in it or spoil. ²⁵Early Sabbath morning Moses spoke to the people, "Eat what you gathered yesterday. There will be no bread on the ground this morning, because today is the Sabbath of the Lord. ²⁶You can go out and gather bread every day for six days, but on the seventh day you won't find any food on the ground."

²⁷Some people didn't believe Moses and went out to gather food Sabbath morning but they found none. ²⁸Then the Lord said to Moses, "How much longer will the people refuse to listen to me and keep my commandments? ²⁹I gave them twice as much bread on the sixth day as on any of the other days so they could observe the Sabbath. On the seventh day they are to stay inside the camp because the Sabbath is holy." ³⁰So the people rested and worshiped the Lord on the seventh day as they were told to do.

³¹The children of Israel called this food "manna," because when they first saw it, they said, "What is it?" It was the size of a small pea, yellowish-white, and tasted like bread made with oil and flavored with honey. ³²Moses said to the leaders, "The Lord wants us to save some manna and keep it so our descendants can see the food the Lord gave us in the wilderness when He brought us out of Egypt." ³³Then he said to Aaron, "Take a container and put two quarts of manna in it and keep it so we can place it before the Lord as a memorial for our descendants when we build His Sanctuary."

³⁴So Aaron gathered two quarts of manna, put it in a container and kept it until it could be put inside the Ark of the

Covenant in the Lord's Sanctuary. ³⁵So the people ate manna for the next forty years until they reached the borders of Canaan. ³⁶The manna that Aaron saved was about two quarts, and it didn't get maggots or spoil.

Water From the Rock

17 From the Wilderness of Sin, the children of Israel moved on, camping at different places under the guidance of the Lord until they came to the Oasis of Rephidim. When they got there they found that the water had dried up, and the people had nothing to drink. ²Again they complained to Moses, "It's all your fault that we're out here! We need water and we need it now!" Moses said, "The Lord is the One who's leading you, and He is the One who's supplying your needs. You need to go to Him about it, not to me."

³But the people were thirsty and had no patience to wait and pray. They complained to Moses, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, anyway? Are you just going to stand there and let us and our children and our animals die of thirst? " ⁴Then Moses prayed to the Lord, "What should I do? These people are ready to stone me!" ⁵The Lord said to Moses, "Take some of the leaders of Israel with you and walk on ahead with the shepherd's rod in your hand, the same one you used in Egypt to strike the Nile. Tell the people to follow you. ⁶I'll stand in front of you on the rock in the mountains of Sinai, and when you get there, strike the rock one time, and fresh water will come out for the people."

So when Moses got there, he struck the rock once and water came gushing out in full view of the leaders of Israel. ⁷Moses called the place Massah Meribah, because the children of Israel were tested there and quarreled with the Lord. After all He had done for them, they still doubted His love and said to each other, "Do you think the Lord is still with us or has He abandoned us?"

Victory Over the Amalekites

⁸It was at Rephidim that the Amalekites, the descendants of Esau's grandson and one of the desert tribes that inhabited that region, attacked the Israelite stragglers who were weak and had fallen behind. ⁹When Moses found out about it, he said to Joshua, "Choose men to fight the Amalekites. Early tomorrow morning we'll attack and while you fight, I'll stand on top of that hill with the shepherd's rod of God in my hand and pray." ¹⁰Joshua did as Moses said and first thing in the morning, he and his men went out to fight the Amalekites. Then Moses took Aaron, his brother, and Hur, his brother-in-law who had married his sister Miriam, and went to the top of a nearby hill to pray. ¹¹As long as Moses held up his hands in prayer, the Israelites would win, but as soon as he lowered them and stopped praying, the Amalekites gained the upper hand. ¹²So when Moses got tired and lowered his arms again, Aaron and Hur got a rock for Moses to sit on and they held up his hands as he continued to pray. This way he was able to keep his arms up in prayer until sunset. ¹³By that time Joshua and his men had completely defeated the Amalekites.

¹⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write all this down on a scroll so the people won't forget it. Also tell Joshua that the day is coming when I will have to destroy all of the Amalekites because of their terrible wickedness. For the sake of all the other people in this part of the world, I will have to blot out the memory of them from under heaven." ¹⁵Moses celebrated this victory by building an altar to the Lord, calling it The Lord Is Our Banner. He said, ¹⁶"Our enemies have lifted up their hands against the Lord, and He has heard our prayers and has sworn to go to battle for us any time the Amalekites attack."

Jethro's Advice to Moses

18 When Jethro, Moses' father-in-law and priest of the Lord in Midian, heard everything that the Lord had done for Israel and how He had brought them

out of the land of Egypt, he decided to visit Moses. ²He brought his daughter Zipporah, Moses' wife, with him and their two sons whom Moses had sent back home for safety just before he reached Egypt. ³Moses had named his first son, Gershom, meaning Homeless, for he said to himself, "I'm an alien in a foreign land." ⁴He had named his second son, Eliezer, meaning God Is My Helper, for he had said to himself, "God saved me from being killed by the king of Egypt."

⁵So Jethro came with Zipporah and her two sons near Sinai where Moses and the children of Israel had set up camp. ⁶He sent word ahead saying to Moses, "I'm coming to visit you, and I'm bringing with me your wife Zipporah and your two sons." ⁷Moses went to meet his father-in-law and to welcome his wife and two sons. He bowed before Jethro, and then hugged and kissed him as well as his wife and two sons. They asked about each other's welfare, then Moses took them back to camp and to his tent.

⁸Moses told them everything that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians to free His people. He also told them about the hardships they had met along the way and how the Lord had taken care of them. ⁹When Jethro and the family heard what the Lord had done for His people and how He had delivered them, they rejoiced. ¹⁰Then Jethro said to Moses, "Praise the Lord, who brought you safely out of Egypt and rescued you from Pharaoh's army! Praise the Lord, who delivered His people from slavery and set them free. ¹¹This shows that the Lord is greater than all other gods. The Egyptians had boasted of the power of their gods and treated the God of heaven with contempt." ¹²Then Jethro took an animal for a burnt offering and other sacrifices and offered them to the Lord in thanksgiving for what He had done for Israel. He invited Moses, Aaron and all the elders of Israel to come and join him for the sacred meal. So they sat down and ate together as an act of worship and praise to the Lord.

¹³The next day Moses took his seat as judge to settle various disputes among the people, and he was kept busy from morning until night. ¹⁴When Jethro saw all that Moses was doing he said to him, "You're going to kill yourself. You can't possibly judge all these cases and keep it up. Look at all the people standing in line just to see you!" ¹⁵Moses said to Jethro, "The people come to me to learn what to do and to know God's will for them. ¹⁶Whenever they disagree on something, they come to me and I decide which one is right and which one is wrong and tell them what God's law says about it."

¹⁷Jethro said, "What you're doing for the people is not wrong, but what you're doing to yourself isn't right. ¹⁸You're going to wear yourself out and discourage people from coming to see you. They're not going to keep standing in long lines for days at a time. ¹⁹Listen to me, I want to give you some advice. God will still bless you and help you. It's good that you're helping the people and bringing their differences before the Lord. That's what you should be doing. ²⁰You need to teach them what God says and explain to them how to live and what to do. ²¹But you can't go on like this. To preserve your strength, pick out some God-fearing men to help you, the kind who can be trusted and who won't be bribed. Then divide your leadership responsibilities among them. Put some in charge of thousands, others in charge of hundreds and still others in charge of fifties and tens. ²²Let them serve as judges to handle the more common problems and settle the less difficult cases among the people. The harder cases they can leave for you to handle. This will make it easier for you. ²³You won't wear yourself out and you'll be able to carry the strain of leadership much better. And the people will go home satisfied because they didn't have to stand in line all day long just to see you."

²⁴Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. ²⁵He chose

capable men from each of the tribes of Israel and made them leaders and judges of the people. He put some in charge of thousands, others in charge of hundreds and still others in charge of fifties and tens. ²⁶These men took the less difficult cases and left the harder ones for Moses. ²⁷Then Moses said good-bye to his father-in-law and Jethro returned to Midian.

Israel at Sinai

19 After leaving Egypt, the children of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai on the first day of the third month of their religious year. ²The people had left Rephidim and moved on to the foot of Mount Sinai where they set up a more permanent camp. ³Then the Lord called Moses to come up the mountain to meet with Him. When Moses got there the Lord said to him, "This is what I want you to tell the children of Israel, the descendants of Jacob: ⁴You saw what I, the Lord, did to the Egyptians and how gently I carried you along, as gently as a mother eagle carries her young on her wings, and I brought you all the way here to meet with me. ⁵If you will obey me and keep my commandments, then out of all the nations on earth, you will continue to be my treasured possession. The whole world is mine, but you will be a special people to carry out my mission. ⁶You will be for me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation committed to me alone."

⁷So Moses went back down, called the leaders of the people together and told them everything the Lord had said and what He expected them to do. ⁸The elders responded enthusiastically, "We will do what the Lord says and gladly accept Him as our King." Moses went back up the mountain and took their answer to the Lord. ⁹God said to Moses, "I will come near to you in a dense cloud and the people will hear me speak to you and will accept you as my spokesman." Then Moses again told the Lord what the leaders of Israel and the people had said, that

they would obey and accept the Lord as their only King.

¹⁰The Lord said, "Go back down and tell the people to spend the rest of today and tomorrow purifying themselves and getting ready for worship. ¹¹They should wash their clothes and get ready for me to speak to them. The day after tomorrow I will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of the people and they will unmistakably sense my presence. ¹²I want you to mark out a boundary at the base of the mountain and tell the people not to cross it. They are not to ignore these limits and try to climb up the mountain. Whoever crosses the boundary and touches the base of the mountain, either with his foot or his hand, will be put to death. ¹³If he's defiant and ignores the boundary and goes toward the mountain, the people are to stone him or shoot him with arrows, but no one is to go in after him and touch him. His body is to lie there until I finish speaking. Only when the trumpet sounds a long blast can the people cross the boundary and know it will be safe."

¹⁴Then Moses went down and told the people what the Lord had said and what they should do to get ready to hear the Lord speak. So the people washed their clothes and prepared themselves for worship. ¹⁵Moses made it clear that they should get ready, and during this time the men were not to have sex with their wives.

¹⁶On the morning of the third day a thick cloud began covering the top of the mountain. Suddenly there was thunder, lightning and the loud sound of a trumpet. All the people heard the sound coming from the mountain and they trembled with fear. ¹⁷Moses led the people out of the camp up to the boundary near the base of the mountain to meet with their God. ¹⁸Soon the whole mountain was covered with smoke as it billowed down from the top. The Lord had come down on top of the mountain and set it on fire. The smoke also rose up into the sky like smoke from a furnace and the whole

mountain shook. ¹⁹The sound of the trumpet became louder and louder until finally it stopped. When the thunder and lightning ceased, there was a period of awful silence.

Then Moses, shaking with fear, spoke to the Lord and the Lord answered him in the hearing of all the people. ²⁰He called Moses to come up the mountain into the cloud to talk to Him and He would speak to him from the midst of the fire and smoke. ²¹When Moses got there, the Lord said, "You'll need to go back down and warn the people again not to cross the boundary and come near the mountain. Some are thinking about coming up here to see what I look like. If they do, they'll die. ²²Even those you have appointed as priests must not consider themselves on the same footing as you and Aaron. They are not to come near the mountain or they, too, will die." ²³Moses answered the Lord, "The people won't come up because you told us to consider this mountain sacred and not to cross the boundary or in any way touch it. The people know better than to do that." ²⁴The Lord said, "You need to go back down as I asked you to and warn them again. Then come back and bring Aaron part way up with you. Any of the people, including those who have been set aside as priests, are not to try to force their way up here or they will die." ²⁵Then Moses went back down and told the people that what the Lord had said, He meant.

The Ten Commandments

20 Then from the top of the mountain God spoke to Moses and the people:

²"I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, and set you free. You are my people, and I want you to be holy, for I am holy.

³"Do not allow anyone or anything to become a god that you love more than me.

⁴"Do not manufacture idols for yourselves designed after things in heaven,

on earth or in the sea. ⁵Don't bow down to them or serve them. Such practices will only hurt you and your children, who will reap the consequences of your sins down to the third and fourth generations. ⁶But the children of parents who love me and keep my commandments will benefit from such love for many generations to come.

⁷"Do not dishonor me by using my name as a curse. Those who misuse my name will not be guiltless in the final judgment.

⁸"Remember to observe the Sabbath because I have set it apart as holy. ⁹There are six days in the week for you to earn a living. ¹⁰But the seventh day of the week belongs to the Lord your God. On that day you are to do no work—you, your sons or daughters, your male or female servants, your animals or any aliens living among you. ¹¹Because in six days, I, the Lord your God, created the earth, the sky, the seas and everything in them, and on the seventh day I rested in the joy of having made it all. That's why I blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy, so you can rest and rejoice with me.

¹²"Do not dishonor your parents. Respect your father and mother, and I will bless you with long life in the land I'm about to give you.

¹³"Do not murder anyone or even hurt them.

¹⁴"Do not commit adultery or sexually abuse anyone.

¹⁵"Do not take what doesn't belong to you.

¹⁶"Do not lie, deceive or accuse others falsely.

¹⁷"Do not covet another man's house, his wife, his servants, his cattle or anything else that he has."

The People Afraid of God

¹⁸When the people heard God speak to them, followed by lightning, thunder and the loud blasts of a trumpet, they shook with fear and kept their distance from the mountain. ¹⁹They turned to Moses and

said, "If you speak to us in God's place, we promise to listen, but we're afraid that if God speaks to us one more time, we'll all die!" ²⁰Moses said, "Don't be afraid. God has spoken to you to make you afraid of sin, not of Him. These commandments are like ten promises to you."

²¹The people stayed at a distance while Moses and Aaron went part way up the mountain. Then, going on alone, Moses disappeared into the dark cloud where God was.

Instructions for Building an Altar

²²The Lord said to Moses, "When we finish talking I want you to go back down and tell the people for me, 'I am the Lord of heaven and earth. You have seen my power and heard me speak to you from this mountain. ²³You are not to make gods for yourselves out of silver or gold. ²⁴I want you to make an altar out of the natural stones of the earth. Offer on it your sheep and cattle as sacrifices for your sins and in appreciation of my plan for your salvation. Whatever place I set aside for you to come and worship me, I will be there to bless you. ²⁵When you build an altar, don't build it out of cut stones. If you use any tool, or put forth any human effort to make it acceptable, it will lose its meaning and be unfit for worship. ²⁶And don't make a high altar with lots of steps because I don't want others to see your nakedness as you go up.'"

How to Treat Servants

21 The Lord continued, "Teach the Israelites the commandments I just gave them, and help them understand how to apply them to everyday life. ²If you buy a fellow Hebrew to be your servant, he is to be yours for only six years. You don't own him. In the seventh year you are to let him go; he has no more obligation to you. ³If he came in single, he is to go out single. If he chooses to leave in the seventh year, he must leave alone because he has no claim on anyone. This way no female

can marry him just to secure her own freedom. If he was married when you bought him, then when he goes free, so does his wife and family, because they belonged to him before you got him. ⁴If you give him a female slave to be his wife so he can have a family of his own, she and the children do not belong to him. They are your responsibility. If in the seventh year he chooses to leave, he must leave alone. ⁵But if he says to himself, 'I love working here because my master has been good to me. I also love my wife and children, so I don't want to go,' and he tells you that he would rather stay, you must keep him. ⁶Then take him before the Lord at the place of worship and in the presence of the judges stand him up against the doorpost and pierce his ear lobe, and he'll belong to you for the rest of his life.

⁷"If a father who owes you money gives you his daughter with the possibility of marrying into the family, you are not to treat her as a slave nor let her regain her liberty like other slaves. ⁸If she doesn't please you, you must let her father buy her back even if he has no immediate cash. You have no right to sell her to foreigners, because this is the promise you made when you agreed to take her. ⁹If you like her and decide to offer her to your son in marriage, and he marries her, then you are to grant her the rights of a daughter. ¹⁰If you choose another woman instead of her to be your son's wife, you must not deprive her a servant's rights of food, clothing and shelter. ¹¹If in any way you deprive her of one of these things, you must set her free and allow her to go back home without any payment on the part of her father.

The Law Against Violence

¹²"If you hit a man so hard as to kill him, you must pay with your life. ¹³But if in a scuffle you unintentionally harm a man so severely that he dies, you can quickly go to a place that I will designate and be safe from the family's revenge. While you're

there, no one will be allowed to touch you. ¹⁴However, if you deliberately kill a man and then run to the place I will designate, the authorities will be allowed to take you and put you to death.

¹⁵"If you hit your father or mother you must pay for this with your life.

¹⁶"Anyone who kidnaps another (whether slave or free) in order to sell or enslave him, the person who does such shall be put to death.

¹⁷"Anyone who curses his father or mother is to be put to death.

¹⁸"If an argument develops into a fight and one man hits another man with a stone or with his fist and the man does not die, but is laid up in bed, ¹⁹and eventually gets up and walks with a cane, the one who hit him is not to be put to death. He is to pay the injured man for his lost time and take care of him until he gets well.

²⁰"If a man takes a stick and beats his male or female servant and the servant dies, the man must pay for what he did. ²¹But if the servant is able to get up after a day or two and return to work, the owner need not pay, because the servant is his according to the law of ownership.

²²"If men get in a fight and in the process accidentally hit a pregnant woman and the baby comes early, but neither are hurt in any other way, the one who hit her is to be fined the amount the woman's husband demands and the courts allow. ²³But if the woman or the child is hurt or dies, the one who did it is to be punished according to the law of equal value which means life for life, ²⁴eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

²⁶"If a man hits his male or female servant in the face and the servant loses an eye, the man must let the servant go free as payment for the eye. ²⁷If he knocks out a tooth of his male or female servant, he must let the servant go free as payment for the tooth.

Laws Regarding Animals

²⁸"If a bull grazing in the field gores a man or a woman to death, it is to be stoned and its meat must not be eaten. The owner of the bull is not to be held responsible for what it did. ²⁹But if the bull has been in the habit of attacking people and the owner was warned but has not kept the bull fenced in and it kills a man or a woman, the bull is to be stoned and the owner is to be tried for manslaughter. ³⁰If the judges decide to let the owner live and redeem his life by paying for what his bull did, he is to pay whatever is imposed on him for the value of the victim's life. ³¹If the bull kills a boy or a girl, the same rule applies. ³²If the bull kills a male or female servant, the bull's owner is to pay the servant's owner thirty pieces of silver and the bull must be stoned to death.

³³"If a man takes the cover off a pit he dug, or if he digs a new pit and does not cover it and a bull or a donkey falls into it, ³⁴the owner of the pit must pay for the loss. He is to pay the value of the animal to its owner and the dead animal will be his.

³⁵"If a man's bull injures another man's bull and it dies, the owners are to sell the live bull and divide the money and the meat of the dead bull equally between them. ³⁶But if it was known that the bull had the habit of attacking other animals, and the owner was warned and did not keep the bull fenced in, he is to pay the other man for the loss by providing him with an equivalent bull and the dead animal will be his."

God's Law Applied

22 "If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay five head of cattle for an ox and four sheep for a sheep.

²"If a thief breaks into a house at night and someone beats him up and kills him, the defender is not guilty. ³If a thief breaks into a house in broad daylight and someone beats him up and kills him, the defender is guilty and is to be tried

for manslaughter. If a thief is caught, he is to make restitution for what he took and for any damage he caused. If he has nothing with which to pay, he is to be sold as a slave to help pay for it. ⁴If the thief is caught with one of the owner's animals in his possession, whether an ox, a donkey or a sheep, he is to pay back double, two animals for one.

⁵If a man lets his animals graze in a field or a vineyard and they stray and eat another man's crops or eat in his field, the animal's owner must make up the exact loss from the best of his field or vineyard.

⁶If a man starts a fire to burn the weeds in his field and the fire spreads to another man's field and burns up the grain growing there or what has been cut and stacked, the one who started the fire has to pay for the damages.

⁷If a man gives money or other valuables to his neighbor to keep for him, and the neighbor agrees, and a thief breaks in the neighbor's house and steals them, when the thief is caught he must pay back double what he stole. ⁸But if the thief is not caught, the neighbor who agreed to keep the valuables must come before the judges to swear that he did not steal them and in that way declare his innocence.

⁹In all cases of dispute about property and illegal possession of goods, whether it be cattle, donkeys, sheep, clothing or any other valuables, both parties must appear before the judges, and the one who is found guilty must pay back double what he took.

¹⁰If a man gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep or any other animal to keep for him and the neighbor agrees, but the animal dies, is injured or is stolen when no one was watching, ¹¹the neighbor is to take an oath that he did not kill or injure the other man's animal and the man is to accept his neighbor's oath as true. No restitution is to be imposed. ¹²If the animal was stolen, the neighbor must repay the owner according to the law be-

cause of his negligence. ¹³If the animal was killed by wild animals attacking it, the neighbor needs to bring some of the remains as evidence, and he will not be required to pay for the dead animal.

¹⁴Now if a man borrows an animal from another man and it is injured or dies while he is using the animal, he must make restitution. ¹⁵But if the owner is with his loaned animal and it happens, the borrower does not have to pay. If the animal was rented out and it dies, the man does not have to pay because the loss is covered by the hiring fee.

¹⁶If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married to have sex with him, he must pay a dowry to the parents and marry her. ¹⁷But if her father refuses to give her to him, he must still pay the dowry as if he were going to marry her.

¹⁸Anyone who practices witchcraft must be put to death.

¹⁹Anyone who has sex with an animal must be put to death.

²⁰You must put to death anyone who sacrifices animals to any god other than the Lord.

²¹Do not mistreat or oppress an alien; remember how you were treated when you were in Egypt. ²²Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. ²³If you do and they cry to the Lord for help, He will certainly answer their prayers. ²⁴The Lord will respond by allowing the sword to come into the land and your wives will become widows and your children orphans.

²⁵If you lend money to one of your own people who is very poor, do not take advantage of him by charging him interest. ²⁶If you agree to take a poor person's cloak which he uses at night to cover himself as a pledge that he'll repay, give it back to him before the sun sets, ²⁷because that's the only thing he has and he'll need it that night to keep warm. How else will he get a good night's sleep? When he cries, the Lord will certainly hear him because He is a God of mercy.

²⁸Do not curse God or any leader, such as a judge or a ruler.

²⁹“Do not hold back offerings for the Lord from your grain, grapes, or olive oil at harvest time. And don’t forget that your firstborn sons belong to the Lord. ³⁰The firstborn male of your cattle and your sheep also belong to the Lord. Let the firstborn stay with its mother for seven days and on the eighth day, give it to the Lord.

³¹“I want you to be a holy and healthy people. So don’t eat the meat of an animal that has been attacked and torn by wild beasts, but throw that meat to the dogs.”

Justice

23 “Do not spread false rumors about anyone. Never help a guilty man by giving a false testimony to protect him. ²Don’t go along with the crowd when they’re wrong. When you give your testimony in court, don’t be influenced by others to pervert justice. ³Don’t show favoritism to a poor man when he’s on trial for doing wrong.

⁴“If you see your enemy’s cow or donkey wandering off, get it and take it back to him. ⁵If you see someone you don’t like trying to get his donkey up on its feet after falling under a heavy load, don’t just walk by and look the other way. Stop and help the man get the animal up again.

⁶“Never deny justice to anyone, no matter how poor he is, even if his accusers are some of the wealthiest and most influential members of the community. ⁷Don’t accuse anyone falsely to save yourself, and don’t condemn an innocent man to death, because the Lord will not forget the terrible thing you did. ⁸Don’t accept a bribe, because a bribe will blind you to what is right and will make you twist the words of the righteous.

⁹“Never mistreat an alien, because you were once aliens in a foreign land and know what it’s like to be mistreated.

A Sabbatical for the Land

¹⁰“Sow your fields and harvest your crops each year for six years. ¹¹But during the seventh year the land should rest

and lie dormant. Do not harvest anything that grows there, but let it be for the poor and what’s left after that, for the animals. Do the same with your vineyards and olive groves.

¹²“Do all your work in six days, and on the seventh day of the week, rest. Your animals need a chance to rest and refresh themselves, just as your servants and the aliens who work for you do. ¹³Listen to me and be sure to do everything I ask you to. Don’t pray to the idols you’ll find in the land where you’re going; don’t even talk about them or use their names in your conversation.

Three Yearly Feasts

¹⁴“Three times a year you are to hold a religious festival. ¹⁵In the first month of your religious year, the month of Abib, you should keep the Festival of Unleavened Bread for a week beginning the day after the Passover. You are to do things just as you did the night you left Egypt. This means that all through the week you are to eat unleavened bread. Don’t come before me empty-handed, but bring an offering with you. ¹⁶Next is the Harvest Festival to be held for one day. That’s when you offer me the first of your harvests. The third festival is the Festival of Ingathering or Festival of Shelters which is to take place after all your harvests are in at the end of the year. ¹⁷These three festivals are to be held each year and all adult males are to come before me at those times.

¹⁸“Don’t offer bread made with yeast at the same time you offer an animal. The fat of animals sacrificed during these festivals I appointed must not be left until morning.

¹⁹“When you bring the firstfruits of your harvests to me, bring the best you have. Don’t cook a young goat in its mother’s milk as the heathen do, for they do it as a fertility rite.

The Angel

²⁰“I have sent my Angel before you to

protect you and bring you into the land I have promised to give you. ²¹So obey me. Don't be headstrong and rebel. He will not forgive your sins except you repent for He bears my name.

²²"If you obey Him and do what I ask, then I'll protect you, fight off your enemies for you and set myself against any who oppose you.

²³"My Angel will bring you into the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I will defeat them for you. ²⁴When you come into their land, do not worship their local gods or adopt their cultural or religious practices. You are to destroy their idols and break down the sacred pillars where they worship.

²⁵"If you worship me as the Lord your God, and me only, then I will bless your food and water and will take away sickness from among you. ²⁶There will be no miscarriages among you, neither will any of your wives be infertile nor without children. And I will prolong your lives. ²⁷I will send terror into the hearts of the people who oppose you and throw every nation that confronts you into confusion. I will make your enemies so afraid of you that they will turn and run. ²⁸I will send hornets ahead of you to attack the Hivites, the Canaanites and the Hittites; you'll be able to move in without a battle. ²⁹But I will not do all of this in one year because the land would become desolate and the wild animals would come to live there. Soon they would attack you to protect their turf. I will not move your enemies out of the land any faster than you can settle it. ³⁰I will move them out gradually until there are enough of you to take over. ³¹Slowly I will extend your borders from the Red Sea to the Euphrates River and from the Mediterranean Sea to the Arabian Desert. I will make you a powerful nation so that those who moved out from the land will not come back and attack you.

³²"Don't make a peace agreement with

these people or a covenant with their gods. ³³And don't let them come back and settle in the land, because if you do, they'll cause you to sin against me by luring you into worshiping their gods and you'll be caught in a trap."

The People Promise to Obey

24 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go back down the mountain and tell the people everything I've told you. Then come back and bring Aaron with you, but this time also bring his sons Nadab and Abihu and the seventy leaders of Israel. They are not to come clear to the top, but find a comfortable place on the way to stop and wait for you. I will put my Spirit upon them and give them a glimpse of my glory. ²You are to come up to the top alone as before, but the people are to stay away from the mountain as they've been told or they will die."

³So before Moses went up the mountain with Aaron, the seventy elders, and Aaron's two sons Nadab and Abihu, he told the people everything the Lord had said about His law, just as he had been told. The people responded with one voice, "We will do all that the Lord has said!" (They thought they could do what the Lord had said without His help.)

⁴Then Moses wrote down everything the Lord had said, including the response of the people. Early the following morning he got up and built an altar at the foot of Sinai and set up twelve pillars made of large stones, one pillar for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵He also chose twelve young men from among the first-born to serve as priests until the priesthood was officially set up. They helped slaughter several oxen and offered them to the Lord, confirming the people's commitment and acceptance of His covenant. ⁶Moses caught the blood in basins and poured half of it against the altar confirming the Lord's promise and the people's agreement. ⁷Then he took the book of the covenant that he had just written and read it to the people. When they

heard the words of the Lord the second time, they again responded, "We will do all that the Lord has said!"⁸ That's when Moses took the rest of the blood, sprinkled some of it toward the people and poured the rest out on the ground in front of them. As he did so, he said, "This blood represents your response to the covenant that the Lord has made with you and the agreement is now sealed."

Seventy Leaders Join Moses on the Mountain

⁹When this was done, Moses and Aaron, Aaron's two sons Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy leaders of Israel went up the mountain.¹⁰ Before reaching the top they stopped to worship. The Lord poured out His Spirit upon them and showed them the glory of His presence. They saw the feet of God resting on what looked like pavement of blue sapphire.¹¹ The Lord protected them from His glory, but He did allow them to see His feet resting on the blue pavement. While they were there they ate bread and drank water as a covenant meal, surrounded by God's glory.

¹²After they came down from the mountain, the Lord said to Moses, "When you come up next time, bring Joshua with you. While you're up here I will give you two tablets of stone on which I will write my law as a guide for my people."¹³ So Moses took Joshua, his assistant, and went back up the mountain to be with God.¹⁴ Before they went, Moses said to the seventy elders, "This time stay here with the people until I come back. Aaron and Hur will be here with you, so if the people have any major disputes to settle they can go to them."

¹⁵Then Moses and Joshua went up the mountain and when they were part way up a thick cloud covered it.¹⁶ The glory of the Lord was in the cloud, and it hid the mountain for six days as Moses and Joshua waited. On the seventh day the Lord spoke to Moses and asked him to come up into the cloud to talk to Him.

¹⁷From down below, the glory of the Lord looked to the people like flames of fire consuming the top of the mountain.

¹⁸Moses obeyed the Lord, left Joshua, and went the rest of the way to the top. He was without food for forty days and forty nights, miraculously kept by the power of God.

Offerings for the Sanctuary

25 The Lord spoke to Moses,² "When you go back down, I want you to give the children of Israel the following instructions: Bring me a special offering, whatever your hearts prompt you to give.³ The offering can be gold, silver or bronze,⁴ or it can be blue, purple or scarlet yarn, finely woven white linen, spun goat hair,⁵ ram skin dyed red, fine leather from animals with soft skin, acacia wood,⁶ olive oil as used in lamps, spices to mix with oil to make sweet-smelling incense,⁷ and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece worn by the high priest.⁸ Have them make a holy tent for me so I can live among them. It will be called the Lord's Sanctuary.⁹ I want you to supervise its construction and see that its furnishings are exactly like the plan I'll show you, which is patterned after things in heaven. My Sanctuary will have its own measurement. A hand's breadth is to be added to each cubit, making a Sanctuary cubit twenty-two inches.

The Ark

¹⁰"First, I want you to make a chest out of the same kind of hard acacia wood that the burning bush had. I want this chest to be fifty-five inches long, thirty-three inches wide and thirty-three inches high.

¹¹Overlay it with pure gold, inside and out, and make a molding of gold to go around the top.¹² Make four large rings from gold and fasten them to the four corners near the bottom of the chest, two on one side and two on the other.¹³ Then make two carrying poles out of acacia wood and overlay them with gold.¹⁴ Slip

them into the golden rings along the sides of the chest, one pole for each side with which to carry it. ¹⁵The poles are to stay in the rings and must not be taken out, even when the chest sits in the Sanctuary. That's why the rings for the poles are attached to the bottom and not the top.

¹⁶Place the two tablets of stone on which I will write my law inside the chest. It will be known as the Ark of God's Covenant because it will hold the Ten Commandments. ¹⁷Make an atonement cover of pure gold for the Ark to serve as its lid. It is to be known as God's Mercy Seat. It is to be fifty-five inches long and thirty-three inches wide to fit the Ark. ¹⁸Then make two cherubs out of hammered gold with two wings each, one cherub for each end of the lid. ¹⁹Fashion one cherub on one end of the lid and the other cherub on the other end, making one piece with the Mercy Seat. ²⁰The angels are to face each other across the lid and are to be made so one wing from each make an arch over God's Mercy Seat and one wing folds over their body. ²¹Place the two tablets of stone that I will give you inside the golden Ark and then put the lid with its angels on top of it. ²²I will appear to you above the Mercy Seat, and from there I will give you added instructions for my people.

The Table for the Showbread

²³Next I want you to make a table out of acacia wood, forty-four inches long, twenty-two inches wide and thirty-three inches high.

²⁴Overlay the table with gold and make a gold molding to go around the top. ²⁵Make a three-and-a-half-inch frame to go around the top and a gold molding for the frame. ²⁶Make four gold carrying rings and fasten them to the four corners where the legs meet the table top. ²⁷The rings are to be close to the frame, to hold the poles that will be used to carry the table. ²⁸Make the poles for carrying the table out of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. ²⁹Make plates, pitchers,

bowls and covers out of pure gold. ³⁰This table is to hold the bread of the presence, which is to be kept before me every day.

The Lampstand

³¹Make a lampstand of pure gold. Hammer out its base and shaft. Together with its decorative flowers, the whole lampstand is to be one solid piece of gold. ³²Its central shaft should have six branches coming out of it, three on one side and three on the other side, all curving upward. ³³Each of these six branches is to have three almond-shaped cups decorated with buds and blossoms. ³⁴The shaft is to have four such almond-shaped cups with buds and blossoms. ³⁵Put a bud on the shaft under each of the three pairs of branches and one near the top. ³⁶The buds, the branches and the shaft should be hammered out of one solid piece of gold. ³⁷Make seven oil lamps and put one on top of the shaft and one on top of each of the six branches. Light will reflect off the wall, lighting up everything around it. ³⁸Also make the wick trimmers, tongs and trays out of gold. ³⁹Use seventy-five pounds of pure gold to make the lampstand and its tools. ⁴⁰Be very careful that you make everything according to the plan which is patterned after the heavenly Sanctuary I showed you on the mountain."

The Sanctuary

26 "For the Sanctuary itself, make ten curtains out of fine white linen embroidered with blue, purple and scarlet yarn. Have a skillful person weave artistic figures of angels on the cloth. ²All the curtains are to be the same size, fifty-one feet long and seven feet wide. ³Sew five of them together to make one large piece and then do the same with the other five. ⁴Make blue loops for the long seam of each set. ⁵Put fifty of them along the end seam of the first set and fifty matching loops along the end seam of the second set. ⁶Make fifty gold clasps and hook the two sets together to make

one large curtain for the ceiling.

⁷Next make the first of three outside coverings for the Sanctuary out of eleven pieces of cloth spun from goat hair.

⁸Make these pieces all the same size, fifty-five feet long and seven feet wide.

⁹Sew five of them together into one set and the other six into another set. Half of the sixth piece in the second set is to be doubled over at the entrance of the Sanctuary. ¹⁰Make fifty loops along the end piece of the first set and fifty loops along the end piece of the second set.

¹¹Make fifty bronze hooks and fit them into the fifty loops of each set so the two sets can be hooked together to make one large piece. ¹²The other half of the sixth piece in the second set should hang down at the rear of the Sanctuary. ¹³All three roof coverings are to cover the Sanctuary. The first covering is to hang in equal two foot lengths over each side, and the other two coverings are to be stretched out and tied down to ground stakes. ¹⁴Make the two other outside coverings out of ram skin dyed red and soft leather. These three coverings—first the one made from spun goat hair, then the one made of ram skin and the outside one of soft leather—will make up the threefold covering.

¹⁵Next make hollow wall frames for the sides of the Sanctuary out of acacia wood like the furniture. ¹⁶Each hollow frame should be eighteen feet high, thirty-three inches wide and twenty-two inches thick. ¹⁷Each is to have a solid bottom with two pegs to fit into the holes of the two silver feet. This is to be done for all the frames. ¹⁸Make twenty such frames for the south side of the Sanctuary. ¹⁹Make two silver feet for each frame, or forty in all. A peg will fit into the hole of each silver foot. ²⁰Make twenty frames for the north side of the Sanctuary, ²¹and forty silver feet, two for each frame.

²²For the rear of the Sanctuary, make six frames, ²³and two corner frames to overlap the end frames of the side walls. ²⁴These corner frames are to overlap the end frames of the side walls all the way

to the top. ²⁵Altogether there will be eight frames for the west end, including the corners, with sixteen silver feet, two for each frame.

²⁶Then make fifteen crossbars out of acacia wood, five to connect the frames on one side of the Sanctuary, ²⁷five for the frames on the other side and five for the frames at the far western end of the Sanctuary. ²⁸The center crossbar is to pass through each frame exactly halfway up. The other four crossbars are for the outside of the frames to hold them all together. ²⁹Overlay all the frames and the rods with gold and fasten gold rings to the outside of the frames to hold the rods. ³⁰Then erect the Sanctuary tent according to the plan I showed you.

³¹Make a curtain out of finely woven white linen, using blue, purple and scarlet yarn to embroider the curtain with figures of winged angels, exquisitely sewn. ³²Make gold hooks for this curtain and hang it on four square hollow pillars made out of acacia wood, overlaid with gold and set in four silver bases. This will be the curtain that separates the first and second parts of the Sanctuary. ³³Behind this curtain you are to place the Ark of God's Covenant with its two tablets of stone. The curtain will separate the first compartment called the Holy Place from the second compartment called the Most Holy Place. ³⁴Then put the lid holding the carved angels on the Ark and close it up as it sits inside the Most Holy Place. ³⁵On this side of the curtain in the Holy Place, put the table that will hold the sacred bread against the north wall of the Sanctuary and the lampstand with its seven lights against the south wall.

³⁶For the entrance to the Holy Place make a curtain of finely woven linen and have someone who sews well embroider the curtain with blue, purple and scarlet yarn. ³⁷Make gold hooks for the curtain and hang it on five pillars made of acacia wood, overlaid with gold and set in five bronze bases."

The Altar of Burnt Offering

27 “Next build an altar on which to offer sacrifices. Make it out of acacia wood, nine feet wide, nine feet long and five-and-a-half feet high. ²Make a horn for each of the four corners, so that the horns and the altar are one piece, and overlay the horns and the altar with bronze. ³All the utensils for the altar are to be made of bronze: pots to remove ashes, shovels, bowls for sprinkling blood, meat forks and pans to carry the fire in. ⁴Make a bronze grate to be set inside the altar and four bronze rings for its four corners. ⁵Set the grate half way down inside the altar as it sits over the pit.

⁶“Make two carrying poles of acacia wood and overlay them with bronze. ⁷The poles are to be inserted into the rings on each side of the altar and used to carry it. ⁸Make the altar out of solid planks. Then cover the planks with bronze plates just like I showed you in the plans.

The Courtyard

⁹“Next make an enclosure with curtains for the courtyard of the Sanctuary out of fine white linen. The south side is to be a hundred and eighty feet long. ¹⁰Hang the curtains on silver hooks from twenty square-shaped hollowed wood posts which have been overlaid with bronze. The crowns of the posts are to be silver and they are to sit on bronze bases. ¹¹The north side also is to have a curtain one hundred and eighty feet long with twenty such posts with silver hooks and silver crowns on top, sitting on bronze bases.

¹²“The west end of the courtyard beyond the Sanctuary should be ninety feet wide with curtains, ten such posts with silver hooks and crowns on top, and ten bronze bases. ¹³On the east end of the courtyard will be the entrance to the Sanctuary. It will also be ninety feet wide. ¹⁴On one side of the entrance the white enclosure curtain should be twenty-seven feet wide, with three posts which

have silver hooks and silver crowns and three bronze bases. ¹⁵On the other side of the entrance the white enclosure curtain should also be twenty-seven feet wide, with three of the same posts with silver hooks and silver crowns and three bronze bases.

¹⁶“For the entrance itself, make a curtain thirty-six feet wide out of finely woven linen embroidered with blue, purple and scarlet yarn. Hang it from four posts with silver hooks and crowns on top, sitting on four bronze bases. ¹⁷All the posts around the courtyard are to sit on bronze bases and be connected with silver rods and have silver hooks to hold the curtain. ¹⁸The entire enclosure is to be one hundred and eighty feet long, ninety feet wide and nine feet high. The curtains are to be made of white linen and all the posts are to have bronze bases. ¹⁹All the utensils to be used in the Sanctuary are to be made of bronze. The tent pegs for the Sanctuary and courtyard are also to be of bronze.

Oil for the Lampstand

²⁰“Tell the children of Israel to bring you the best oil from pressed olives for the lampstand, so the seven lamps can always be kept burning. ²¹Aaron and his sons are to set the lampstand in the Holy Place and keep the seven lamps burning before the Lord continually day and night. This is to be a lasting practice among the children of Israel and their descendants for all generations to follow.”

The Garments of the Priests

28 “Call Aaron your brother out from the people, along with his sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, to set them aside as priests. ²Make seven sacred garments for your brother Aaron to give glory and beauty to his position. ³Tell the craftsmen to whom I have given wisdom and ability in such matters that they are to make these special garments for Aaron so he can be consecrated as my high priest. ⁴These are the clothes they should

make: white undergarments, a white long-sleeved inner robe down to the ankles, a blue short-sleeved outer robe down to the calves, a holy vest with front and back panels joined at the top to reach halfway down the thighs, a waistband to hold the front and back panels of the holy vest close to him, a breastpiece for the outside of the vest and a flat white turban. They also are to make special clothes for Aaron's sons who will serve as priests.

The Ephod

⁵“The craftsmen are to use gold, blue, purple and scarlet thread and the finest linen. ⁶The holy vest is to be called an ephod and should be made of fine linen beautifully embroidered with gold, blue, purple and scarlet thread. ⁷The front and back panels are to be joined at the shoulders. ⁸The sash is to match the vest with its gold, blue, purple and scarlet colors. ⁹They are to take two flat onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the twelve sons of Jacob in order of their birth, ¹⁰the six names of the oldest sons on the stone on the right and the six names of the youngest sons on the stone on the left. ¹¹Engrave their names on these stones as a gem cutter engraves a royal seal. Each stone is to be mounted in a gold setting, ¹²then fasten the two stones on the two shoulder pieces that join the front and back panels of the holy vest. This way Aaron will be carrying the twelve sons of Jacob representing the twelve tribes of Israel on his shoulders before the Lord to show that they will never be forgotten. ¹³Make two little loops out of woven gold and fasten them to the two gold settings holding the onyx stones. ¹⁴Also make two short cords out of twisted gold to look like chains and attach them to the two little loops to hang down over Aaron's chest.

The Breastplate

¹⁵“Then make a breastpiece for the high priest that will help him to know God's will. Make it out of the same mate-

rial as the vest using finely woven linen embroidered with gold, blue, purple and scarlet thread. ¹⁶It should be a foot long and a foot wide after it's folded, and the fold should be at the bottom so it looks like a pouch. ¹⁷Then mount four rows of three precious stones on the outside of the breastpiece. In the first row have a ruby, a topaz and a beryl. ¹⁸In the second row have a turquoise, a sapphire and an emerald. ¹⁹In the third row have a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst. ²⁰In the fourth row have a chrysolite, an onyx and a jasper. All these are to be mounted in gold settings. ²¹Each of these stones is to have the name of one of the sons of Jacob engraved on it to represent the twelve tribes of Israel. This way Aaron will carry the twelve tribes of Israel over his heart as he goes before the Lord. ²²The breastpiece will be attached to the two short cords hanging from Aaron's shoulders. ²³Make two gold rings and fasten them to the two upper corners of the breastpiece, ²⁴and then fasten the one end of the two cords to each of these rings. ²⁵The other end of the cords will be attached to the gold loops that are fastened to the gold settings on Aaron's shoulders. This way the breastpiece can hang freely over his chest. ²⁶Then make two gold rings and attach these to the two lower corners of the breastpiece on the inside edge. ²⁷Make two more gold rings and attach them to the sides of the holy vest toward the front just above the waistband. ²⁸Then tie the two lower rings of the breastpiece to the two rings on the sides of the vest with a blue cord to pull the breastpiece close to Aaron's chest. This way the breastpiece will not swing away from him when he leans forward. ²⁹When Aaron enters the Sanctuary to go before the Lord he is to wear the breastpiece with its twelve stones, each one engraved with the name of one of the twelve sons of Jacob, to show that the twelve tribes will always have a place in God's heart.

³⁰“Next, take two large gemstones and

attach them to the breastpiece, one to the right and the other to the left of the twelve gems already there. These are to be known as the Urim and the Thummim, words which begin with the first and last letters of your alphabet. I will use these gems to guide Israel. If I approve a certain action, a light will encircle the stone on the right, and if I disapprove, a shadow will be over the stone on the left. Aaron is to carry them over his heart whenever he enters the Sanctuary.

Additional Priestly Garments

³¹The blue short-sleeved robe that Aaron is to wear over his white inner robe is to be woven as one piece, without seams. ³²There is to be an opening at the top for Aaron to slip his head through, and the opening is to be reinforced with a special binding to keep it from tearing. ³³On the bottom hem, by Aaron's calves, you are to attach small balls like pomegranates made of blue, purple and scarlet yarn arranged alternately in color with little gold bells between each of them. ³⁴The gold bells and the pomegranates are to be placed alternately around the bottom of the hem. ³⁵Aaron is to wear this robe whenever he ministers before me as high priest. The sound of the bells will be heard by the people as he enters the Sanctuary and when he comes out. It will be an audible link between him and the people as they hear him ministering in my presence. If he comes before me without the robe, he will surely die.

³⁶Also make a headband of pure gold and engrave on it the words, 'Holiness to the Lord.' ³⁷Fasten a blue cord to it, place it on his forehead and tie it in the back. This will hold the white turban in place. ³⁸Aaron is to wear this gold headband on his forehead because he represents the Lord and in this role he will carry the guilt of my people as they come to him with their sin offerings. The headband is to be worn on Aaron's forehead whenever he comes into my presence so the

people will find favor before the Lord.

³⁹"Aaron's turban and tunic are to be made out of finest white linen. Then make a skillfully embroidered sash for him to be tied in front of the holy vest with one end neatly hanging over the other.

⁴⁰Also make a long white robe for each of Aaron's sons who are to serve as priests to give them dignity and honor. Make embroidered sashes for them as waistbands and flat white turbans out of fine linen which they are to wear when they minister before me. ⁴¹Have Aaron and his sons put these clothes on, and then ordain them as priests by anointing them with oil. ⁴²Also make linen underclothes for them to reach from the waist to the knees. These are to be worn under their robes so as not to expose themselves when they go up the steps to the altar. ⁴³Aaron and his sons must wear these clothes whenever they come into the Sanctuary to minister in my presence or approach the altar; otherwise they will incur guilt and die. This is a perpetual ordinance for Aaron and his sons throughout their generations."

Aaron and His Sons Serve as Priests

29 "This is what you are to do when you dedicate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. Select a young bull and two rams without defects. ²Take the best wheat flour and make bread cakes and wafers without yeast. The cakes are to be made with olive oil and the wafers without it, but the tops of the wafers should be brushed with olive oil. ³Put all of them in a basket and bring them to me as an offering along with the young bull and the two rams. ⁴Then bring Aaron and his sons into the courtyard near the entrance to the Holy Place and wash their hands and feet according to the ritual I have shown you. ⁵Put the priestly clothes on Aaron. First the long white inner robe, then the shorter blue outer robe, followed by the holy vest with its breastpiece, and then the decorated sash. ⁶Finally, put the flat white tur-

ban on his head as you would a crown and tie the gold headband across his forehead. ⁷Then dedicate him to the Lord by pouring perfumed oil on his head, letting it drip on his beard and clothes. ⁸Next bring Aaron's sons into the courtyard near the entrance to the Holy Place. ⁹Put their long white robes on them, tie the embroidered sashes around their waists, put flat white turbans on their heads, then dedicate them to the Lord as you did Aaron. This will be the rite of ordination for Aaron and his sons when they're set apart. They and their descendants are to serve me as priests from generation to generation.

¹⁰"Bring a young bull into the courtyard near the Holy Place. Tell Aaron and his sons to put their hands on its head, silently confessing their sins, then tie its legs, ease it down, ¹¹and kill it as an atoning sacrifice for each of them. ¹²They should catch some of the bull's blood, dip their fingers in it and put a little of it on the four horns of the altar of sacrifice. They should pour the rest of it at the base of the altar. ¹³Then they should take all the fat that covers the inside organs and the upper part of the liver, and the kidneys with the fat around them, and burn all of this on the altar. ¹⁴They should then take the bull's body with the rest of its organs outside the camp and burn it. It is a sin offering for the sins of Aaron and his sons.

¹⁵"Next, take one of the rams and have Aaron and his sons do the same thing to this animal. Have them put their hands on it as a sign of commitment, tie it up, ¹⁶kill it, then catch some of its blood and splash it against all four sides of the altar. ¹⁷Divide the ram into its natural body parts, then take its internal organs and its legs and wash them until they're cleansed of blood. Lay them on top of the altar with the other sections and the head. ¹⁸Burn all the pieces of the ram on the altar as a sign of self-sacrifice. It is a symbolic act that pleases the Lord.

¹⁹"Then take the other ram and have

Aaron and his sons place their hands on its head in dedication. ²⁰Kill it, catch its blood and with your finger put some blood on the lobes of the right ears of Aaron and his sons, on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet. Then pour the rest of the blood against all four sides of the altar. ²¹Take a little blood from the altar, mix some of the anointing oil in it, then sprinkle it on Aaron and his sons and on their clothes. This means that he and his sons and their vestments are set apart for me.

²²"Before you lay this ram on the altar to burn it, take out all the fat that covers the inner organs, the upper part of the liver, and the kidneys and their fat, the right front thigh by the shoulder and the fat tail. ²³Then take bread made without yeast from the basket, one cake made with oil and one wafer made without oil, ²⁴and place these in the hands of Aaron and his sons for them to hold up before the Lord. ²⁵Then take all this from their hands and place it on the altar on top of the ram and burn them together as an offering to me. The meat of the ram and the bread from your hands make a complete offering.

²⁶"Before you burn the different parts of the ram, cut out the breast meat, hold it up and wave it before the Lord in a gesture of thanksgiving, then give it to Aaron and his sons. This part of the meat and the meat from the right front thigh next to the shoulder will be theirs. ²⁷Whenever men are dedicated to the priesthood, the breast and the right front thigh next to the shoulder all belong to me. I have set them aside for the priests. ²⁸This is to be a rule for all the offerings that the people bring to me: the meat from the breast and the right front thigh next to the shoulder are to be lifted up in a single motion before the Lord by the priests.

²⁹"The holy clothes made for Aaron are to be passed on to his descendants to wear when they are ordained to become high priest, because the garments belong to me and not to Aaron. ³⁰When Aaron's son is chosen to serve as high priest and

begins his ministry in the Holy Place, he is to wear the high priestly garments for seven successive days.

³¹“The meat that Aaron and his sons receive from the ram of dedication is to be boiled inside the courtyard, then prepared for eating. ³²They are to eat it together with the bread in the basket near the entrance to the Holy Place. ³³They are the only ones who are to eat this food because it is the food of their dedication. No one else is to eat of this food because it is holy. ³⁴If any meat or bread is left over until morning, it is to be burned. No one is to eat it, because it is holy.

³⁵“This is how the dedication service for Aaron and his sons is to be conducted for seven days. ³⁶On each of the seven days you are to sacrifice a young bull as a sin offering to make atonement for Aaron and his sons. This sacrifice also will make atonement for the altar. Each day you are to anoint the altar and dedicate it to the Lord. ³⁷Do this every day for seven days and then the altar will be most holy, and whatever touches it will be considered holy.

Daily Offerings

³⁸“Once the altar has been made holy and dedicated, the priests are to offer two one-year-old lambs on it, one in the morning and one in the evening, every single day without a break. ³⁹One lamb is to be offered at sunrise and the other just before sunset. ⁴⁰With the first lamb, offer two pounds of finely ground wheat flour mixed with two pints of pure olive oil as a cereal offering, and two pints of unfermented wine as a drink offering. ⁴¹With the other lamb, offer the same amount of wheat, olive oil and unfermented wine as you did in the morning. Such offerings are pleasing to the Lord because the lamb and the cereal and drink offering represent what I will do for you. Only together do they make a complete offering. ⁴²These two offerings are to be made each day on the altar in the courtyard in line with the entrance to the

Sanctuary where I will meet and speak with you.

⁴³“It is in the Sanctuary that I will make my presence known to the children of Israel and my glory will make it holy. ⁴⁴My presence will also make the altar and the laver in the courtyard holy, and Aaron and his sons will serve me as priests. ⁴⁵I will dwell among the children of Israel, and I will be their God and they will be my people. ⁴⁶They will know that I, the Lord, brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, to live among them. For I am the Lord their God.”

The Altar of Incense

30“Make an altar out of acacia wood for burning incense in the Holy Place. ²It should be square, twenty-two inches long, twenty-two inches wide and forty-four inches high. It should have four little horns on each of the upper corners and they should be one piece with the altar. ³Put a crown molding of gold around the top edge of the altar, lay the gold plate to be used for burning incense down inside the molding and overlay the entire altar with gold. ⁴Make two gold rings and attach them to opposite corners just below the molding. They are for the poles that will be used to carry the altar. ⁵The poles are to be made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold.

⁶“Place the altar in front of the curtain going from the Holy Place into the Most Holy Place where the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat are and where I will meet with you. ⁷Every morning when Aaron or one of his sons comes into the Holy Place to take care of the lamps on the seven-branched lampstand, he is to look toward the Ark and offer fragrant incense on the coals of the altar. ⁸He is to do the same thing when he comes in to take care of the lamps at sunset to keep them burning during the night. This way the sweet fragrance will continually rise to the Lord all through your generations, day and night, representing the Lord’s righteousness ascending with the prayers of the

people. ⁹You are not to offer on this altar strange-smelling incense, or any parts of an animal, grain or drink offering as you do on the altar of sacrifice that's in the courtyard. ¹⁰Once a year Aaron, as high priest, is to make atonement on the altar by putting on its horns the blood of the animal that was sacrificed that day for a sin offering. This is to be done every year throughout your generations. This altar is special in its service because in its function it belongs to the Most Holy Place."

The Ransom Money

¹¹Then the Lord spoke to Moses on another topic, saying, ¹²"When you take a census of the people of Israel, every male who registers must pay a ransom for himself. They are to be sure to do this so no harm will come to them. ¹³Everyone who registers must bring the same weight in silver—one-fifth of an ounce—set by the monetary standard of the Sanctuary. This is called the census offering. No one is exempt. ¹⁴Those who are twenty years and older are to bring this amount to the Lord as a ransom offering for themselves. ¹⁵The rich are not to bring more than this and the poor are not to bring less. All are to bring the same amount as an offering to the Lord who ransomed your lives. ¹⁶This money is for the upkeep of the Sanctuary that it may continue to be a memorial before the Lord to protect you."

The Laver

¹⁷Then the Lord came back to the subject of the Sanctuary, saying to Moses, ¹⁸"Make a large bronze basin with a bronze stand and place it in the courtyard between the altar of sacrifice and the entrance to the Sanctuary. Then fill it with water. ¹⁹Aaron and his sons are to remove their sandals and wash their hands and feet with water from this basin. ²⁰They are to do this before they enter the Sanctuary so they will not be harmed by my presence or perhaps die, because the ground on which they will

be walking is holy. They are to do the same before they approach the altar of sacrifice to burn an offering there. ²¹They are to wash their hands and feet with the water from the basin so they will not be harmed or die. This is an ordinance for all the priests to observe from now on."

The Anointing Oil

²²The Lord gave Moses additional instructions about the Sanctuary, saying, ²³"Take these amounts of fine Eastern spices: twelve pounds of liquid myrrh, six pounds of fragrant cinnamon, six pounds of fragrant cane and ²⁴twelve pounds of cassia, all weighed out according to the official standard of the Sanctuary. Then add one gallon of olive oil to these spices ²⁵to make a holy oil like that blended by a perfumer. This is the oil to be used to anoint the priests and the Sanctuary. ²⁶You are to anoint the Sanctuary tent, the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place, ²⁷the table that holds the sacred bread, the seven-branched candlestick and the altar of incense in the Holy Place; ²⁸and in the courtyard, anoint the altar of burnt offerings and its equipment and the wash basin with its base. ²⁹By doing this you are dedicating these things to the Lord and setting them apart as holy. Anything that touches them will also be considered dedicated to the Lord and holy. ³⁰Then anoint Aaron and his sons to dedicate them and set them apart to serve me as priests. ³¹Tell the priests and the people that this perfumed oil will be the Lord's anointing oil for generations to come. ³²It is never to be used on anyone but those who are set aside as priests. You are never to make such oil. It is holy and it is to be holy to you. ³³Whoever makes this oil and puts it on himself or on someone else will no longer be considered part of my people."

The Incense

³⁴The Lord continued, "Take an equal amount of these spices: gum resin, onycha, galbanum and pure frankincense.

³⁵Make a fragrant blend of incense from these as a perfumer does, then add a little salt to keep it pure and it will be holy unto the Lord. ³⁶Grind some of it into a fine powder, take it into the Holy Place and sprinkle it on the altar of incense that stands in front of the curtain going into the Most Holy Place where I will meet with you. This incense is holy and must always be treated as such. ³⁷Neither you nor anyone else are to make incense like this, because it's set aside for the Lord's use. ³⁸Whoever makes incense like this for his own use, whether to perfume himself or his house, will no longer be considered part of my people."

Building the Sanctuary

31 Then the Lord said to Moses, ²"I have chosen Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, from the tribe of Judah, to help you build the Sanctuary. ³I will fill him with my Spirit and give him knowledge, skill and ability in all kinds of artistry and craft. ⁴He will make artistic designs in gold, silver and bronze. ⁵He will cut and set precious stones, carve wood and do all kinds of hand crafts. ⁶And I have chosen Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, from the tribe of Dan, to help him. I also have filled others with my Spirit and given them knowledge, skill and ability to help them make everything for the Sanctuary that should be made. ⁷They are to make the Sanctuary tent, the Ark of the Covenant with its atonement cover and all the other furnishings, such as ⁸the bread table, the seven-branched lampstand, the altar of incense, ⁹the altar of sacrifice with all its equipment and the wash basin with its stand. ¹⁰They will make the garments for Aaron as high priest and for his sons as priests. ¹¹They also will make the anointing oil and the perfumed incense for use in the Holy Place. They are to make all these things exactly as I have told you."

The Sabbath

¹²The Lord continued, ¹³"Say to the

people, 'Most importantly, remember to keep the Sabbath holy because it is a very special day for me, and it's a day of rest for you. It's a sign between you and me for all time to show that you are the people whom I have chosen and set apart. ¹⁴The Sabbath is holy and anyone who desecrates it by working on that day will be put to death. To break the Sabbath is an act of treason against divine government. ¹⁵There are six days in which you should do your work to earn a livelihood, but the seventh day is the day set apart for me. Anyone doing unnecessary work on that day is to be put to death. ¹⁶My people are to keep the Sabbath, celebrating it forever as a sign that they belong to me. ¹⁷It is to be a permanent sign between us, because in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and by the seventh day he had finished everything. He then rested in the joy of what He had made.'"

¹⁸When God finished talking to Moses on Mount Sinai, He gave him the two tablets of stone He had promised to give him on which He had written the Ten Commandments.

Aaron's Golden Calf

32 Moses was up on the mountain much longer than the people had expected. Some of them became impatient, so the leaders went to Aaron and said, "We don't know whether something has happened to Moses or not. He brought us out of Egypt all the way here, but now what do we do? Let's make a god we can see!" ²They surrounded Aaron and put pressure on him to go along with them. At first Aaron remonstrated with them for wanting to do such a thing, but finally he gave in and said, "All right, ask your wives and sons and daughters to take off their gold earrings and bring them to me, and we'll see what we can do." ³So the leaders talked to the people and they took off their gold earrings and brought them to Aaron. ⁴He took the earrings, melted them down and made a golden statue for the people in the shape

of a young bull. Then the leaders said to all the people, "Hear, O Israel, this is your god! Think of him as the one who led you out of Egypt, the one who will lead you into the Promised Land. This is a god you can see!" ⁵When Aaron saw the joy that this brought to the people, he built an altar in front of the golden bull and announced to everyone, "Tomorrow will be a festival to the Lord and you can bring your sacrifices to Him and offer them in front of this bull." ⁶So early the next morning people brought their animals and offered them as burnt offerings and peace offerings to this visible god. Then they sat down to eat and drink and soon their feasting took on the sexual rites of pagan worship.

⁷The Lord saw all this and said to Moses, "You had better hurry on down to your people you led out of Egypt. They've rebelled against me and are corrupting themselves with fertility rites. ⁸They're worshipping a golden idol made to look like a young bull. They're offering sacrifices to it and telling themselves that the young bull represents me, the God who brought them out of Egypt. ⁹I know how rebellious and stubborn these people can be. ¹⁰One way for me to solve this problem is to wipe them off the face of the earth. So leave me alone. I will start a new and greater nation with you and your family."

¹¹But Moses pleaded with God, "Lord, why would you do this to your own people? Everyone knows that it was your power that set them free and brought them out of Egypt. ¹²If you do this, the nations will say, 'The Lord brought these people out of Egypt to kill them. He told them he wanted them to come and offer sacrifices and worship Him, when He really brought them out here to become human sacrifices.' So don't do it, Lord. Think of the misunderstanding other people will have of you! ¹³You said you would make a great nation out of their descendants. They would be so numerous that they would be as hard to count

as the stars in the sky, and they would have a land all of their own. If you destroyed them, what would the people think of your promise? They'd think that you couldn't keep it and had to start over. So don't destroy your people, Lord." ¹⁴The Lord had told Moses that He would destroy the children of Israel, but by saying "Leave me alone," He was testing Moses' love. So the Lord accepted Moses' intercession as a reflection of His own love for His people and did not destroy them.

¹⁵Then Moses went down the mountain carrying the two tablets of stone which had been written on, both front and back. ¹⁶These were the tablets of stone which God had made and given to Moses after writing on them with His own finger. ¹⁷Part way down, Moses met Joshua, who was still there waiting for him, and together they continued down the mountain. Suddenly, Joshua stopped and said, "Wait! I hear people shouting! It's so loud, it sounds like war!" ¹⁸Moses said, "No, it doesn't sound like war because the shouts don't sound like shouts of victory, neither do they sound like shouts of pain and defeat. The shouting sounds more like what you hear in pagan worship." ¹⁹As they came within sight of the camp, they could see the golden calf, the dancing, the revelry and the people participating in the sexual fertility rites. When Moses saw all this, he became furious. He went to where the people could see him and threw down the tablets of stone so hard that they broke into many pieces. ²⁰Then he walked into the midst of the camp, had the people build a huge fire, took the golden calf, threw it in and melted it down. He ordered them to grind the gold into powder, poured the powder into the water and made the leaders and those principally involved drink it.

²¹Moses then turned to Aaron and said, "What was going on here? What did these people do to you? Why did you help them make a golden calf and then

let them sin like this?" ²²Aaron said, "Don't be so upset! You know that these people are inclined to do evil. That's their nature. ²³They said to me, 'We don't know what happened to Moses, who brought us out of Egypt, so now you take over the leadership. But give us a visible god, one we can see.' ²⁴So I asked them to bring me their gold jewelry which they did, and I threw it into the fire, and when it all melted and flowed together, it made a statue that looked like a young bull!"

²⁵Aaron's excuses didn't make sense. Moses noticed that some of the people were still in a frenzy. He knew that their enemies would see them as a bunch of wild people, easy to attack, rob and slaughter. By not trusting God and standing firm, Aaron had not restrained them and had lost control. ²⁶So Moses went to the entrance of the camp and shouted, "Those who did not take part in this abomination to the Lord, come and stand on my right, and those who did take part but are repentant, come and stand on my left!" Then the whole tribe of Levi and those who had opposed this false worship at the risk of their lives, came and stood on his right, and a great many went and stood on his left. But there was still a large group, mostly foreigners and Hebrews who had married Egyptians, who stubbornly defended what they had done. ²⁷Then Moses turned to the Levites and said, "The Lord God is asking you to take your swords and go through the camp from one end to the other and kill everyone you find defending this kind of worship, whether he's your brother, friend or neighbor. This is nothing but a rebellion against the God of heaven who personally spoke to them just a few days ago." ²⁸So the Levites put on their swords and did as Moses said. That day three thousand men who had led out in this kind of worship died by the sword, not counting the others who would die from the plague that the Lord would send on them later.

However, all those who had taken part but repented were spared. ²⁹Afterward Moses said to the Levites, "Your whole tribe was loyal to God. You have put Him first before your own sons and brothers and you destroyed those who defended what they did. So the Lord will honor your whole tribe by setting you apart for Himself."

³⁰The next day Moses said to the people, "You committed a terrible sin by worshiping a golden calf and saying that this was the God who had brought you out of Egypt. This was nothing but open rebellion. But I'll go back up the mountain and ask the Lord to forgive you." ³¹Then Moses pleaded with the Lord, "These people have committed a terrible sin against you. They made themselves a golden idol and fell down and worshiped it and did some terrible things. ³²Please forgive them. But if you can't forgive them, take my name out of the Book of Life also." ³³The Lord answered, "Whoever persists in rebelling against me, his name will be removed from the Book of Life. Everyone is responsible for his own sins. ³⁴Tell the people to break camp, then take them to the place I'll show you and my Angel will go with you. However, I still need to discipline the people for what they have done."

³⁵Then the Lord sent a plague on the people who had worshiped the golden calf that Aaron had made for them.

Leaving Sinai

33 The Lord said to Moses, "Get ready to break camp and leave the area, you and the people you led out of Egypt, and make your way to the land that I promised to give to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants. ²My Angel will guide you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites by the same means He used to subdue the Egyptians. ³You will go to a rich and fertile land. But I will not be in your midst as I was before. These Israelites are very rebellious and

stubborn, and if they rebel again, my presence will destroy them.”

⁴When the people were told what the Lord had said, they became very sad and took off their jewelry to express their grief. ⁵For the Lord had told Moses, “Say to the children of Israel, ‘You are a most rebellious and stubborn people. If I were to stay in your midst, my presence would destroy you. Yes, take off your jewelry as a sign of repentance and commitment to me and let me decide what to do with you.’” ⁶From Horeb on, it was a perpetual rule not to wear jewelry, as a sign of dependence and reliance on God’s providential care.

The Building of the Sanctuary Delayed

⁷Because of their rebellion, Moses decided to delay the building of the Sanctuary. Instead he had a temporary tent of meeting pitched some distance from the camp. Anyone wishing to ask the Lord anything would go there. ⁸Whenever Moses went out to the tent of meeting to speak with the Lord, the people would reverently stand at the entrance of their tents and watch him until he went inside. ⁹Then a pillar of cloud would come down and hover over the entrance of the tent as the Lord spoke with Moses. ¹⁰As soon as the people would see the cloud coming, they would bow low to the ground and worship. ¹¹When the Lord spoke to Moses, He did so directly, as a man speaks to his friend, but Moses could not see Him. Then Moses would return to the camp, but Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses’ young aide, would stay at the tent.

God’s Promise

¹²When the Lord told Moses to break camp at Sinai and move on, Moses said to the Lord, “You asked me to lead these people to the land you promised to give them, but because of their sin you didn’t say who would go with me. However, you did say that you know me well and are pleased with me. ¹³If you are, Lord, then

teach me your ways and show me the paths I should walk in so I can serve you better and continue to find grace in your sight. But, Lord, remember that these people belong to you, because you chose them to be your people.” ¹⁴The Lord said, “I won’t leave you. I’ll go with you and help you.” ¹⁵Moses said, “But suppose we leave here and then along the way you decide not to go on with us, then it would be better for us to have stayed with you here. ¹⁶How will other nations know that we are your people and how will I know that you are pleased with me, if you don’t stay with us? What else would set us apart from the other people of the world?”

¹⁷The Lord said, “I will go with you and stay with you, so don’t worry. I am pleased with you, Moses, and I know you love me.” ¹⁸Then Moses asked the Lord, “Please, may I see you?” ¹⁹The Lord said, “Come back up the mountain and I’ll let you see the glory of my presence and give you a deeper insight into the kind of God I am. I am a God of mercy and compassion and as gracious and merciful as I am just. ²⁰I will not let you see my face, because no man can look at me and live. ²¹When you come up, I’ll have you stand on a rock near me, ²²and as the glory of my presence begins to pass by, I’ll make an opening in the rock and put you in that cleft and cover you with my hand until I’ve passed by. ²³Then I’ll take my hand away and you’ll see my back, but not my face.”

New Tablets of Stone

34 Then the Lord said to Moses, “I want you to chisel out two tablets of stone like the first ones I gave you, and I’ll write on them the same words that I wrote on the first ones which you broke. ²Have them ready by morning, then come back up to meet me on the top of the mountain and I’ll permit you to see the glory of my presence. ³Bring no one with you, not even part way up, and no one should be anywhere on the mountain.

The sheep and cattle are not to graze at the foot of the mountain."

⁴So Moses chiseled out two tablets of stone like the first. Then early the next morning he went up the mountain again, carrying the two stone tablets with him, and stood on the rock the Lord pointed out to him. ⁵Then the Lord came down on the mountain and stood close to Moses and said, "I am Yahweh. I AM WHO I AM." ⁶He then made a cleft in the rock, put Moses in the opening, held His hand over him and passed by. As He did so, He said, "I am the Eternal One, the Lord God of Israel, full of mercy and compassion. I am gracious and kind, not easily angered, overflowing with love and forgiveness. ⁷I am faithful and true, full of goodness, showing mercy to thousands who love me and keep my commandments, forgiving iniquity and sin but without clearing the guilty and unrepentant, letting the consequences of sin be felt down to the third and fourth generations." ⁸After the Lord had passed by, He removed His hand and Moses saw the back of His person. Moses bowed in awe and reverence and worshiped God. ⁹Then Moses said, "Lord, now I know that you are pleased with me and that I have found favor in your sight. Do forgive our wickedness. We are a stubborn people and have sinned against you. Don't leave us. Accept us once again as your own."

The Covenant Renewed

¹⁰The Lord said to Moses, "I'm ready to renew my covenant with you. In front of all your people I will do wonders such as never have been seen before by any nation on earth. People will see how awesome the things are that I, the Lord, will do for Israel.

¹¹"I will drive the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites out of the land. ¹²Do not make a treaty with them because it would bind you to them and they will lead you into sin. ¹³When you go in to occupy the land they have left, I want you to crush their

altars, pull down their sacred pillars and destroy all the symbols of their goddess Asherah. ¹⁴Do not worship any of their idols, for the Lord is very jealous for your safety, your welfare and your love. ¹⁵Do not make any treaties with these people. If you do, they will invite you to participate in worshipping their gods and sacrificing to them. To be polite you will be tempted to accept their invitation and become involved in their fertility rites and eat their blood-filled meat which was offered to their idols. ¹⁶The next thing you'll know, your sons will marry their daughters and these women will lead your sons to worship their gods.

¹⁷"Never make a likeness of any of their gods.

¹⁸Observe the Passover as a most sacred day. Then for the next seven days observe the Festival of Unleavened Bread. During this time you are to eat only unleavened bread. Do this in the month of Abib, the first month of your religious calendar, the month you left Egypt. ¹⁹Also remember that every firstborn son who opens the womb belongs to me, as well as the firstborn males from your herds and flocks. ²⁰You can buy back every firstborn male donkey with a lamb. If you decide not to buy it back, as soon as it's born, quickly kill it by breaking its neck. You are to give an offering for all your firstborn sons who have opened the womb. Never come to worship empty-handed. ²¹You have six days in which to do all your necessary work, but on the seventh day you are to rest, even during the plowing and harvest season.

²²"In addition to the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread which go together, you are to keep the Harvest Festival, called the Festival of Weeks. This festival should be kept when you begin to harvest your barley, the first of your many crops. Then keep the Festival of Shelters (also called the Festival of Ingathering) toward the end of your harvesting for the year. ²³This means that three times a year, at these three festi-

vals, all men are to come before the God of Israel. ²⁴When I drive out the inhabitants of the land and enlarge your borders, I will see to it that no one attacks you or invades your land while your men come before me at these specified times during the year.

²⁵“When you offer your sacrifices, offer them only with unleavened bread. And during the Passover, don’t keep any part of the animal until the next morning. ²⁶Every year bring the best of the first-fruits of your harvests to the house of the Lord. Do not milk a sheep or a goat, then boil a baby in its mother’s milk. That’s what the heathen do during their fertility rites.”

²⁷Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write all these things in a book, because they’re all in harmony with the other instructions I’ve given you as part of my covenant with you and with Israel.”

Moses’ Face Shines

²⁸Again, Moses was on the mountain with the Lord for forty days and forty nights. All this time he ate and drank nothing, but was kept by the presence of the Lord. The Lord wrote the same commandments He had written before, this time on the stone tablets that Moses had chiseled out.

²⁹When Moses came down from the mountain with the two stone tablets in his hands, he didn’t know that his face was glowing and reflecting the glory of God. ³⁰When Aaron and the leaders of Israel saw his glowing face, they were afraid and backed away from him. ³¹But Moses called to them and asked them to come, so they cautiously approached and told him about his face, and he spoke to them. ³²Then the people quietly assembled, and he shared with them all that the Lord had told him while he was on the mountain. ³³When he finished speaking, he covered his face with a veil so the people would not be afraid of him. ³⁴But when he went into the temporary tent to speak with the Lord, he took the

veil off until he came out and related to the people what the Lord had said. ³⁵Because the people were afraid of his shining face, he would cover it again until the next time he met with the Lord.

The Sabbath

35 Moses shared with the people what the Lord had told him, saying, “These are the instructions the God of Israel gave me when I was with Him on the mountain: ²You have six days to do all your work, but the seventh day is mine. It is a holy day, a Sabbath of rest and worship. Whoever rebels and does unnecessary work that day is to be put to death. ³Do not go out to gather wood to make a fire to cook for yourselves that day.”

Offerings for the Sanctuary

⁴He continued, “The Lord also told me to tell you, ⁵Look around to see what you have to bring me as an offering. It can be gold, silver, bronze, ⁶fine linen, either blue, purple or scarlet yarn, cloth made of goats’ hair, ⁷ram skins dyed red, fine leather, acacia wood, ⁸olive oil to be used for light, spices for anointing oil and for fragrant incense, ⁹precious stones like onyx, and other gems to be mounted on the shoulders of the holy vest called the ephod and on the breastpiece to be worn by the high priest.

Furniture for the Sanctuary

¹⁰All who are skilled and who want to work should come and help make everything that I have asked to be made. ¹¹These are the things you need to make: a tent with coverings, frames, hooks, clasps, crossbars, posts, bases, ¹²an Ark with poles, an atonement lid, a curtain closing off the Most Holy Place, ¹³a table with its poles, to hold bread, utensils and special bread, ¹⁴a seven-branched lampstand with its utensils and individual lamps with olive oil for light, ¹⁵an altar of incense with its poles and sweet-smelling incense, the anointing oil, a curtain to close off the en-

trance to the Holy Place, ¹⁶the altar of sacrifice on which the offerings are burned, its bronze grate, poles and all its equipment, a laver to stand near it, ¹⁷a curtain around the courtyard with posts and bases, a curtain for the entrance into the courtyard, ¹⁸tent pegs and ropes for the Sanctuary and for its enclosure, ¹⁹and woven garments to be worn by those ministering in the Holy Place. These sacred garments are for Aaron the high priest and his sons who are to serve as priests.”

Additional Offerings for the Sanctuary

²⁰Moses dismissed the people and they went back to their tents to see what they could bring as an offering to the Lord. ²¹Everyone whose heart was moved and whose spirit was willing came and brought an offering. These gifts were used for the Sanctuary and to make garments for Aaron and his sons who would serve as priests. ²²So all who wanted to give, men and women, came and brought gold and all kinds of precious stones and jewelry such as pins, earrings, rings, necklaces and many other ornaments. They brought it all as a freewill offering to the Lord. ²³Those who had fine linen, or blue, purple or scarlet yarn, cloth of goats' hair, ram skins dyed red or fine leather gave it to the Lord. ²⁴Those who had silver or bronze brought what they had, and those who had acacia wood that could be used, brought it. ²⁵Women who were skilled brought finely woven linen, or blue, purple or scarlet yarn which they had spun by hand. ²⁶All the women who were skilled and wanted to help spun the goats' hair. ²⁷The leaders brought precious stones such as the onyx and other gems to be mounted on the holy vest and on the breastpiece. ²⁸The people also brought spices, oil for the lamps, together with anointing oil, and spices for sweet smelling incense. ²⁹All the men and women who wanted to help

came eagerly and brought these offerings to the Lord for Moses to construct the Sanctuary.

Craftsmen Equipped by God

³⁰Then Moses said to the children of Israel, “The Lord has chosen Bezalel, the son of Uri from the tribe of Judah, ³¹to work on the Sanctuary. He has placed His Spirit on him and given him skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of artistic work. ³²The Lord wants him to design things to be made out of gold, silver and bronze. ³³He wants him to cut and set precious stones, to carve wood and to use his artistic craftsmanship to help me make His Sanctuary. ³⁴The Lord has given both him and his assistant Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach from the tribe of Dan, the skill to teach others to do the same. ³⁵He has given them skill as craftsmen, designers, embroiderers and weavers of fine linen and yarn dyed blue, purple and scarlet. They will do this with the skill of trained designers and craftsman.”

36 Moses said, “This means Bezalel, Oholiab and all the other workmen to whom the Lord has given skills to make everything needed for the Sanctuary are to do it exactly as the Lord has commanded.”

Offerings More Than Enough

²So Moses called together Bezalel, Oholiab and all the others whose hearts were in the work to whom the Lord had given special skills and told them to begin. ³He gave them all the offerings that the children of Israel had brought to the Lord for making the Sanctuary, but the people continued to bring their offerings because they wanted to. ⁴Then the skilled workmen said to Moses, ⁵“The people are bringing more than is needed for the work which the Lord wants us to do.” ⁶So Moses told the people not to bring any more offerings because the workmen had all they needed to make

the Sanctuary. The people did as Moses said and stopped bringing their offerings. ⁷What they had brought was more than enough to do the work.

Building the Sanctuary

⁸The most skilled workmen among them made the things directly connected with the Sanctuary. They made ten large curtains to drape over the Sanctuary. They made them out of finely woven white linen and embroidered them with figures of angels out of blue, purple and scarlet yarn. ⁹Each curtain was the same size, fifty-one feet long and seven feet wide. ¹⁰They sewed five of them together to make one set, then did the same with the other five to make another set. ¹¹They made loops out of blue cloth all along the edge of the end curtain in one set, then did the same for the other set. ¹²They made fifty loops for the end curtain of the one set and fifty loops for the end curtain of the other set. ¹³Then they made fifty gold clasps and used them to fasten the two sets of curtains together to make one huge piece.

¹⁴They made a roof covering for the Sanctuary out of eleven pieces of cloth made of spun goat hair. ¹⁵The pieces were all the same size, fifty-five feet long and seven feet wide. ¹⁶Then the workmen sewed the pieces together, five in one set and six in another. ¹⁷They put fifty loops along the edge of the last piece of one set and fifty loops along the edge of the first piece of the second set. ¹⁸Then they made fifty bronze hooks to hold the two sets together to make one huge piece. ¹⁹They also made two more roof coverings for the Sanctuary, one out of ram skins dyed red to go above the spun goat hair cover, and the other out of fine leather to serve as an outer cover.

²⁰Next they made hollow wall frames for the Sanctuary out of hard acacia wood. ²¹Each frame was eighteen feet high, thirty-three inches wide and twenty-two inches thick. ²²These hollow frames had solid bottoms with two pegs each for

fitting tightly into two silver feet. All the frames were made the same way. ²³They made twenty frames with pegs for the south side of the Sanctuary, ²⁴and forty silver feet for the frames to sit on, two feet for each frame. ²⁵Then they made twenty frames for the north side of the Sanctuary, ²⁶and forty silver feet to hold those in place. ²⁷For the back of the Sanctuary, the west end, they made six frames, ²⁸and two special frames for the corners to overlap the frames on the sides. ²⁹These corner boards were made to overlap the side frames all the way to the top to give them extra strength; the same was done for both corners. ³⁰So they made a total of eight frames, six for the back wall and two extra for the corners, plus sixteen silver feet, two for each frame.

³¹They made fifteen thick rods of acacia wood, five for the frames along one side of the Sanctuary, ³²five along the other side, and five for the frames on the west end, the back of the Sanctuary. ³³The center crossbar went into one end of the frame extending to the other exactly half way up. This was done all along the line to hold the frames together. ³⁴Then they covered the frames with gold and made gold rings to hold the other four rods in place on the outside of the boards and covered them with gold.

³⁵Next, they made a curtain for the entrance into the Most Holy Place. They made it out of fine linen, then carefully embroidered it with the figures of winged angels from blue, purple and scarlet yarn. ³⁶They made four hollow posts of acacia wood, overlaid them with gold and put gold hooks on them to hold the curtain. Then they made four silver bases to hold the posts in place. ³⁷For the entrance into the Holy Place they made another curtain of fine linen, also skillfully embroidered with winged angels from blue, purple and scarlet yarn. ³⁸For this curtain they made five hollow posts with hooks. They overlaid the tops of the posts and their connecting rods

with gold and made five bronze bases to hold the posts in place.

The Ark of the Covenant

37 Bezalel made the Ark of the Covenant for the Most Holy Place. He made it out of hard acacia wood, fifty-five inches long, thirty-three inches wide and thirty-three inches high. ²He overlaid the chest with pure gold, inside and out. Then he put gold molding around the top like a king's crown. ³He made four gold carrying rings and attached them near the bottom, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other side. ⁴He made two carrying poles out of acacia wood and covered them with gold. ⁵He inserted the poles at the bottom of the Ark from front to back so it could be easily carried. ⁶Then he made the atonement cover for the Ark out of solid gold. It was fifty-five inches long and thirty-three inches wide. ⁷He also made two cherubs of solid gold, each with four wings, for the ends of the cover. ⁸One angel was attached to one end of the cover and the other angel to the other end of the cover. He made the angels and the cover all as one piece. ⁹The angels were attached to the lid in such a way that they faced each other, and one wing of each was spread upward and outward to arch over the lid like a canopy.

The Table to Hold the Showbread

¹⁰Next, he made the table for the bread out of acacia wood. It was forty-four inches long, twenty-two inches wide and thirty-three inches high. ¹¹He covered it with pure gold, then put a gold crown around the top. ¹²He made a three-and-a-half inch rim around it and put gold molding around the frame. ¹³He made four gold rings to carry the table with and put them by the corners where the four legs were. ¹⁴The rings were attached to the table near the top. ¹⁵He made two poles out of acacia wood and also covered them with gold. ¹⁶Then he made plates out of solid gold to hold the

bread. He also made the dishes, cups, bowls and pitchers out of pure gold to be used in connection with the service of the bread and drink offerings.

The Lampstand

¹⁷He made the seven-branched lampstand out of pure gold. He made its base and shaft, its six branches and its decorative flowers with their buds and petals and blossoms all as one piece. ¹⁸The six branches extended out from the shaft and swung upward so the tops were even with the top of the shaft. There were three branches on one side and three on the other side of the shaft. ¹⁹Each branch had three almond-shaped cups decorated with buds and blossoms. ²⁰The center shaft itself had four such almond-shaped cups with buds and blossoms. ²¹One such flower was under the first pair of branches extending from the shaft, the second flower under the second pair, the third flower under the third pair and the fourth flower near the top of the shaft. ²²The shaft, the three pairs of branches and the golden flowers were all made as one piece together with its base. The entire lampstand was hammered as one piece out of solid gold. ²³Then he made seven bowls to hold oil, plus wick trimmers and trays, all out of pure gold. ²⁴He used seventy-five pounds of pure gold according to the standard weight of the Sanctuary to make the seven-branched lampstand and its accessories.

The Altar of Incense

²⁵He also made the altar of incense out of acacia wood. It was twenty-two inches long, twenty-two inches wide and forty-four inches high. It had four horns, one for each of the corners, making one piece with the altar. ²⁶He overlaid the top, the four sides and the four horns with gold. He then put a gold crown molding around the top. ²⁷He made two gold carrying rings for each side, and attached them just below the crown molding to hold the poles that would carry it. ²⁸Then

he made the poles out of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold.

The Oil and the Incense

²⁹And he made the sacred anointing oil and the pure sweet-smelling incense, as a perfumer makes perfume.

The Altar of Burnt Offering

38 Bezalel built the sacrificial altar for the courtyard on which to burn offerings. He made it out of acacia wood, nine feet long, nine feet wide and five-and-a-half feet high. ²He made four horns, one for each corner, to be one with the altar and then overlaid the altar and the horns with bronze. ³He also made all the utensils to be used for the altar out of bronze, as well as the pots, shovels, sprinkling bowls, meat hooks and fire pans. ⁴Then he made a grate out of heavy bronze with four carrying rings, and set it halfway down inside the altar. ⁵He also made four carrying rings, one for each of the four corners of the altar. ⁶He made two poles out of acacia wood with which to carry the altar and covered them with bronze. ⁷Then he inserted them into the rings on each side of the altar. The altar itself was made out of acacia wood, but it was overlaid with thick bronze and was hollow inside.

The Laver

⁸After that, he made the large bronze basin and its base out of polished bronze mirrors donated by a group of women who had dedicated themselves to the Lord and later served at the entrance to the Sanctuary.

The Courtyard

⁹Next, he made the curtain enclosure of the courtyard out of fine linen. On the south side of the Sanctuary the curtains measured one hundred and eighty feet. ¹⁰Then he made twenty hollow posts out of acacia wood, twenty bronze bases for them to sit on, and two silver hooks for each post, one on one side and one on

the other. The silver hooks on the inside of the posts facing the courtyard were to hold the silver rods for the curtains and the silver hooks on the outside of the posts were for the ropes that went to the bronze stakes. ¹¹On the north and south side of the Sanctuary the curtains measured the same, one hundred and eighty feet long, and they had twenty posts, twenty bronze bases and silver hooks and rods. ¹²On the west end of the Sanctuary the curtains were ninety feet long with ten posts, ten bronze bases and silver hooks and rods. ¹³On the east end of the Sanctuary toward the rising sun, the enclosure was also ninety feet long. That's where the entrance was located. ¹⁴The curtains on one side of the entrance were twenty-seven feet long with three posts, three bronze bases and silver hooks and rods. ¹⁵On the other side of the entrance the curtains were also twenty-seven feet long with three posts, three bronze bases and silver hooks and rods. ¹⁶All the curtains making up the enclosure around the courtyard were made of fine white linen. ¹⁷The bases for all the posts were made out of bronze and all the hooks and rods were made out of silver. The crowns on all the posts were overlaid with silver and connected with silver rods. ¹⁸The curtains for the entrance were exquisitely embroidered and made of finely woven linen and yarn that was dyed blue, purple, or scarlet. The entrance was thirty-six feet wide and nine feet high, just as high as the curtains for the enclosure. ¹⁹It had four hollow posts with four bronze bases and silver hooks and rods, and the caps of the posts were overlaid with silver. This made a total of ten posts and bronze bases just like the west end of the courtyard. ²⁰The tent pegs supporting the posts of the courtyard were all made of bronze.

Materials Used for the Sanctuary

²¹This is the list of materials used in building the Sanctuary where the two tablets of stone were kept on which the

Ten Commandments were written. These things were ordered by Moses and recorded by the Levites under the direction of Ithamar, the son of Aaron.²²Bezalel, the son of Uri and the grandson of Hur from the tribe of Judah, made everything the Lord commanded.²³His assistant was Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach from the tribe of Dan. He was a craftsman, designer and weaver, with skill to embroider the white linen curtains with blue, purple and scarlet yarn.

²⁴All the gold that the people brought to the Lord as a thank offering weighed two thousand, one hundred pounds, according to the standard weight of the Sanctuary.²⁵The silver given by those of the congregation who were counted in the census weighed seven thousand, five hundred and fifty pounds, according to the standard weight of the Sanctuary.

²⁶The silver was brought to the Lord by the men of Israel who registered for the census, each one paying his required amount. There were six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty men counted in that census who were twenty years old and up.²⁷The seven thousand, five hundred pounds of silver were used to make the one hundred silver bases for the frames of the Sanctuary and the four posts that held the curtain going into the Most Holy Place. It took seventy-five pounds of silver for each base or a total of seven thousand, five hundred pounds.²⁸Bezalel used the remaining fifty pounds of silver to overlay the tops of the posts and to make the silver rods on which to hang the curtains and the silver hooks on which to lay the rods.

²⁹The bronze that the people brought to the Lord weighed nearly five thousand pounds, according to the standard weight of the Sanctuary.³⁰Bronze was used to make bases for the posts at the entrance of the Sanctuary, for the sacrificial altar on which the offerings were burned and for the grate and the utensils.³¹The bronze was also used to make bases for the posts holding the curtain

around the courtyard and the curtain going into the Holy Place. All the tent pegs for the coverings of the Sanctuary and the posts surrounding the courtyard were also made of bronze.

The Priestly Garments

39 Then they used the finely woven white linen to make garments for the priests to wear as they ministered in the Holy Place. They also made garments for Aaron to wear as he ministered in the Holy Place and in the Most Holy Place. Some of the garments were embroidered with blue, purple and scarlet thread. All this was done just as the Lord had said.

The Ephod

²They also made the holy vest from fine linen, embroidered with blue, purple, scarlet and gold thread.³They did this by hammering out sheets of gold until they were extremely thin, then cutting threads from it to be worked into the blue, purple and scarlet colored embroidery of the holy vest.⁴They also made shoulder pieces which were fastened to the front and back panels of the holy vest.⁵The waistband was from the same material as the vest and made just as carefully. It was made of the blue, purple and scarlet fabric as the Lord had directed.⁶Then they mounted the onyx stones in gold settings and engraved them as an engraver does a seal. They engraved the stones with the names of the twelve sons of Jacob.⁷They fastened these stones to the shoulder pieces of the holy vest as memorial stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel, just as the Lord had said.

The Breastplate

⁸They then made a breastpiece out of the same material as the vest, embroidered with blue, purple and scarlet yarn. It was sewn with gold thread.⁹It was one foot long and one foot wide and looked like a pocket because it was doubled over.¹⁰Then they mounted four rows of precious stones on it. In the first row

there was a ruby, a topaz and a beryl;¹¹ in the second row, a turquoise, a sapphire and an emerald;¹² in the third row, a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst;¹³ and in the fourth row, a chrysolite, an onyx and a jasper. These were all mounted in gold settings.¹⁴ Each of the twelve stones had engraved on it the name of one of the sons of Jacob, representing the twelve tribes of Israel.¹⁵ Then they made two cords of gold, twisted to look like chains.¹⁶ They made two gold rings which were fastened to the two gold settings on the shoulder pieces and also two rings for the two upper corners of the breastpiece.¹⁷ Then they attached one end of the two gold cords to the two gold rings on the breastpiece,¹⁸ and the other end to the gold settings attached to the shoulder pieces of the vest. This let the breastpiece hang from the shoulders over the high priest's chest.¹⁹ They also made two gold rings for the lower corners of the breastpiece on the inside edge.²⁰ They made two more gold rings and attached one on each side of the vest just above the waistband.²¹ Then they tied the rings of the breastpiece to the rings on the vest with a blue cord to pull the breastpiece close to the chest just above the waistband. All this was in harmony with what the Lord had told Moses.

Additional Priestly Garments

²²Next, they made the calf-length robe that the high priest wore under the holy vest which was made without seams from one piece of blue cloth.²³ It had an opening for the head in the center of the robe and the opening was reinforced to keep it from tearing. The sleeves reached only to the elbows.²⁴ They made little balls like pomegranates out of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and attached them in alternate colors to the hem of the robe.²⁵ They also made little bells out of pure gold and attached them to the hem of the robe, one each between the pomegranates.²⁶ So the bells and the pomegranates alternated with each

other all the way around the robe just as the Lord had said.

²⁷They also made long-sleeved robes of finely woven white linen for Aaron and his sons to wear when they served as priests.²⁸ They made flat white turbans for Aaron and his sons and also undergarments.²⁹ The sash or waistband for Aaron was made out of fine linen and embroidered with blue, purple and scarlet thread just as the Lord had told them.

³⁰Then they made a headband for Aaron out of pure gold and inscribed on it, "Holiness to the Lord," meaning that the people were wholly God's, separated fully to Him.³¹ They tied the headband on his forehead with a blue cord to sit across the front of the turban just as the Lord had said.

The Work Completed

³²So all the work on the Sanctuary was completed. The people did everything exactly as the Lord had instructed.³³ Then they brought everything they had made to Moses, all the items for the Sanctuary: the posts with their bases, the hooks, the frames and the crossbars;³⁴ the three roof coverings made of goats' hair, ram skins dyed red and fine leather; as well as the curtains for the ceiling and the entrance into the Most Holy Place.

³⁵They also brought the Ark of the Covenant which would hold the two tablets of stone and its atonement cover;³⁶ the table for the bread with all its utensils, including the bread of the Presence;³⁷ the lampstand with its seven branches made out of pure gold, together with its accessories and oil;³⁸ the gold altar with its incense and anointing oil, the curtains for the entrance into the Holy Place;³⁹ the bronze altar with its bronze grating, its carrying poles and all the equipment needed to offer sacrifices, the large wash basin with its base;⁴⁰ the curtains for the enclosure with the posts and their bases, the special curtains for the entrance to the courtyard, the tent pegs and all the

other equipment needed to set up the Sanctuary.

⁴¹Last, they brought the woven garments for the priests, both the sacred garments for Aaron the high priest and those for his sons. ⁴²The people had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded. ⁴³When they brought it to Moses, he carefully inspected everything and observed that they had made it just as the Lord had said. Then Moses praised the people for what they had done and blessed them.

The Sanctuary Tent Erected

40 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, ²“Pitch the Sanctuary tent on the first day of the first month of the new year. ³After it’s pitched, place the Ark of the Covenant inside the Most Holy Place, then shield it from view with the curtain. ⁴Next, bring in the table for holding the sacred bread and set out everything that goes with it. Then bring in the lampstand and start the lamps burning. ⁵Bring in the altar of incense and set it in the Holy Place in front of the curtain that shields the Most Holy Place. ⁶Set the altar for burnt offerings in the courtyard. ⁷Place the wash basin between the Sanctuary and the altar and fill the basin with water.

⁸“Next set up the posts for the enclosure of the courtyard and hang the curtains that go around it. Then hang the curtain for the entrance to the courtyard. Do everything in the order I have just told you. ⁹After you set things up, but before you use them, take the anointing oil and anoint all the furnishings of the Sanctuary so that everything the people made will be holy. ¹⁰First anoint the altar of sacrifice in the courtyard and all its equipment. By doing this you will dedicate it to me and it will be holy. ¹¹Then anoint the wash basin and its stand, and it will be holy. ¹²Next bring Aaron and his sons into the courtyard, near the entrance to the Sanctuary, and wash their feet and hands. ¹³Put the vestments of the high priest on Aaron, anoint him with

the sacred oil and dedicate him to my service. ¹⁴Next bring in Aaron’s sons, wash their feet and hands, and then put on them the priestly robes. ¹⁵Anoint them just as you anointed Aaron and dedicate them to my service.”

¹⁶Moses did everything the Lord told him to do. ¹⁷So the Sanctuary was set up and anointed on the first day of the first month in the second year after the children of Israel came out of Egypt. ¹⁸Moses did everything the Lord had told him. He set up the silver bases, erected the frames, put the crossbars in place and the posts to hold the curtain for the Most Holy Place. ¹⁹He put the coverings over the Sanctuary just as the Lord had told him. ²⁰He took the two tablets of stone and placed them carefully inside the Ark of the Covenant. He put the carrying poles into the rings attached to the Ark and then added the atonement lid with the cherubim on top of it.

²¹He brought the Ark into the Most Holy Place and hung the curtain to shield it from view just as the Lord had directed. ²²He brought the table for the bread into the Holy Place and set it against the north wall this side of the curtain which shielded the Most Holy Place. ²³He laid out the bread in the order the Lord had told him. ²⁴He brought the lampstand with its seven branches into the Holy Place and set it against the south wall. ²⁵He lit the seven lamps just as the Lord had commanded. ²⁶He brought the altar of incense into the Holy Place and set it in front of the curtain shielding the Most Holy Place. ²⁷He burned sweet-smelling incense on it as the Lord had directed. ²⁸He hung up the curtain at the entrance to the Sanctuary. ²⁹He set the altar of sacrifice in the courtyard and offered burnt offerings and grain offerings on it just as the Lord had said. ³⁰He set the wash basin in place between the altar and the Sanctuary and put water in it for the ritual washing. ³¹This is the basin that Moses and Aaron and his sons used to

wash their hands and feet. ³²They would do this whenever they entered the Sanctuary or approached the altar of sacrifice just as the Lord had told them to do. ³³Moses also set up the enclosure of the courtyard around the Sanctuary and hung the curtains at the entrance. So the Sanctuary was finished and set up just as the Lord had said it should be.

The Glory of the Lord

³⁴Then the cloud of the Lord came down and covered the tent and the glory

of His presence filled the Sanctuary. ³⁵The glory of His presence was so blinding that Moses couldn't even enter the Sanctuary, because of its brilliance. ³⁶Whenever the cloud lifted from the Sanctuary, the people broke camp and followed the cloud. ³⁷But if the cloud did not lift and move on, the people stayed where they were. ³⁸During all their time in the wilderness they could always look up and see the cloud of the Lord's presence over the Sanctuary by day and the fire of His presence by night.

LEVITICUS

The Burnt Offering

1 At first God spoke to Moses from the mountain, but afterward He spoke to him from the cloud that filled the Sanctuary. He told Moses ²to say to the children of Israel: "When you bring an offering to the Lord, it should be an offering of an animal from your own herds or flocks." (There were three major offerings: The whole burnt offering, acknowledging one's sinful nature and total dependence on the Lord for salvation; the sin or trespass offering, confessing specific sins against either God or man; and the peace or fellowship offering, expressing gratitude to God for reconciliation and being at peace with all men. The burnt and peace offerings were always accompanied by grain, salt, olive oil and fermented wine.)

³The Lord said, "If a man volunteers to offer a burnt offering from his cattle, it must be a young bull without defect. He is to bring this animal to the entrance of the Sanctuary. The priest will meet him there, and examine the animal to see if it is without blemish. If he approves, he will invite the man to come into the courtyard. ⁴The priest will then ask the man to lay his hands on the head of the animal. While leaning on the animal, transferring his guilt and that of his family on its head, he is to face the Sanctuary and silently confess his sins to me. The animal will be accepted as a substitute, a stand-in, for him. ⁵To help the man realize that sin brings death, the priest will give him a knife to slit the animal's throat. The priest is to catch some of the blood and sprinkle it against the sides of the altar of sacrifice which is near the courtyard entrance. Only a priest is to apply the sacrificial blood. All this will help the man understand the result of sin and that forgiveness can be granted only by confession and the ministrations of blood. ⁶Then the man should skin the animal and divide its body into its natural

parts. ⁷The priest is to carefully arrange the wood on the altar. (The wood must be solid, without decay.) Then he is to start a fire from coals that are already smoldering there. ⁸He shall salt the head, legs, internal organs and fat of the animal, then arrange them in their natural order on the logs. ⁹The man shall sever the legs of the animal and wash them together with the internal organs with water from the laver, dry them, then give them to the priest who will put them in their proper order on the altar as they were when the animal was alive. This offering is called the whole burnt offering because it is a sign of a man's total dedication to me. It is the kind of dedication that pleases me.

¹⁰"If the man brings an animal from his flock such as a sheep or a goat, it must be a male without defect. ¹¹He shall bring the animal to the Sanctuary courtyard only at the invitation of the priest. He will kill the animal at the north side of the altar, and the priest will catch some of the blood and sprinkle it on all four sides of the altar. ¹²Then the man is to skin the animal and cut it into its natural parts. The priest shall salt the various parts, including its head and its fat, and then arrange them on the wood on the altar. ¹³The man must cut off the legs of the animal and wash them together with the internal organs. He is to give them to the priest who will carefully lay them on the altar as they were when the animal was alive. This is a sign of complete dedication to me, which pleases me.

¹⁴"If the man has nothing to bring but a bird for a whole burnt offering, it must be a dove or a young pigeon. ¹⁵The man is to give the bird to the priest who will take it up to the altar, quickly pinch off its head, drain out the blood against the side of the altar, then throw its head on the fire to burn. ¹⁶Before he places its body on the altar, he is to pluck off its feathers and leave them on the east side

of the altar where the ashes are. ¹⁷He should take hold of the wings in such a way as to tear its body open without tearing off the wings; then he is to place it on the fire to burn. This sacrifice will be accepted as a burnt offering, just as the bull calf, the sheep or the goat are. It will be considered a sign of complete dedication, which greatly pleases me.”

The Grain Offering

2 The Lord continued, “When someone brings a grain offering it should be made from very fine flour, together with salt and olive oil, and sprinkled with sweet herbs. ²He must bring it to the priest who will take a handful of the fine flour with its mixture of oil, salt and sweet herbs and pour the drink offering of the juice of grapes on it. Then it must be burned up on the altar as a sign of heartfelt appreciation for the Lord’s material blessings. ³The rest of the grain offering belongs to the priest. It is most holy because it is part of the offering which was brought to me.

⁴If the worshiper chooses to bake the grain offering, he must prepare a mixture of flour, water, oil and salt, but without yeast, and press it into flat loaves. Or, if he chooses, he may make wafers without yeast and pour oil over them. ⁵If he fries it in a skillet, it must be made with olive oil, but without yeast. ⁶He is to break it up, pour a little oil over it and take it to the priest as an offering. ⁷If he decides to cook it in a pan, it must be made from fine flour, water, olive oil and salt. ⁸Whether the flour is baked or cooked, it should be given to the priest who will bring it before me at the altar. ⁹He will take a part of the grain offering as a reminder of my ownership, and burn it on the altar as a sweet fragrance of gratitude, which is pleasing to me. ¹⁰The rest of the grain offering should be given to the officiating priest and his family. It is most holy because it is part of the man’s dedication offering.

¹¹“Every such grain offering brought to

me must be made without yeast or honey if it is to be burned on the altar. ¹²You can bring it to me as part of the offerings of the firstfruits of your harvest, but it is not part of the offering burned on the altar. ¹³All grain offerings are to be seasoned with salt, a preservative. The salt is a symbol of the covenant I have made with you which is to last forever.

¹⁴“If the offering is made from the first grain that is harvested, it should be crushed and roasted in the fire before you bring it to me. ¹⁵After it’s roasted, put olive oil, salt and sweet smelling herbs on it. ¹⁶The priest will take the remaining portion of the grain offering, sprinkle it with incense and burn it on the altar to acknowledge my ownership.”

The Peace or Fellowship Offering

3 Another major offering the people were to bring to the Lord was the peace and fellowship offering, followed by a sacred meal with family and friends, during which they were to share their testimonies and praises to God. God said, “When a man decides to bring a peace offering to me, he may bring a calf, either male or female, but it must be without defect. ²He is to take it to the Sanctuary and when invited into the courtyard, he is to lay both his hands on the animal’s head and enumerate all the blessings he has received from me. Then he is to kill the animal according to the instructions I have given you before. The priest will catch some of the blood and sprinkle it on the four sides of the altar. ³He shall take the fat from the inner organs of the animal to the altar to be part of the sacrifice made to me by fire. ⁴He will take the kidneys with their fat and the fatty part of the liver to the altar to be burned. ⁵These shall be offered together with the whole burnt offering as a sign that the worshiper is dedicating himself to me and is at peace with God and man. All this should burn on the altar as one offering.

⁶“If the man decides to bring a sheep or goat for a peace or fellowship offering, he

may bring either male or female, but it must be without defect. ⁷If he chooses a lamb, he must bring it to the Sanctuary to be offered just as he would a calf. ⁸He should lay both hands on the animal's head, enumerate the blessings he has received from me, and then kill it in the courtyard just north of the entrance to the Sanctuary. The priest will catch some of the blood and sprinkle it against the four sides of the altar. ⁹The offering must include the fatty tail of the lamb removed close to its body and the fat in and around the internal organs, ¹⁰both kidneys with their fat and the fatty part of the liver. All these should be brought to me. ¹¹The priest will offer these to me by burning them on the altar as he does the grain offering.

¹²"If a man chooses to bring a goat as a peace offering, ¹³he should bring it into the courtyard to the north side of the Sanctuary entrance. There he shall lay both his hands on the animal's head and enumerate the blessings he has received from me. Then he must kill the animal. The priest will catch some of the blood and sprinkle it on all four sides of the altar, ¹⁴and he will take the fat of the animal, which is part of the offering, such as the fat covering the internal organs and around the intestines, ¹⁵the kidneys with their fat and the fatty part of the liver and bring them to me. ¹⁶He should burn these parts on the altar just as he does the grain offering. All the fat belongs to the Lord. ¹⁷No Israelite shall eat fat or blood. This is to be a perpetual ordinance throughout your generations no matter where you live."

The Sin or Trespass Offering

4 Still another major offering was the sin or trespass offering for the confession and forgiveness of all types of sins. These sins were then recorded with the blood of the sacrifice as forgiven sins. The Lord continued instructing Moses, saying, ²"If anyone sins thoughtlessly, either through ignorance or negli-

gence of my law and breaks one of my commandments, the following instructions will help him know what to do. ³If the high priest sins, he has brought guilt on himself and symbolically on the whole nation. He is to bring to the Lord a young bull without defect and offer the animal as an atonement for his sin. ⁴He should bring it into the courtyard, north of the entrance to the Sanctuary. Facing the Sanctuary, he is to lay his hands on the calf's head, lean on it and silently confess his sin. Then he should slit the throat of the young bull, ⁵catch its blood and carry it into the Sanctuary. He is not to eat of the sacrifice, for he cannot bear his own sins. ⁶He will dip a finger into the blood and sprinkle it seven times in front of the curtain at the entrance to the Most Holy Place, ⁷and smear some of the blood on the four horns of the altar of incense that stands in front of that curtain. The rest of the blood he should pour at the foot of the altar of sacrifice in the courtyard. ⁸Then he shall remove all the fat from the internal organs of the animal, ⁹including both kidneys with the fat around them and the fatty part of the liver. ¹⁰He should remove the fat the same way it's removed from the young bull of the peace offering. He will offer this sacrifice for himself and the nation and the guilt of both will be recorded as forgiven. ¹¹The hide of the young bull and all its flesh, as well as its head and legs and inner organs— ¹²all the rest of the young bull—is to be taken outside the camp to a ceremonially clean place where the sacrificial ashes from the altar are dumped. He will burn the body of the animal with a wood fire on the ash heap.

¹³"If the nation as a whole sins thoughtlessly, either through ignorance or negligence of my law and breaks one of my commandments, the people are guilty. ¹⁴When this sin is pointed out to them and they realize what they have done, the leaders shall bring a young bull as a sin offering into the courtyard. ¹⁵The elders will take turns placing their hands

on the animal's head, leaning on it and then one of them is to sacrifice the animal. ¹⁶The high priest will catch some of the blood and take it into the Sanctuary. ¹⁷He will dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it seven times in front of the curtain that veils the Most Holy Place. ¹⁸He is also to smear some of the blood on the four horns of the altar of incense that stands in front of that curtain. The rest of the blood should be poured out at the foot of the altar of sacrifice in the courtyard. ¹⁹He should then remove all fat from inside the animal, the kidneys and their fat and the fatty part of the liver, and burn them on the altar.

²⁰“He is to sacrifice this young bull the same way he would for his own sins. In both cases the animal should be sacrificed as a sin offering. It is a sacrifice made to the Lord for the sin of the nation and their sin will be recorded as forgiven. ²¹Then he should carry the young bull outside the camp and burn it in a ceremonially clean place just as he would do with the young bull that he brought for his own sin, the only difference being that this is a sin offering for the whole nation.

²²“When the head of a tribe or the head of a division of a tribe sins thoughtlessly, either through ignorance or negligence, he is guilty. ²³As soon as his sin is pointed out and he realizes what he has done, he should bring a male goat without defect as a sin offering to me. ²⁴The ruler or chief must bring it into the courtyard, lay both his hands on its head, lean on it, confess his sin, then kill the animal where the animals for the whole burnt offerings are killed. This is an offering to remove guilt. ²⁵The priest will catch some of the blood, dip a finger in it, smear it on the four horns of the altar of sacrifice there in the courtyard, then pour the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar of burnt offering. ²⁶Then he shall remove all the fat and burn it on the altar just as he burns the fat of the animal brought as a peace offering. This way the priest will

make atonement for the sin of the official and his sin shall be recorded as forgiven.

²⁷“If one of the original inhabitants of the land who has chosen to worship me sins thoughtlessly, either through ignorance or neglect of my law, and breaks one of my commandments, he is guilty. ²⁸When his sin is pointed out and he realizes what he has done, he is to bring a female goat without defect to me as an offering. ²⁹He should bring it into the courtyard, lay his hands on its head, lean on it, and by confession and faith in me, transfer his sin to the animal. Then he must sacrifice it where the animals for the whole burnt offerings are killed. ³⁰The priest will catch some of the blood, dip a finger in it, smear it on the four horns of the altar of sacrifice there in the courtyard, then pour the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar. ³¹Then he will remove all the goat's fat and burn it on the altar just as he burns the fat of the animals brought as peace offerings. This way the priest will make atonement for the man's sins, and they shall be recorded as forgiven.

³²“A man may also bring a female sheep, but it must be without defect. ³³He should bring it into the courtyard, lay his hands on its head, lean on it and kill it where the animals for the whole burnt offerings are killed. ³⁴The priest will catch some of the blood, dip a finger in it, smear some of it on the four horns of the altar of sacrifice there in the courtyard, then pour the rest of the blood at the foot of the altar. ³⁵Then he will remove all the fat and burn it on the altar just as he burns the fat of the animal brought as a peace offering. That way the priest will make atonement for the man's sin and it will be recorded as forgiven.”

5 These are the things for which a sin offering must be made. The Lord said, “If a person is ordered to testify in court but refuses to tell what he has seen or what he knows, he is guilty of

sin and is subject to punishment. ²If someone touches anything ritually unclean such as the carcass of an unclean wild or domestic animal, or the carcass of an unclean animal that crawls on the ground, whether he does so intentionally or not, he is ritually unclean and guilty. ³If someone touches anything that would make him ritually unclean from another person, whether he does so intentionally or not, he is ritually unclean. If he does it ignorantly, as soon as he realizes that what he did was wrong, he becomes guilty. ⁴If someone thoughtlessly makes a rash vow to do something or to refrain from doing certain things and breaks that vow, as soon as he realizes what he has done, he is guilty. ⁵Anyone who is guilty of any of these things must confess that sin. ⁶Then he should bring a female lamb or goat from the flock as an offering to me. The priest is to offer the animal as a sacrifice for the man's sin.

⁷"If a man can't afford a lamb or a goat, he is to bring two doves or two young pigeons, one as a sin offering and the other as a whole burnt offering. ⁸He should take them to the priest who will offer the sin offering first. The priest will take a dove or a pigeon and quickly pinch its neck without pulling off its head, ⁹then sprinkle some of its blood on the side of the altar and squeeze the rest of the blood out against the foot of the altar. This is the offering for the man's sin. ¹⁰Then he will offer the second dove or pigeon as a whole burnt offering to complete the atonement ritual and the man's sin will be recorded as forgiven.

¹¹"If a person can't afford two doves or two young pigeons, he is to bring two pounds of fine flour as a sin offering. He should not put any olive oil or sweet herbs on it, because it is a sin offering, not a grain offering. ¹²He shall bring this flour to the priest, who will take a handful of it as a memorial portion of the offering, then burn it on the altar with the

other sin offerings, because it has been brought to me as an offering for sin. ¹³This way the priest will make an atonement for the man and his sin shall be recorded as forgiven. The rest of the flour belongs to the priest, just like the regular grain offering."

Restitution

¹⁴The Lord also said to Moses, ¹⁵"If anyone sins by choosing to remain ignorant of my law and withholds or pays less than was due to me in tithes, firstfruits, or anything else that is holy, he is guilty. When he realizes that what he did was wrong, he shall bring a ram from the flock, one of value without defects, as a sin offering to me. The animal's value will be determined according to the standard set by the Sanctuary. If the man brings the equivalent in money, it is considered a sin offering because he has sinned against me. ¹⁶He shall return to me what he failed to give, plus twenty percent. He must give it to the priest and the priest will make an atonement for him with the ram that he brought. Then the man's sin will be recorded as forgiven.

¹⁷"If anyone breaks any of my commandments by choosing to remain ignorant of my law, he is still guilty. ¹⁸When this is pointed out to him, and he realizes that what he did was wrong, he is to confess that sin. Then he is to bring a ram without defects to the priest, or the equivalent value in silver. The priest is to offer this sheep as a sacrifice to make atonement for the man's willful ignorance and his sin will be recorded as forgiven. ¹⁹It is a sin offering to cover the guilt of his trespass."

6 Next the Lord talked about things knowingly done, for which a sin offering must be made. ²"If a person deceives his neighbor about what happened to something he was taking care of for his neighbor, deceives him about a deposit or pledge, lies about a promise he made

to him, steals from him or cheats him,³ if a person finds something that was lost and doesn't return it but lies about it, then swears he told the truth, or if he does anything such as that,⁴ he has sinned against God and against the owner. He shall return what he took by manipulation, what the neighbor left in his care, the lost property he found which wasn't his, what he stole,⁵ or anything else that he received through swearing falsely. He must confess what he has done and pay the full price plus twenty percent. He should return what he took as soon as he is convicted of his guilt, giving it back to the owner before coming to the Sanctuary with his offering.⁶ He should bring a ram without defect as a sin offering to me. In cases of dispute over the value of the restitution, the priest will estimate the damages.⁷ He will offer the animal as a sacrifice for the man's sin against his neighbor, which is a sin against the Lord, and what he did will be recorded as forgiven."

The Law of Offerings

⁸Then the Lord said to Moses,⁹"The priests shall let the evening offering lie on the altar and slowly burn all night. The fire should not go out.¹⁰In the morning the priest is to put on his linen undergarments and his long linen robe, come into the courtyard, remove the ashes of the offering that burned during the night and put them beside the altar.¹¹Then he is to change his clothes and take the ashes outside the camp to a ritually clean place.¹²The fire on the altar is always to be kept burning, it must not be allowed to go out. Every morning the priest should add firewood and place on the altar the whole burnt offering for that day. He must burn it together with the fat from the peace offering.¹³The fire must be kept burning continuously day and night. It must never be allowed to go out.

¹⁴"Grain offerings shall be brought to me at the altar by the priests, Aaron's sons.¹⁵One of them shall take a handful

of fine flour with oil mixed in it, together with sweet smelling herbs and hold it up as a memory offering from the worshiper before burning it on the altar where the whole burnt offering is smoldering. The fragrance from the smoke will please me because it represents the faithfulness of my people.¹⁶The rest of the grain offering is for the priests, Aaron and his sons, to eat. They will make it into unleavened bread and eat it only in the courtyard of the Sanctuary.¹⁷This bread should be made without yeast. I have given them a portion of this offering. It is most holy just like the sin offering and the peace offering.¹⁸Any male descendant of Aaron may eat it. It is the priest's share of the grain offering brought to me and burned by fire. Anything that touches it is to be considered holy."

¹⁹Then the Lord gave additional instructions on Aaron's anointing as high priest.²⁰He said, "Each priest is to bring two pounds of flour for a grain offering to me, one quart in the morning and one in the evening.²¹It must be well mixed with olive oil and water and baked on a grid-dle. The grain offering should then be broken in pieces and offered to me.²²This shall be done by every one of Aaron's descendants when they're anointed as high priests. The grain offering shall be completely burned as a sacrifice made to me. It is a perpetual offering.²³No part of the grain offering that a priest brings to me on the day of his dedication is to be eaten. It should be burned completely as an offering that is most holy."

²⁴The Lord continued,²⁵"Tell Aaron and his sons that when they accept a sin offering from the people, the animal should be killed in the courtyard where the whole burnt offerings are killed. These offerings are most holy.²⁶A portion of it should be eaten in the courtyard of the Sanctuary by the priest who offers it.²⁷No one is to touch these offerings except those who are called to do so. The clothes that are spattered with

the animal's blood are to be washed in a place that is ritually holy.

²⁸"If the portion of the offering belonging to the priest is cooked in a clay pot, that pot must be broken afterwards. If it is cooked in a bronze pot, the pot must be thoroughly scrubbed and carefully rinsed with water. ²⁹Any male of the priest's family may eat of this offering, but they are to remember that it is a portion of a most holy offering made to me. ³⁰No portion of the sin offering should be eaten if any of its blood is to be used for atonement in the Holy Place. It must be completely consumed by fire."

7 "These are the regulations for the priests to follow when they sacrifice an animal as a sin offering. This is an offering that is most holy. ²The animal brought shall be killed where animals for the whole burnt offerings are killed, and its blood shall be sprinkled against all four sides of the altar. ³The animal's fat must be removed and offered on the altar, including its fatty tail, the fat covering the intestines, ⁴both kidneys with the fat around them and the fatty part of the liver which shall be removed with the kidneys. ⁵The priest will burn all the fat on the altar as an offering made to me by fire. It is a part of the sin offering. ⁶All the priests may eat from the sin offering, but it must be eaten in a holy place, for it is most holy. ⁷The regulations for carrying out the sin offering are the same as for the trespass offering. A portion of the animal's meat will always go to the priest who offered it. ⁸The priest may keep the hide of the animal that is brought to me as a whole burnt offering, but not the hide of the animal brought as a sin offering.

⁹"A portion of every grain offering, either baked in an oven, cooked in a pan or on a griddle, belongs to the priest who offers it. ¹⁰And a portion of every grain offering, whether mixed with olive oil or not, also belongs to the priest and shall be equally shared by him with his fellow priests.

¹¹"There are also regulations for sacrificing an animal as a peace or fellowship offering. ¹²When a man brings an animal for a peace offering for a vow or because he's thankful, he shall also bring with it either bread made with oil and without yeast, wafers made without yeast and spread with oil, or cakes made of fine flour mixed in oil. ¹³With the peace offering you may bring bread made with yeast. ¹⁴One portion of bread from each offering must be given to the priest who will wave it before the altar of burnt offering and in this way offer it to me. It will then belong to the priest who will offer the animal and sprinkle its blood. ¹⁵If the peace offering is one of thanksgiving, the portion of the meat of the animal that the priest takes must be no more than can be eaten that day. Nothing must be left over and kept for the next day. ¹⁶If a man brings a peace offering as a vow or a freewill offering, the portion of the meat of the animal that the priest takes should be eaten the same day, but if some is left over, it may be eaten the next day. ¹⁷If any meat is left until the third day, it must be burned up. ¹⁸If any of it is eaten on the third day, the offering will not be credited to the man who brought it, and those who eat of it will be held responsible for what they have done.

¹⁹"If the meat taken by the priest from the offering touches anything ritually unclean, it must not be eaten; it must be burned. The meat from the offering that has not touched anything unclean may be eaten by anyone who is clean. ²⁰If anyone who is ritually unclean eats it, he will be cut off from the rights and privileges of the people with no share in the blessings of the covenant. ²¹If anyone touches anything ritually unclean, whether a man or an animal or anything else, and then eats the meat from the peace or fellowship offering at the sacred meal that follows, he must be separated from the people."

Fat and Blood Must Not Be Eaten

²²The Lord continued, ²³"The children

of Israel shall not eat any fat from cattle, sheep or goats. ²⁴Fat from an animal found dead or torn by wild animals may be used for other purposes, but it must not be eaten. ²⁵Anyone who eats the fat from an animal that is offered as a peace offering to me will lose the rights and privileges of an Israelite and will have no share in the covenant. ²⁶No blood of any bird or animal shall be baked or eaten by an Israelite, no matter where he lives. ²⁷Anyone who eats or drinks blood must be separated from my people."

The Priestly Portion

²⁸Then the Lord said to Moses, ²⁹"Whoever brings a peace or fellowship offering to me shall think of it as a special gift. ³⁰He should bring the offering to the Sanctuary himself. The whole sacrifice shall be presented to me, but the fat of the animal with its breast will be brought to the altar. ³¹The fat is to be burned. The breast should be waved before me, but it is for Aaron and his sons. ³²The right thigh from your peace offerings is for the priest. He will wave it up and down before me and then it will be his. ³³The priest who offers the blood and fat of the animal to me on behalf of the man is to be given the right thigh. ³⁴I have taken both the breast and the right thigh of the peace offering from the children of Israel and given them to the priests. ³⁵This part of the offering will belong to Aaron and his sons from the day they are dedicated and set apart as priests. ³⁶On the day of their dedication I will give the priests this part of the offering, and this shall be the standard practice in Israel for generations to come."

³⁷So these are the rules for the whole burnt offerings, the peace offerings, and the sin offerings with their accompanying grain offerings, as well as the offering for the ordination of the priests. ³⁸The Lord gave all these instructions to Moses on Mount Sinai when the children of Israel were still in the wilderness, so the people and priests would know what to do when they brought Him their offerings.

Aaron and His Sons Anointed

8 The Lord continued, ²"Bring Aaron and his sons into the courtyard at the entrance of the Sanctuary. Also bring the priestly garments with you, the anointing oil, a young bull for a sin offering, two rams and a basket of bread made without yeast. ³Then tell the people to come to the entrance of the courtyard." ⁴Moses did what the Lord had said, and when the people assembled at the entrance of the courtyard, ⁵he said to them, "What you're about to witness is what the Lord has told us to do."

⁶Moses had instructed Aaron and his sons not to wear their priestly garments. He had them come into the courtyard and he washed their hands and feet. ⁷He put a white linen robe with long sleeves on Aaron and tied it with the white linen sash. He put the sleeveless blue tunic on him and the embroidered holy vest over that, tying it close to him with the blue, purple and scarlet waistband made of the same material. ⁸Then he put the breastpiece on him with its twelve precious stones and the Urim and Thummim. ⁹Last of all he put the white turban on Aaron's head and positioned the golden nameplate on his forehead as a sign of dedication to the Lord and tied it in place just as the Lord had said to do.

¹⁰When this was done, Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the two rooms of the Sanctuary, the courtyard and everything that was in it. ¹¹He took the oil and sprinkled it seven times on the altar, on its utensils and on the water basin and its stand, dedicating them to the service of the Lord. ¹²Then he poured the anointing oil on Aaron's head, setting him apart for the service of the Lord. ¹³Next Moses asked the sons of Aaron to come forward and he put long-sleeved white linen robes on them, tied sashes around their waists, then put the priestly turbans on their heads just as the Lord had said to do.

¹⁴After that, he brought in the young bull for a sin offering and asked Aaron

and each of his sons to lay their hands on the head of the animal. ¹⁵Then he killed the young bull and caught some of its blood and with his finger smeared some of it on the horns of the altar of sacrifice dedicating it to the Lord. The rest of the blood he poured out at the foot of the altar. By doing this he set them apart for the service of the Lord. ¹⁶He took the fat from the internal organs of the animal, both kidneys with the fat around them, and the fatty part of the liver and burned it on the altar. ¹⁷The rest of the bull—its skin, meat and intestines—he took outside the camp and burned just as the Lord had told him to do.

¹⁸He brought one of the rams into the courtyard to sacrifice as a whole burnt offering, and again he asked Aaron and each of his sons to lay their hands on its head. ¹⁹He killed the ram, caught some of its blood and sprinkled it on all four sides of the altar. ²⁰Then he cut the ram in pieces and burned the head, the pieces and the fat on the altar. ²¹He washed its internal organs and hind legs with water and made sure that the whole ram was burned on the altar. This pleased the Lord, for it was an offering made by fire, just as Moses had been told.

²²Moses brought the second ram into the courtyard, the one to be sacrificed for the dedication of Aaron and his sons, and they each laid their hands on its head. ²³Moses killed the ram, caught some of its blood, and with his finger smeared some of it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. ²⁴He also brought Aaron's sons forward and put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears, on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet. Then he sprinkled the rest of the blood on all four sides of the altar. ²⁵He took the fat of the ram, its fatty tail, the fat from the inward organs, the kidneys and the fat around them, the fatty part of the liver and the thigh of the right leg. ²⁶He also took from the basket

a loaf of bread made without yeast, one cake made without yeast and a wafer smeared with oil, together with the fat from the right thigh. ²⁷Moses placed all of these in the hands of Aaron and his sons and they waved them up and down and back and forth before the Lord. ²⁸Then Moses took them from their hands and put them on the altar and burned them with the whole burnt offering as a sign of complete dedication of the priests to the Lord. This was an offering made by fire and it greatly pleased the Lord. ²⁹Moses took the breast of the ram and waved it before the Lord. This part was for him, according to the command of the Lord.

³⁰Then he took the fragrant anointing oil and blood from the altar and sprinkled it on Aaron and his garments and on his sons and their garments. This is the way Moses dedicated them and their vestments to the service of the Lord.

³¹After this Moses said to Aaron and his sons, "Take your portion of the meat, cook it in the courtyard by the Sanctuary and eat it together with some of the bread from the basket as the Lord said.

³²Take any meat and bread that is left over and burn it on the altar. ³³Don't leave the courtyard of the Sanctuary for the next seven days. It will take seven days to do all that needs to be done for your ordination. ³⁴Today we have done what the Lord requires of us; we have made atonement to cover your sins. ³⁵So you and your sons are to stay here for the next seven days and seven nights and give yourselves to study and prayer. Then each day we'll do what the Lord wants us to do. If you leave the courtyard of the Sanctuary, you will die. This is what the Lord told me to tell you." ³⁶So Aaron and his sons stayed in the courtyard seven days and seven nights and did everything the Lord asked them through Moses to do.

The Priestly Ministry

9 On the eighth day, the day after the ordination of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood, Moses called them and the leaders of Israel together ²and said to Aaron, "Take a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a whole burnt offering—both must be without defect—and offer them to the Lord. ³Tell the leaders to bring a male goat for a sin offering, a year-old calf and a year-old lamb, all without defect, for a whole burnt offering, ⁴and a young bull and a ram for a peace or fellowship offering. They are to sacrifice these animals to the Lord together with a grain offering mixed with oil. (Later, when they reached Canaan, they were told to add a drink offering.) They are to do this because today you are to see the glory of the Lord. Today is the day the Lord will appear in the midst of Israel." ⁵So the leaders of Israel brought everything to the Sanctuary that Moses through Aaron had asked them to bring. The people also came and stood before the Lord. ⁶Moses said to the leaders, "The Lord has asked you to do all this so He can come in our midst and appear to us in the dazzling light of His presence." ⁷Then he turned to Aaron and his sons who were now anointed as priests and said, "First, sacrifice the animals for the sin offering and the whole burnt offering that you brought for yourselves, then take the animals that the leaders brought and offer them to the Lord."

⁸So Aaron placed his hands on the head of the calf and silently confessed his sins. He then killed the calf as a sin offering for himself. ⁹His sons caught the blood, then he dipped his finger in it, smeared some of it on each of the four horns of the altar and poured the rest of it at the base of the altar. ¹⁰Next he burned the fat of the animal, its kidneys and their fat and the fatty part of the liver, just as the Lord had said. ¹¹But the rest of the animal, as well as the hide, he burned outside the camp.

¹²Then he killed the ram as a whole

burnt offering for himself. Again his sons caught the blood, but this time he sprinkled it on the four sides of the altar. ¹³They then handed him the pieces of the burnt offering, including the head, which he burned on the altar. ¹⁴He washed the internal organs and the legs of the ram, put them on top of the other pieces and burned them also.

¹⁵Having finished offering the sacrifice for himself exactly as Moses had instructed him, Aaron took the goat that the leaders of the people had brought to the Lord for a sin offering. He killed it and then offered it the same way he had offered his own sin offering. ¹⁶He also took the whole burnt offerings the leaders of the people had brought and offered them to the Lord in the same way he had presented his own whole burnt offering. ¹⁷Then he brought the grain offering, took a handful of it and burned it on the altar in connection with the whole burnt offering.

¹⁸He also killed the young bull and the ram the leaders had brought for a peace offering. His sons caught the blood, and he sprinkled it on the four sides of the altar. ¹⁹The fat of the young bull and the ram, including the fat tail, the kidneys and their fat and the covering of the liver of both animals, ²⁰he put on top of the breasts and carried it all to the altar where only the fat was to be burned. ²¹The breasts and the right thigh of the animals he waved as a special gift before the Lord as Moses had told him.

²²When Aaron finished his work, he turned to the people, raised his hands and blessed them. Then he stepped down from the platform around the altar because the sacrifices were finished. ²³Moses and Aaron went into the Sanctuary and when they came out, they both blessed the people. And the Lord appeared in a dazzling light above the Sanctuary to show His pleasure over everything that had been done. ²⁴Suddenly fire came out from the dazzling light and consumed the whole burnt offering and the fatty parts on the altar. When the peo-

ple saw this, they stood in awe! Then they gave a shout of joy, fell on their knees and bowed with their faces to the ground.

Nadab and Abihu Offer Strange Fire

10 When time came for Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu, to officiate at the Sanctuary, they took their censers and, under the influence of wine, put ordinary fire in them instead of fire from the altar. Then they walked toward the entrance of the Holy Place to go into the Sanctuary to minister before the Lord. ²Suddenly fire came out from the presence of the Lord and struck them, and they died before the Lord in the sight of the people. ³Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord meant when He said, 'All who minister before me need to know that I am holy. I will be glorified and honored in the sight of my people.'" Aaron listened to Moses, but said nothing.

⁴Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel, Aaron's uncle, and said to them, "Come and carry the bodies of your cousins outside the camp away from the Sanctuary." ⁵They carried out the bodies of Aaron's sons, still dressed in their priestly garments. ⁶Then Moses turned to Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar and said, "Don't let your hair fly loose or uncover your heads in mourning, and don't tear your clothes in grief; otherwise, the Lord will destroy you too, and the whole community will suffer. Let your relatives and the people of Israel mourn over those the Lord has destroyed. ⁷Don't leave the courtyard of the Sanctuary and interrupt God's services or you, too, will die, because the Lord appointed you to His service." So they dutifully carried on their ministry.

Alcohol Forbidden

⁸The Lord said to Aaron, ⁹"You and your sons are not to drink wine or any kind of alcoholic beverage when you come into my Sanctuary to serve me or you will die. This is a standing order for

all generations to come. ¹⁰You need to know the difference between what is holy and what is not holy, between what is right and what is wrong. ¹¹You and your sons need to be examples to the people and teach them the laws that I have given to Moses."

¹²Moses then said to Aaron and his two other sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, "Take the grain offering left from the offerings made to the Lord, make unleavened bread with it, and then eat it beside the altar because the offering is most holy. ¹³This offering belongs to you and your sons from the offerings brought to the Lord to be burned by fire, but it should only be eaten in a place that is holy. This is what the Lord has ordered. ¹⁴You, your sons and your daughters are to have the breast and the thigh of the peace offerings that are waved before the Lord. You are to eat these in a clean place. ¹⁵You are to wave the breast and the thigh as a special gift to the Lord at the time when you burn the fat of the animal on the altar. After that, these pieces will be yours to eat and will be your family's regular share throughout your generations. These instructions are from the Lord."

¹⁶Moses came into the courtyard looking for the goat to be offered as a sin offering. He asked Eleazar and Ithamar about it, and they told him that it had already been burned up. Then Moses became very angry because they had not gone through the proper ritual. He said to them, ¹⁷"You were supposed to eat your part of the sin offering in the courtyard. This offering is most holy and every part of the ritual is very important. It is to make an atonement for the people signifying that their guilt is now carried by you. ¹⁸Since its blood was not to be taken into the Sanctuary, you should have eaten the meat while in the courtyard as a symbol of the transfer of sin. I told you that before."

¹⁹Then Aaron spoke up for his sons, "My sons and I are still shaking because of what happened to Nadab and Abihu earlier today. Is the Lord happier with

the right ritual or with the right attitude? How could we take the guilt of the people on ourselves by eating our portion of the meat when we were in this frame of mind?" ²⁰When Moses understood the reason behind what Aaron and his sons did, he was satisfied.

Dietary Laws

11 The Lord said to Aaron and Moses, ²"Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: These are the land animals that you may eat. ³You may eat any animal that has divided hooves and chews the cud. ⁴Some animals chew the cud but don't have divided hooves, so don't eat them. The camel chews the cud but doesn't have divided hooves. It's unclean. ⁵The rock badger chews the cud but has no split hoof. It's unclean. ⁶The rabbit, while it appears to chew the cud, has no split hoof. It's unclean. ⁷Do not eat pig. It has a split hoof but doesn't chew the cud. It's unclean. ⁸You are not to eat these animals or touch their dead bodies for they are all unclean.

⁹"As for fish, you may eat any kind of fish taken from the sea or from rivers and streams as long as they have fins and scales. ¹⁰But you are not to eat anything that moves in the water which doesn't have fins and scales. ¹¹Such seafood is unclean. You are not to eat these kinds of fish or touch their dead bodies, for they are unclean. ¹²You are not to eat any creature taken from the sea or from rivers and streams if it does not have fins and scales. Such should be repugnant to you as food.

¹³"Now as for fowl, these are the ones you must not eat: eagles, buzzards, vultures, kites, ¹⁴falcons, ¹⁵ravens, ¹⁶hawks, ostriches, sea gulls, ¹⁷owls, crows, cormorants, ¹⁸pelicans, ospreys, ¹⁹storks, herons, bats and hoopoes. They are all unclean.

²⁰"Also, all winged insects are unclean, ²¹except those that have jointed legs and hop. ²²You may eat grasshoppers, locusts, crickets and the like. ²³But all other insects which have wings and

crawl along the ground are unclean to you. You are not to eat them.

Unclean Animals

²⁴"Whoever touches the dead body of any one of these unclean animals will be ritually unclean until that evening. ²⁵Whoever picks up the dead body of one of these unclean animals must afterward wash his clothes and he will be ritually unclean until that evening. ²⁶The bodies of dead animals that do not have split hooves and do not chew the cud are unclean. ²⁷Also animals that walk on all fours and have paws are unclean. ²⁸Anyone who picks up their dead bodies must afterward wash his clothes and he will be ritually unclean until that evening.

²⁹"The animals that creep close to the ground such as weasels, rodents and lizards are unclean. ³⁰Also geckos, chameleons, snails, moles and other such animals are unclean. ³¹Any animal that slithers along the ground is unclean. Whoever touches them when they're dead will be ritually unclean until that evening. ³²Anything these animals fall on when they die will be unclean, whether it's wood, cloth, leather or sackcloth. It must be washed, but will be unclean until that evening. ³³If such an animal falls into a clay pot, everything in it will be unclean and the pot must be broken.

³⁴Any food on which water from that pot was afterward poured is unclean and any kind of drink from that pot is unclean. ³⁵Anything on which even part of their carcass falls is unclean, whether it be a clay cooking pot or a clay oven; it must be destroyed because it's unclean.

³⁶A spring or a cistern holding water into which such an animal falls will still be clean, but anything else that their dead bodies touch will be unclean. ³⁷If their bodies fall on seeds to be planted, the seeds will remain clean, ³⁸but if the seeds are soaking in water and a dead body of one of these animals falls into the water, those seeds are unclean.

³⁹"If a clean animal that you are al-

lowed to eat is not slaughtered but dies on its own, anyone who touches its body will be ritually unclean until that evening. ⁴⁰Anyone who eats part of that animal must wash his clothes and will be ritually unclean until that evening.

⁴¹Every creature that moves along the ground is unclean to you and must not be eaten, ⁴²whether it crawls on its belly, has four legs or has many legs. ⁴³Do not defile yourself by eating any of these unclean creatures. Do not be made unclean because of them. ⁴⁴I am the Lord your God and you must be holy because I am holy. Do not defile yourself by eating crawling animals. ⁴⁵I am the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God, therefore live clean and holy lives because I am holy."

⁴⁶These are the laws that God gave about animals, birds, fish and other things that live in water and creatures that move along the ground. ⁴⁷This was so everyone could know the difference between what is clean and unclean, between those animals which are good for food and those which are not.

Required Ritual After Childbirth

12 The Lord also said to Moses, ²"Tell the children of Israel that when a woman gives birth to a son, she will be ritually unclean for seven days in the same way she is ritually unclean during her monthly periods. ³On the eighth day she should have the boy circumcised. ⁴She will continue to be ritually unclean for another thirty-three days until she is rested and free from the loss of blood. During that time she must not touch anything holy or go to the Sanctuary or participate in sacred ceremonies until the days of her purification are over. ⁵If she gives birth to a daughter, she will be ritually unclean for fourteen days in the same way she is ritually unclean during her monthly periods. Then she is to wait another sixty-six days until she is rested and free from the loss of blood. During this time she should not

touch anything holy nor go to the Sanctuary until the days of her purification are over.

⁶"When the time of the new mother's purification is over, she must bring a sacrifice to the priest at the entrance of the courtyard of the Sanctuary. She must give a year-old lamb for a whole burnt offering and a dove or a pigeon for a sin offering. ⁷The priest will offer these to take away her impurity. Then she'll be clean. These are the regulations for a woman who has given birth to a boy or girl. ⁸If the woman cannot afford to bring a lamb, she is to bring one dove or pigeon for a whole burnt offering and one for a sin offering. The priest will offer them for her and perform the necessary ritual to take away her impurity and she will be clean."

Leprosy

13 Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ²"When anyone has a swelling, a scab, a rash or a bright red spot on his skin, it could be the beginning of a leprous disease. So he should see Aaron, the high priest, or one of his sons who is serving as priest. ³The priest will examine the man's sore and if the hair in the sore has turned white and the sore appears to be deeper than the rest of the skin, it is a leprous disease. The priest must pronounce him ritually unclean. ⁴But if the white spot does not appear to be deeper than the rest of the skin and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest shall isolate the man for seven days. ⁵On the seventh day the priest must examine him again and if the sore looks the same and has not spread, he shall isolate him for another seven days. ⁶The priest will examine him again on the seventh day and if the sore has faded and has not spread, the priest will pronounce him clean. It was only a rash. The man should wash his clothes and he will then be ritually clean. ⁷Now if the rash reappears after the priest has pronounced him clean, he must go back and show himself to the priest. ⁸The priest must examine him

again and if the rash has spread, he will pronounce the man unclean. It is the beginning of a leprous disease.

⁹“If anyone has a skin problem of any kind that looks like a disease he must show himself to the priest. ¹⁰The priest will examine him and if there is a white swelling in the skin that has turned the hair white and it is full of pus, ¹¹it is a leprous disease and the priest will pronounce him unclean. He should not isolate him for observation, because he's obviously unclean. ¹²Now if the disease breaks out and has spread over the man's body as far as the priest can see, ¹³the priest must closely examine him and if these same white spots are over his whole body, he will pronounce him clean. ¹⁴But from the moment raw flesh appears in the sore, the man is unclean. ¹⁵So the priest must examine him again and if he sees raw flesh in the sore, he will pronounce the man unclean. The raw flesh means he has a leprous disease and is therefore ritually unclean. ¹⁶If the raw flesh turns white, he must return to the priest. ¹⁷The priest will examine him again and if the sores are indeed turning white, he will pronounce the man ritually clean.

¹⁸“If someone has a boil and it heals, ¹⁹but then a white swelling or a reddish-white spot appears where the boil was, he must go to see the priest. ²⁰The priest will examine it and if it is more than skin deep and the hair in it has turned white, he will pronounce the man unclean. It is a leprous disease that has started in the boil. ²¹But, if the priest examines it and there is no white hair in it and it is no more than skin deep and has faded, then he will isolate him for seven days. ²²If it is spreading after seven days, the priest will pronounce him unclean. It is a leprous disease. ²³If the spot is unchanged and has not spread, it is only a scar from the boil. The priest will pronounce him ritually clean.

²⁴“If a person gets burned and the raw flesh becomes white or red, ²⁵the priest will examine the spot and if the hair in

the spot has turned white and the spot is more than skin deep, it is a leprous disease that has started in the burn. The priest shall pronounce him unclean. ²⁶But if the priest examines it and there is no white hair in the spot and if the spot is only skin deep and is light in color, he is to isolate him for seven days. ²⁷On the seventh day the priest will examine him and if it is spreading, it is a leprous disease and he is to pronounce him ritually unclean. ²⁸If the priest examines it and the spot has not spread, but has faded, it is only the result of the burn; he will pronounce him ritually clean.

²⁹“If anyone, a man or a woman, has a sore on the scalp or on the chin, ³⁰the priest must examine it and if it looks like it is more than skin deep and the hair in it is yellowish and thin, he will pronounce him unclean. It is a leprous disease. ³¹If the priest examines it and finds that it's only skin deep, but finds no healthy hairs in it, he will isolate him for seven days. ³²On the seventh day the priest is to examine the sore and if it has not spread and there are no yellowish hairs in it and it's still only skin deep, ³³he will shave off the hair around the sore and the priest will isolate him for another seven days. ³⁴On the seventh day the priest will examine the sore again and if it has not spread and is still only skin deep, he will pronounce him clean. The person must wash his clothes, and then he will be ritually clean. ³⁵If the sore spreads on the skin after he is pronounced clean, ³⁶the priest will examine it again and if the sore has spread, even though there are no yellowish hairs in it, the priest will pronounce the person unclean. ³⁷If the sore has not spread and black hair is growing in it, the sore has healed. The priest will pronounce the person clean.

³⁸“When anyone, a man or a woman, has white spots on their skin, ³⁹the priest must examine them, and if the spots are a dull white, they are only blemishes, the person is ritually clean.

⁴⁰“When a man has lost his hair and is bald, he is ritually clean. ⁴¹If only the front part of his head is bald, he is also clean. ⁴²But if he has a reddish-white sore on the bald spot, it might be a leprous disease. ⁴³The priest must examine him and if the sore on the bald spot is truly reddish-white and proves to be a leprous disease, ⁴⁴he will pronounce the man ritually unclean because of it.

⁴⁵“The man who has this leprous disease must wear torn clothes, leave any hair he has uncombed, cover the lower part of his face and call out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ whenever he appears in public. ⁴⁶As long as he has this disease and is unclean, he must live alone outside the camp.

Contaminated Garments

⁴⁷“When clothing becomes contaminated with mildew or fungus, whether it’s linen or wool, ⁴⁸woven cloth or knitted material, a hide or anything made of leather, ⁴⁹if the mildew or fungus is green or red, it may spread, so these items must be shown to the priest. ⁵⁰The priest will examine the article and isolate it for seven days. ⁵¹On the seventh day he will examine it again and if the mildew or fungus has spread, the article is unclean. ⁵²He must burn the clothing or the leather article because it is contaminated with spreading mildew or fungus.

⁵³“But if it has not spread, ⁵⁴the priest will ask that the article be washed. Then he must isolate it for another seven days. ⁵⁵On the seventh day he will examine the washed article. If it looks the same, even though it hasn’t spread or is only on one side, the article must be burned.

⁵⁶“But if the priest examines the article and sees that the mildew or fungus has faded after the article has been washed, he will cut out the contaminated area from the clothing or leather. ⁵⁷If it reappears and is spreading, the article must be burned. ⁵⁸If he washes the item and the mildew or fungus disappears, it

must be washed one more time and it will be ritually clean.”

⁵⁹These are the regulations regarding mildew or fungus on clothing of linen or wool or on anything made of leather.

Cleansing Healed Lepers

14 The Lord said to Moses, ²“Those who are cured of a leprous disease and who wish to be pronounced clean by the priest must go through the rite of purification. ³The priest will take him outside the camp to examine him. If this leprous disease has healed, ⁴then the priest will ask the person to bring two live, clean birds, a piece of cedar wood, a scarlet cord and a sprig of hyssop for the cleansing ritual. ⁵He will have one of the birds killed over fresh water in a clay pot. ⁶He will then take the living bird and dip it, together with the piece of cedar wood, the scarlet cord and the sprig of hyssop in the blood of the other bird that was mixed with water. ⁷He will sprinkle the water mixed with blood seven times on the person to be purified and pronounce him clean. Then he must release the live bird in the open field and let it fly away, symbolizing the man’s freedom from the leprous disease and the atonement to be made by the Lord for His people. ⁸The man must wash his clothes, shave off all his hair and take a bath. He will then be ritually clean and can come back into the camp, but he must sleep outside the family tent for seven days. ⁹On the seventh day he shall shave off all his hair again, his beard, his eyebrows and all hair on his body. He must wash his clothes again and take another bath. He will then be considered ritually clean.

¹⁰“He may now come to the courtyard of the Sanctuary with an offering for me. On the eighth day he must bring two male lambs and one female lamb without defect, all about a year old. He also must bring six pounds of flour for a grain offering and two-thirds of a pint of olive oil. ¹¹The priest will announce that the man is clean and present him and his offer-

ings to me at the entrance of the courtyard. ¹²Then the priest will take one of the lambs and offer it together with the olive oil as a sin offering to me. ¹³The lamb must be killed in the courtyard where all sin offerings and whole burnt offerings are killed. Yet it is different from these offerings in that the priest will wave the offering before me. It will atone for the man's guilt and is most holy. ¹⁴Then the priest will catch some of the blood of the sin offering and put it on the lobe of the man's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot before he can be declared ritually clean.

¹⁵"The priest will also take some of the olive oil and pour it in the palm of his own left hand, ¹⁶dip the forefinger of his right hand into the oil and sprinkle it before me seven times. ¹⁷Then he will put some of the oil from his palm on the lobe of the man's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. Then the man can be declared ritually clean. The oil must be put on top of the blood that was taken from the animal and put on the man. ¹⁸The rest of the oil in the palm of the priest's hand should be poured on the head of the man. Thus the priest shall make an atonement for the man's guilt. ¹⁹Then the priest must sacrifice the second lamb as a sin offering to make atonement for any sin the man committed. After the sin offering, he will sacrifice the third lamb as a whole burnt offering, ²⁰together with the grain offering, to complete the atonement for the one being cleansed and the man will be clean.

²¹"If a man is poor and can't afford these offerings, he shall bring only one male lamb as a sin offering to make atonement for him, and only two pounds of flour mixed with olive oil for a grain offering, plus two-thirds of a pint of olive oil. ²²He should also bring two doves or two young pigeons, whichever he can afford, one for a sin offering and the other for a whole burnt offering. ²³On the

eighth day of his purification, after sleeping outside his family tent for seven days, he must bring these offerings for his cleansing to the priest to be presented to me at the entrance of the courtyard. ²⁴The priest will take the lamb for the sin offering and the olive oil and offer them as a wave offering to me. ²⁵He must kill the lamb and catch some of its blood and put it on the lobe of the man's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot.

²⁶"Then the priest will pour some of the oil into the palm of his own left hand, ²⁷and with the forefinger of his right hand he will sprinkle it before me seven times. ²⁸He must take some oil from the palm of his hand and put it in the same places on the man he put the blood from the sin offering; that is, on the lobe of the man's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. ²⁹He will pour the rest of the oil in his hand on the man's head to make atonement for his guilt before me. ³⁰Then he must offer the two doves or the young pigeons, whichever the man can afford, to me, ³¹one as a sin offering and the other as a whole burnt offering together with the grain offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for the man's sins and declare him ritually clean." ³²So these are the Lord's regulations for anyone who has recovered from a leprous disease but cannot afford the regular offerings for his purification.

Contaminated Houses

³³Again the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, ³⁴"When you reach Canaan which I am giving you for a possession, and you find mildew in a house, ³⁵the owner of the house shall go to the priest and tell him about it. ³⁶The priest will order everything in the house moved out before he examines it for mildew or the furniture will be declared unclean. Only then is he to go in to inspect the house. ³⁷If there are greenish or reddish spots on the walls that appear to be eating into it, ³⁸he

will order the house closed and locked for seven days. ³⁹On the seventh day he will return and inspect the house again. If the mildew has spread on the walls, ⁴⁰he must order the stones with the mildew to be torn out and thrown into the dump outside the city. ⁴¹The walls shall be scraped and the plaster that is scraped off must be thrown into the dump outside the city. ⁴²Other stones are to be used to replace those that were torn out and new plaster shall be put on the walls of the whole house.

⁴³If the mildew reappears in the house, the owner of the house must report it to the priest. ⁴⁴The priest will examine the house again and if the mildew has reappeared and spread, it is a mildew that destroys things. ⁴⁵The house is unclean and must be torn down. Its stones, wood and plaster are to be taken out of town to the city dump. ⁴⁶Anyone who goes into the house will be unclean until that evening. ⁴⁷Anyone who slept in the house or ate there must wash his clothes.

⁴⁸“But if the priest inspects the house and the mildew has not returned, he will declare the house clean. ⁴⁹To purify it, he will bring two birds, a small piece of cedar wood, a fresh twig of hyssop and a scarlet cord to the house. ⁵⁰He must kill one of the birds over a clay pot of fresh water. ⁵¹He will dip the bird, the wood, the hyssop and the cord into the water mixed with blood and sprinkle the house seven times. ⁵²In this way he will purify the house by sprinkling it with the blood of the first bird using the fresh twig of hyssop, the small piece of cedar wood and the scarlet cord. ⁵³He will then release the live bird in the open fields outside of town. Thus he will declare the house clean, symbolizing the removal of sin by atonement.”

⁵⁴These are the Lord's regulations for leprous diseases, sores, boils, ⁵⁵spreading mildew in clothing or in a house, ⁵⁶and for a swelling, rash or inflammation. ⁵⁷They teach the difference be-

tween clean and unclean by applying the rules for leprous diseases and mildew.

Bodily Discharges

15 The Lord gave further sanitary regulations to Moses and Aaron, saying, ²“When a man has a discharge from his body, the discharge is unclean and can spread disease. ³Whether this discharge flows from the openings in his body or is blocked and has caused a swelling in his body, the man is unclean. ⁴Any bed he lies on or anything he sits on is unclean. ⁵Anyone who touches his bed must bathe and wash his clothes. He will be ritually unclean until that evening. ⁶Anyone who sits on anything the man with the discharge sat on must bathe and wash his clothes. He will be ritually unclean until that evening. ⁷Anyone who touches the man with the discharge must bathe and wash his clothes and will be ritually unclean until that evening. ⁸If the man with a discharge spits on anyone, that person must bathe and wash his clothes and will be ritually unclean until that evening. ⁹Anything the man with the discharge sits on while riding will be unclean. ¹⁰Anyone who sits on anything that was under the man or who picks up and carries anything the man sat on must bathe and wash his clothes, and he will be ritually unclean until that evening. ¹¹Anyone the man with the discharge touches without first having washed his hands, must bathe and wash his clothes and he will be ritually unclean until that evening. ¹²Any clay pot that the man touches must be broken and any wooden bowl that he touches must be washed with water.

¹³“After the man is cured of his discharge, he must wait seven days. Then he is to wash his clothes and bathe in fresh spring water, then he will be ritually clean. ¹⁴On the eighth day he shall bring two doves or two young pigeons to me at the entrance to the courtyard of the Sanctuary and give them to the priest. ¹⁵The priest will sacrifice them,

one as a sin offering and the other as a whole burnt offering. In this way he will make atonement on behalf of the man before me because of his discharge.

¹⁶“When a man has a discharge of semen, he must bathe his whole body and he will remain ritually unclean until evening. ¹⁷Any clothing or leather that has semen on it must be washed and will remain unclean until evening. ¹⁸After having sexual intercourse both the man and the woman are to wash their bodies and they will remain ritually unclean until evening. ¹⁹When a woman has her monthly period, she is ritually unclean for seven days. Anyone who touches her will be unclean until evening. ²⁰Anything she sits on or lies on during her period will be unclean. ²¹Whoever touches her bed must bathe and wash his clothes. He will be unclean until evening. ²²Whoever touches anything she sits on must bathe and wash his clothes and he will be unclean until evening. ²³Whether someone touches her bed or anything she was sitting on, that person will be ritually unclean until evening. ²⁴If a man sleeps with her and her monthly flow is on him, he will be unclean for seven days and anything he lies on will be unclean.

²⁵“When a woman has a flow of blood other than during her monthly period, or her monthly flow continues beyond the normal time, she will be ritually unclean just as she was during her regular period. ²⁶Any bed she lies on or anything she sits on while her flow continues will be unclean, just as it was during her regular monthly period. ²⁷Anyone who touches such items must bathe and wash his clothes and will be unclean until evening. ²⁸After the woman’s flow stops, she must count off seven days, then she will be ritually clean. ²⁹On the eighth day she is to bring to me two doves or two young pigeons at the entrance to the courtyard of the Sanctuary and give them to the priest. ³⁰The priest will offer one bird as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering. In this way

he will make atonement for her uncleanness before me.

³¹“You must warn the Israelites to keep away from things that are unclean so as not to defile my Sanctuary that is in their midst.”

³²These then are the Lord’s regulations for a man who has had either an infectious discharge or a discharge of semen. ³³These also are His regulations for a woman who is having her monthly period or who has an infectious discharge. These are the regulations for anyone having sexual relations with a woman who is ritually unclean.

The Day of Atonement

16 Following the death of Aaron’s two sons who died while offering incense, God said to Moses, ²“Tell your brother Aaron he is to come into the Most Holy Place only on the Day of Atonement. He should never come in dressed just as he is, or he will die. On the Day of Atonement, I will veil my presence by a small cloud just above the lid of the Ark called the Mercy Seat. ³On that day, he will come into the Sanctuary area and sacrifice a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a whole burnt offering before coming into the Most Holy Place. ⁴He should bathe and put on the white linen underwear, the special white linen robe with the linen sash and the white linen turban. These special priestly garments are holy. ⁵He will take from the leaders of Israel two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a whole burnt offering.

⁶“He must sacrifice the young bull he brought for his own sins and for those of his family. ⁷Then he will take the two goats and present them before me by the entrance to the Sanctuary. ⁸He will draw lots for the two goats, one lot to be inscribed with the words, ‘For the Lord,’ and the other with the words, ‘For Azazel.’ ⁹Aaron will tie a scarlet cord around the neck of the Lord’s goat for identification and sacrifice it for a sin offering. ¹⁰He will tie a scarlet cord on the

horn of the other goat, present it alive before me, then send it into the wilderness to symbolically remove sin and Satan from my people forever.

¹¹“Aaron must first sacrifice the bull to atone for his own sins and the sins of his family. ¹²Then he is to fill his censer with hot coals from off the altar and take it into the Sanctuary together with two handfuls of finely ground incense. ¹³He must put the incense on the little altar and draw aside the curtain to the Most Holy Place. The smoke of the incense will cover the Ark with its Mercy Seat, so he won’t die from coming into my presence. ¹⁴He will leave the censer and bring some of the bull’s blood into the Most Holy Place. Then with his finger he must sprinkle the blood first on the Mercy Seat, then seven times before the Ark.

¹⁵“After that he shall go back to the courtyard, kill the Lord’s goat as a sin offering for the people and take some of the blood into the Most Holy Place. He must sprinkle it first on the Mercy Seat, then seven times before the Ark. ¹⁶This way he will purify the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the Holy Place. ¹⁷No one shall be in the Sanctuary from the time Aaron gets ready to go into the Most Holy Place until after he has made atonement for himself, his family and the people of Israel. ¹⁸Then Aaron is to come out to the altar of burnt offering, take some of the bull’s blood and some of the goat’s blood and put it on the horns at the corners of the altar. ¹⁹Still using his finger he will sprinkle the blood before the altar seven times to purify it from the sins of the people and to again make it holy and consecrated to me.

²⁰“After Aaron finishes making atonement for the Most Holy Place and the Holy Place, he will take the live goat called Azazel or Scapegoat and present it to me without blood. ²¹He must lay both his hands on the goat’s head, transfer-

ring to it all the forgiven sins of the people which have been atoned for by the Lord’s goat. He will put the responsibility of all sin on the Azazel goat, who is to be taken into the wilderness by a man appointed to do so. ²²Symbolically, this goat will take all sin away from the camp into the wilderness where the man will turn it loose. It will have been taken there to die.

²³“Then Aaron will go back into the Sanctuary and take off the special linen clothes he put on before he went into the Most Holy Place and leave them there. ²⁴He must wash himself in the Holy Place and put on his regular priestly clothes. Then he will come out of the Sanctuary and begin the ceremonies for another year by offering the evening sacrifice for his own sins and the sins of the people. ²⁵He will offer the fat of the various sin offerings made earlier and burn it on the altar. ²⁶The man who took the goat into the wilderness must wash his clothes and bathe before returning to camp. ²⁷The bull and goat that were killed for the sin offering and whose blood was sprinkled in the Most Holy Place must be burned outside the camp. Everything must be burned, their hides, all their meat and their internal organs. ²⁸The one who does this must then wash his clothes and bathe before he returns to camp.

²⁹“The tenth day of the seventh month will be the Day of Atonement. No regular work shall be done on that day. The children of Israel and the foreigners living among them must fast, humble themselves and enter into the deep spiritual significance of the day. ³⁰This is the day when atonement will be made for their sins and the record of their sins in the Sanctuary will be removed, and they will stand before me as a clean people. ³¹It is a sacred day, a special Sabbath, during which the people are to deny themselves, search their souls and do no regular work. This is a lasting ordinance for generations to come. ³²The high priest, who has been ordained to succeed his

father, will put on the vestments of the high priest. ³³He will perform all the services involved in purifying the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place and the sacrificial altar. He must remove from the Sanctuary the sins of the priests and the people who brought their sin offerings during the year. ³⁴These ordinances are to continue for generations to come. Each year on the Day of Atonement, the sins of the priests and the people are to be removed from the Sanctuary." Aaron followed all the instructions the Lord had given Moses.

Blood Represents Life

17 Again the Lord said to Moses, ²"Pass these ordinances on to Aaron and his sons and to all the people: ³Any Israelite who sacrifices a young bull, a lamb or a goat anywhere in the camp or outside of it, ⁴and does not bring it to the Sanctuary courtyard to present it as an offering to me, he will be held guilty of causing bloodshed and must be cut off from the people. ⁵This ordinance is so the Israelites will bring their peace offerings to me to be sacrificed at the Sanctuary under the supervision of the priests and not take them outside the camp to be sacrificed in the open field. ⁶The priest will catch some of the blood and sprinkle it against the altar and burn the fat as a pleasing offering to me. ⁷The people are not to offer goats as sacrifices to a goat idol as they have done in the past. This regulation will protect them against such demonic worship and is a lasting ordinance for generations to come.

⁸"An Israelite or a foreigner living in the community who continues to sacrifice animals in the field ⁹and does not bring them to me at the Sanctuary must be cut off from the people. ¹⁰Any Israelite or foreigner living among you who bakes blood and eats it, or eats raw meat with the blood still in it, must be cut off from the people. ¹¹The life of the body depends on blood. I have chosen blood as

a symbol of salvation. Blood makes atonement for sin because of the life that is in it. That is why it is poured out on the altar. It is exchanging one life for another. ¹²Therefore blood shall be used only to make atonement for sins and is not to be eaten. Neither an Israelite nor a foreigner is to eat blood for any reason. ¹³Any Israelite or foreigner living among you who kills a clean animal or bird for food must pour its blood on the ground and cover it with dirt.

¹⁴"Blood is life and life is sacred. No one shall eat the blood of flesh. If anyone does, he must be cut off from the people. ¹⁵Any Israelite or foreigner living among the people who eats meat from a dead animal or bird that he has found, whether it died naturally or was killed by animals, must bathe and wash his clothes. He will be unclean until evening; after that he will be considered clean again. ¹⁶But if he does not bathe and wash his clothes, he will be held guilty for what he has done."

Sexual Immorality

18 The Lord said to Moses, ²"Tell the children of Israel that I am the Lord your God. ³You are not to follow the practices of the people in Egypt where you once lived, nor are you to follow the practices of the people in the land of Canaan where you're going. ⁴You are to obey my laws and do what I ask you to do for I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. ⁵Do what I ask you to do; the one who listens to me and keeps my laws will save his life by doing so. I am the Lord.

⁶"You are not to have sexual relations with your relatives. ⁷Do not disgrace your father by having sex with your mother. She is your mother and you are not to have sexual relations with her. ⁸Do not disgrace your father by having sexual relations with your stepmother, even if she's from another tribe. ⁹You are not to have sexual relations with your sister or stepsister even if your stepsister was

born and raised somewhere else. ¹⁰You are not to have sexual relations with your granddaughter. That is a very wicked thing to do. ¹¹Do not have sex with your half-sister because she is still your sister. ¹²Do not have sex with your father's sister. She is your aunt and your father's blood relative. ¹³You are not to have sex with your mother's sister. She's also your aunt and your mother's blood relative. ¹⁴You are not to dishonor your father's brother by approaching his wife. She is your aunt by marriage and your father's sister-in-law. ¹⁵Do not have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law. She is your son's wife; you are not to have sex with her. ¹⁶Do not have sexual relations with your brother's wife because that would dishonor your brother. ¹⁷You are not to have sex with a woman and her daughter, nor with her and her granddaughter, whether the granddaughter is by her son or her daughter. That is a very wicked thing to do. ¹⁸Do not take your wife's sister as a wife to rival her. That also is a wicked thing to do.

¹⁹"You are not to have sex with a woman during her monthly period. ²⁰Do not have sex with your neighbor's wife. ²¹You are not to sacrifice your babies to the idol Molech. That is an extremely wicked thing to do and is a disgrace to your God. ²²Do not have sex with another male. That is detestable. ²³You are not to have sex with an animal, nor is a woman to present herself to an animal for sex. That is a perversion.

²⁴"You are not to defile yourself in any of these ways, for that is how the people in the land where I am taking you are defiling themselves. That is why I am driving them out from this fruitful land and making room for you. ²⁵Their perverted natures have defiled the whole land. Therefore I have withheld my blessings and the land is vomiting them out. ²⁶So you are to keep my laws and carry out my instructions. I don't want anyone, whether he is an Israelite or a foreigner who lives among you, to do such de-

testable things. ²⁷The people living in the land where I am taking you do these things and the whole land is defiled by their wickedness. ²⁸If you do them, the land will vomit you out just as it is vomiting out those who are there now. ²⁹Anyone who does these things must be cut off from the people. ³⁰So keep my laws and follow my instructions. Once you come into the land, do not pick up the disgusting practices done by the people before you, thus defiling yourselves, for I am the Lord your God."

Ceremonial Laws

19 The Lord said to Moses, ²"Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: You are to be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy. ³Each one of you must respect your mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am your God. ⁴No one is to make gods out of stone or wood, or worship them. I alone am the Lord.

⁵"When you sacrifice an animal for a peace offering, follow the regulations I have given you and I will accept your offering. ⁶The meat should be eaten on the day you sacrificed the animal or the next day, but any meat left over on the third day must be burned. ⁷If any of it is eaten on the third day, I will reject the offering that was brought because it was made impure by disobedience. ⁸Whoever eats it is guilty of sin for he is treating something sacred as something ordinary, and he will be cut off from the people.

⁹"When you reap the harvest, do not cut the grain to the very edge of the field or pick up the grain that fell as you were harvesting. ¹⁰Do not go over your vineyard the second time or pick up the grapes that fell as you were harvesting. Leave them for the poor and the stranger. I am the Lord.

¹¹"Do not steal, lie or deceive anyone. ¹²Do not swear falsely in my name. This disgraces me. I am the Lord.

¹³"Do not cheat your neighbor or anyone else; do not rob him or take advan-

tage of him. Do not hold back the wages of someone you hire, not even for one night. ¹⁴Do not curse the deaf or the hard of hearing, and do not put something in front of a blind man to make him stumble, but fear God. I am the Lord.

¹⁵Do not pervert justice by showing favoritism to the rich or partiality to the poor. Judge every case honestly and fairly. ¹⁶Do not spread falsehoods about others. Don't do anything that would put your neighbor's life in danger. I am the Lord.

¹⁷Don't bear a grudge against your neighbor or hate him. Speak to him about what he has done. Don't just harbor hateful feelings and let him go on sinning or you too will be guilty. ¹⁸Never seek revenge against anyone. Forget about the wrong he has done to you. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. I am the Lord.

¹⁹Show that you love me by keeping my commandments. Do not crossbreed domestic animals, sow your field with mixed seeds, or wear clothes of wool mixed with linen. All these things the pagans do to please their gods.

²⁰If a man has sex with a slave girl who has been promised in marriage before her future husband has purchased her freedom, he is not to be put to death, but he should be punished, because she was not free. ²¹The man has sinned against me and shall bring a ram for a sin offering to the Sanctuary. ²²The priest will make an atonement for him before the Lord for the sin he committed and it will be forgiven him.

²³When you come into the land of Canaan and plant fruit trees, you should not eat the fruit for the first three years. ²⁴In the fourth year all the fruit will be holy and is to be given as an offering of gratitude to me. ²⁵In the fifth year the fruit will be yours. If you do this, I will bless you and increase your harvest. I am the Lord your God.

²⁶Do not eat any meat that still has blood in it. Do not practice any kind of

witchcraft or sorcery. ²⁷Do not shave the sides of your head nor all around your head, nor clip your beard to make it square, for that is what the pagans do as a sign of commitment to their fertility gods. ²⁸Do not tattoo yourself or cut your body in any way to mourn the dead. I am the Lord.

²⁹Do not degrade your daughter by selling her to the temple of the fertility god to become a temple prostitute. This degrades women, lowers the morals of society and destroys the nation.

³⁰Keep the Sabbath and respect the Sanctuary, for both are holy. I am the Lord.

³¹Do not turn to spirit mediums for answers or go for advice to people who consult demons. If you do, you will be defiled and will soon be caught in their web. I am the Lord your God.

³²Respect the elderly and honor them, for by so doing you are honoring me. I am the Lord.

³³Do not mistreat foreigners who live in your land. ³⁴Treat them as you do your own. Love them as you love yourself. You, too, were once foreigners in a strange land and you know what it was like to be mistreated. I am the Lord your God.

³⁵Do not cheat anyone by using faulty weights and measures. ³⁶Use honest scales and accurate measures. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. ³⁷Keep my laws and carry out all my instructions and do them. I am the Lord who loves you."

Penalties for Breaking the Law

20 The Lord said to Moses, ²"Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: If anyone in your country sacrifices his newborn baby to the idol Molech, he shall be stoned to death. ³I will set my face against anyone who sacrifices his child to Molech because he has disgraced my name and defiled my Sanctuary. I will cut off his life from my people. ⁴If the people ignore what he has done and fail to stone him for sacrificing

his child to Molech, ⁵I will personally turn against him and his family and against all those who went with him to worship Molech. I will cut off their lives from my people.

⁶“If anyone goes to spirit mediums for advice and prostitutes himself by following these messengers of Satan, I will cut off his life from my people. ⁷Consecrate yourselves and be my holy people, for I am holy. I am the Lord. ⁸Keep my commandments and my laws because I am the Lord who wants to sanctify you and make you holy. ⁹Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death. He has brought it on himself.

¹⁰“If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife, he and the woman shall be put to death. They also have brought it on themselves. ¹¹If a man has sexual relations with his stepmother, his father’s wife, he has disgraced his father; both he and the woman are to be put to death. ¹²If a man has sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, both are to be put to death. ¹³If a man has sexual relations with another man as he would with a woman, they have done a disgusting thing and both are to be put to death. They have brought it on themselves. ¹⁴If a man marries both a woman and her mother, they have done a wicked thing and all three shall be burned to death. They have brought the sentence on themselves. ¹⁵If a man has sexual relations with an animal, he and the animal shall be put to death. ¹⁶If a woman presents herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it, she and the animal shall be put to death.

¹⁷“If a man marries his sister, or his half-sister either from his father or his mother, they are to be cut off from the people. They have disgraced the family and brought it on themselves. ¹⁸If a man has sexual relations with a woman during her monthly period, they shall be cut off from the people. They also have sinned, because he has exposed the flow of her blood and she consented. They

have brought the sentence on themselves. ¹⁹If a man has sexual relations with the sister of either his father or his mother, they have committed incest and will be held responsible for what they have done. ²⁰If a man has sexual relations with his aunt, they have disgraced the family and, if she was married, they have disgraced his uncle as well. Neither of them will have any children. They have brought the consequences on themselves. ²¹If a man has sexual relations with his brother’s wife, he has disgraced his brother. Neither of them will have children. They will have no part in the future of Israel. They will die childless.

²²“You are to keep my laws and follow all my instructions. Then the land where I am taking you will not vomit you out. ²³I am forcing the people out of the land ahead of you. Don’t go in and do what they’re doing, which I abhor. ²⁴I will bring you into this rich and fertile land and give it to you just as I promised. I am the Lord your God and have set you apart from all other people. ²⁵You shall make a clear distinction between what to eat and what not to eat. Do not defile yourselves by eating animals and birds that I have told you are unclean. ²⁶You shall be a clean and holy people for I, the Lord, am holy. I have set you apart from other nations to represent me and to be my very own.

²⁷“Any man or woman who consults demons will surely turn you against me. Such people are to be stoned to death. They are responsible for bringing about their own death.”

Priestly Conduct

21 The Lord said to Moses, “Tell Aaron and his sons that no priest shall make himself ritually unfit by touching a dead body, ²except for a very close relative such as a mother or father, a son or daughter, ³a brother or an unmarried sister who is still at home. ⁴Otherwise, a priest has made himself ritually unfit to serve his people as a leader. ⁵No priest

shall shave his head, cut off the edges of his beard or cut his body to demonstrate grief. ⁶He will respect my name and be blameless and holy. He has been set apart to present offerings burned on the altar as bread for their God. So he must be holy and ritually clean, ready in heart to serve. ⁷He must not marry a woman who has been a prostitute or who is divorced, for the priest is holy to his God. ⁸Treat the priest as one set apart for holy service. Think of him as holy because I, the Lord, am holy and I make you holy. ⁹If the priest's daughter becomes a prostitute, she disgraces her father. She shall be put to death by fire. She has brought it on herself.

¹⁰"The high priest will be chosen from among his brother priests. The anointing oil will be placed on his head and he will be set apart to wear the high priestly clothes. He is not to uncover his head and let his hair fly loose in mourning or to tear his clothes in grief. ¹¹He will not attend to funeral details, thus making himself ritually unclean, not even if it is his father or mother. ¹²He must not do anything to desecrate the Sanctuary, because he has been set apart and consecrated with the anointing oil of his God. I am the Lord. ¹³The high priest must marry a woman who is a virgin. ¹⁴He must not marry a widow, a divorced woman or a woman who has been a prostitute, but only a virgin from his own people. ¹⁵This is so his offspring will be respected by the people. I am the Lord, and I have set him apart as high priest to be holy."

¹⁶The Lord continued, ¹⁷"Tell Aaron that no one from his descendants for generations to come who has a physical defect may serve as priest to bring offerings to me. ¹⁸No one shall be consecrated as a priest who has any physical defects. He should not be blind, lame, disfigured or deformed. ¹⁹No one shall come before me who has a deformed hand or foot, ²⁰who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, who has an eye defect, a skin

disease or damaged testicles. ²¹If one of Aaron's descendants has a physical defect, he cannot come before me as a priest to serve and to burn offerings. He is not ritually suited to carry out the symbolic function of a priest as he looks after the offerings. ²²He may eat from the priestly portion of the offerings as the other priests do, ²³but because of his defect, he must not approach the altar or the curtain going into the Holy Place. If he does, he will desecrate the Sanctuary. I am the Lord and I am holy. I am the One who sets people apart and makes them holy." ²⁴This is what Moses passed on to Aaron and his sons and to all the people.

22 The Lord said to Moses, ²"Tell Aaron and his sons that they shall treat with respect the offerings people bring so as not to profane my name, for I am the Lord. ³If one of Aaron's descendants is ritually unclean or physically unfit and tries to come before me with offerings, he will be cut off from my presence and will never serve at my altar again. I am the Lord. ⁴If one of Aaron's descendants has an infectious skin disease or a bodily discharge, he is ritually unclean and shall not eat the holy offerings until he has been declared clean. He will be ritually unclean if he touches a corpse, anything defiled by a corpse or a man who has had an emission of semen. ⁵If he touches an unclean animal or any person who is ritually unclean, he, too, will be unclean.

⁶"The priest who has become unclean in any one of these ways will be unclean until evening. He must not eat from any of the offerings until he has bathed and been declared clean. ⁷Only after the sun goes down will he be considered clean again and fit to eat from the holy offerings. ⁸He must not eat the meat of any animal that has died naturally or been killed by wild animals. For him to eat such meat will make him ritually unclean. I am the Lord. ⁹All priests must carefully keep my laws and follow my instructions

so they will not die before me because of disrespect. I am the Lord who sets them apart and makes them holy.

¹⁰“Only the priest’s family shall eat of the sacred offerings. Not even one of his house guests or hired workers is to eat from such holy offerings. ¹¹But if a priest has a slave, or if a slave was born in his house, that person is part of his family and may eat of the offerings. ¹²If a priest’s daughter marries someone other than a priest, she has forfeited her right to eat of these offerings. ¹³However, if she is divorced or widowed and lives at home as a dependent, she may eat of the sacred offerings because she is once again part of her father’s family. But no one outside the family may eat of such offerings. ¹⁴If anyone eats from the sacred offerings when he should have known better, he must pay the full value of the whole offering plus twenty percent. ¹⁵The priest must not desecrate the offerings by letting strangers eat of them. These offerings are sacred for they have been given to me by the people. ¹⁶If a priest lets someone eat of such offerings, he is bringing on himself and on the man who eats, guilt that requires payment. I am the One who makes the offerings holy.”

Animals Without Defect

¹⁷Again the Lord spoke to Moses, ¹⁸“Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the children of Israel and tell them that if any Israelite or foreigner living in Israel brings an offering to me, either to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering, ¹⁹the animal must be without defect, whether from cattle, sheep or goats, before it can be accepted on his behalf. ²⁰If there is something wrong with the animal, it is not an acceptable offering. ²¹If anyone brings an inferior animal from his flock or herd to fulfill a special vow or for a peace offering, it will not be accepted on his behalf. ²²No blind, crippled or injured animal shall be brought to me, nor is one that has running sores or scabs. ²³An animal that is stunted or deformed from birth,

whether a calf or a lamb, may be brought to me as a special gift, but not to fulfill a vow. ²⁴A male animal whose testicles have been crushed, cut, bruised or torn is not an acceptable offering. ²⁵Such animals obtained from a foreigner not living in Israel are not acceptable because of their defects; they are not suitable ‘food’ for me and my altar.”

²⁶The Lord also said, ²⁷“When a calf, a lamb or a goat is born, it is to stay with its mother seven days before it can be brought to me as an acceptable offering. ²⁸Do not kill a calf or lamb for an offering on the same day you kill its mother. ²⁹When you offer a special gift of thanksgiving to me, do it of your own free will and in a way that pleases the Lord and brings honor to His name. ³⁰Whatever part of the animal is to be eaten must be eaten that day. Nothing is to be left until morning. I am the Lord.

³¹“So keep my commandments and do them. I am the Lord. ³²Show respect for my name for I am the Lord. I am holy and have set you apart to be holy. ³³I am the One who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord.”

Feasts of the Lord

23 Then the Lord said to Moses, ²⁴“Speak to the children of Israel and tell them about the appointed feasts. They shall be regarded as sacred festivals of worship set apart by me.

The Sabbath

³⁴“There has always been the weekly Sabbath since God first blessed it. Six days are set aside for your regular work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath, a day of solemn rest. On that day all work must stop because it is the day the Lord has set aside for worship. The day belongs to me, no matter where the children of Israel live.

The Passover and Unleavened Bread

⁴⁴In addition to the weekly Sabbath, there are six sacred assemblies which

shall be kept every year. Three of these are religious and three are harvest festivals. ⁵First, there is the Lord's Passover. It is a one-day sacred assembly that must be kept beginning at sundown on the fourteenth day of the first month. ⁶In connection with the Passover, you shall celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread which begins the very next day. For seven days you must eat no bread made with yeast. ⁷On the first of these seven days you shall come together for a special Sabbath and do no regular work. ⁸Each day for seven days you shall bring your offerings to me. Then on the last day you are to come together again for worship and do no work."

⁹The Lord continued, ¹⁰"Tell the children of Israel: When you come into the land that I have promised to give you, you are to reap your crops and celebrate your barley harvest in connection with the Festival of Unleavened Bread. On the sixteenth day you shall bring the first bundle of grain to the priest. ¹¹He will take it and wave it before me on your behalf. He will present it to me on the day after the Sabbath. ¹²In addition to the wave sheaf of barley, you should bring a year-old lamb without defect as a whole burnt offering. ¹³You must bring four pounds of flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering and one quart of fresh unfermented wine as a drink offering. These offerings will be burned by fire. They will be pleasing to me because of what they represent. ¹⁴You must not eat any of the new grain, whether raw, roasted or baked as bread until these offerings have been brought to me. These regulations must be followed by each generation no matter where you live.

The Festival of Weeks

¹⁵"The third festival that you must hold is the Festival of Weeks (later known as Pentecost). It must be held seven weeks after the first harvest of that year. By then your wheat crops will be ready to be brought in. ¹⁶It will begin

on the fiftieth day, the day after the seventh Sabbath. On that day you must bring a grain offering to me, the first cut from the final harvest of that year. ¹⁷Bring an offering of two loaves of baked bread, each one made from four pounds of fine flour and yeast as a sample of the first grain to be harvested from your last crop of the year. ¹⁸This bread will be presented to me by your priest together with seven male lambs, each a year old, one young bull and two rams, all without defects. These animals must be sacrificed as whole burnt offerings to me, along with the grain and drink offerings. These offerings and what they represent will please me.

¹⁹"Also you must offer one male goat for a sin offering and two year-old lambs as a peace offering. ²⁰The priest will present the two lambs together with the bread as a wave offering to me. They will belong to the priests. ²¹On that day everyone shall come together for worship and no ordinary work is to be done. This will be a lasting ordinance for the children of Israel for generations to come, no matter where they live in the land.

²²"When you harvest your fields, don't reap to the very edge of the field or pick up every last stalk of grain that was left, but leave it for the poor and the foreigners who live among you. I am the Lord your God."

The Festival of Trumpets

²³The Lord told Moses, ²⁴"Speak to the children of Israel and tell them: On the first day of the seventh month, you are to observe a special day of rest and come together for worship when you hear the blast of trumpets. This is the fourth assembly you are to observe, called the Festival of Trumpets. ²⁵On that day you must bring a food offering to me and do no ordinary work. This signals the beginning of ten days of preparation for the Day of Atonement."

The Day of Atonement

²⁶The Lord continued, ²⁷"The tenth day of the seventh month will be the Day of Atonement. This is the fifth assembly and a most sacred day. On this day, deny yourselves and examine your spiritual standing with me. The priests will present a whole burnt offering to me. ²⁸All regular work must stop, as it does on the Sabbath. It is the day when atonement will be made to take away sin. ²⁹Anyone who does not deny himself and humble his soul on that day will be cut off from the people. ³⁰And anyone who works on that day will be put to death. ³¹Don't even think about your work. This will be a lasting ordinance for the children of Israel for generations to come. ³²It is a special day of worship during which you are to deny yourselves and humble your souls. It must be observed from sunset on the ninth day of the seventh month to sunset on the tenth day."

The Festival of Shelters

³³The Lord further said, ³⁴"The fifteenth day of that same month you shall celebrate the Festival of Shelters, the gathering in of your olives and fruit. It is the sixth assembly and shall be observed for an entire week. ³⁵On the first day of this week no ordinary work shall be done and the people should come together for worship and rejoicing. ³⁶Each day for seven days the priest must present an offering to me. On the eighth day the people will again come together for worship and no regular work is to be done.

³⁷"These are the six sacred assemblies which the children of Israel are to keep: The Passover preceding The Festival of Unleavened Bread, The Festival of Weeks (later called Pentecost), The Assembly of Trumpets, The Day of Atonement and The Festival of Ingathering or Shelters. The people will come together for worship and present their food offerings, burnt offerings, grain offerings, drink offerings and other sacrifices to me. ³⁸These assemblies will be in addition to

the regular weekly Sabbaths. And these offerings are in addition to the regular gifts or freewill offerings you choose to bring to me.

³⁹"The Festival of Shelters is the last festival of the year. So beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after your harvesting is over, praise the Lord for what he has done for you. The festival will last seven days. The first and last days of that festival week will be special days of joy and solemn rest. ⁴⁰On the first day you will take the best fruit from your fruit trees, and leafy boughs, palm fronds and branches of willow trees that grow by the brooks to make shelters for yourselves. You will rejoice for an entire week over what the Lord has done for you. ⁴¹This festival will be kept for generations to come in the seventh month of each year. ⁴²You will camp in these shelters for seven days during the festival. ⁴³This way your descendants will be reminded that I gave their forefathers shelters to camp in when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

⁴⁴Moses told the children of Israel everything the Lord had said.

The Continuous Burning Lampstand

24 Again the Lord spoke to Moses, ²"Tell the children of Israel to bring to you clear oil pressed from olives. That oil is for the seven-branched lamp in the Sanctuary which is to be kept burning continuously. ³Every evening Aaron shall make sure that the seven-branched lampstand in the Sanctuary, this side of the Most Holy Place, has enough oil to burn all night. This will be continued by the high priests for generations to come. ⁴The seven lamps of the golden lampstand must never go out.

New Bread Each Sabbath

⁵"The priests shall take twenty-four pounds of finely ground flour and bake twelve loaves of flat unleavened bread, ⁶then set them up in two stacks of six each on the table of gold in the Holy

Place ⁷and put incense in a golden cup on each stack to be used as a fragrant offering. It will be a token offering for the bread that is to be burned on the altar. ⁸Every Friday evening, at the beginning of the Sabbath, set out fresh bread before me. This is to be done for generations to come. ⁹The bread should be eaten by Aaron and his sons in a holy place set apart for the priests. It is their share of the holy offerings which are brought to me.”

Blasphemy

¹⁰While the Lord was giving all these instructions to Moses, a young man who had an Israelite mother and Egyptian father left his part of the camp and insisted on pitching his tent in the main camp. A fight broke out between him and a fellow Israelite. ¹¹The son of the Israelite woman and Egyptian father cursed the God of Israel in front of the judges. So he was brought to Moses. His mother’s name was Shelomith, daughter of Dibri from the tribe of Dan. ¹²Moses ordered him to be kept under guard until the Lord would tell him whether or not to apply the full force of the law.

¹³Then the Lord said to Moses, ¹⁴“Take the man outside the camp and everyone who heard him curse the God of Israel is to put his hands on the man’s head and testify that he is guilty. Then the people are to stone him to death. ¹⁵Tell the Israelites that anyone who curses the Lord God will suffer the same consequences. ¹⁶Anyone living in Israel who curses the Lord God, whether he is an Israelite or a foreigner living in Israel, shall be stoned to death by the people.

¹⁷“Anyone who commits murder must be stoned to death. ¹⁸Anyone who kills an animal belonging to someone else must replace it. The law is life for life. ¹⁹If anyone injures his neighbor, the same kind of injury shall be inflicted on him. ²⁰The law is bone for bone, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. Whatever someone deliberately does to someone

else is to be done to him, whether it is to break one of his bones, take out an eye or knock out a tooth. ²¹If someone kills another person’s animal, he must replace it. But if someone kills a man, he must be put to death. ²²This law applies to everyone living in Israel, whether Israelites or foreigners. I am the Lord your God.” ²³When Moses told the people what the Lord had said, they took the man who had cursed God outside the camp and stoned him to death just as the Lord had commanded.

A Sabbath for the Land

25 The Lord said to Moses while on Mount Sinai, ²“Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land I promised to give you, let it also have a Sabbath by giving it a rest every seventh year. ³For six years you shall sow your fields, prune your vineyards and harvest your crops. ⁴But during the seventh year the land is to rest, to have a Sabbath to honor me. That year the people shall not sow their fields or prune their vineyards. ⁵The land must have a full rest. And the people are not to harvest for storage anything that grows on its own, either in their fields or on their vines. ⁶Whatever the land grows on its own may be used for food for yourselves, your hired men and servants and any foreigners living with you. ⁷It also can be used to feed your livestock and provide for wild animals. Whatever the land produces by itself can be used and eaten.”

The Year of Jubilee

⁸The Lord also said, “Count off seven times seven years or a total of forty-nine years. ⁹Then on the tenth day of the seventh month in the forty-ninth year, on the Day of Atonement, have the trumpet blown throughout the land. ¹⁰This shall be called the Jubilee. It is a year of freedom, a time to proclaim liberty throughout the land. This is the year when all property must be returned to its original owner or to his descendants and all

slaves must be set free to return home. ¹¹The fiftieth year will be a year of joy. Do not sow your fields or harvest your unsown crops or pick grapes from your unpruned vineyards for storage. ¹²The entire year will be sacred for you. Let your fields rest and eat only what the fields produce of themselves.

¹³This is also the year when all property that has been sold shall be returned to its original owner so that each family will have their property back again. ¹⁴When you sell land to a fellow Israelite or buy a piece of property from him, do not take unfair advantage of him. ¹⁵He is to buy or sell to you on the basis of the number of years left until the next Jubilee, that is, according to the number of times he can harvest the field. ¹⁶If there are many years left the price may be higher, and if there are only a few years left the price should be lower, because it is to be sold according to the number of crops it will produce. ¹⁷Do not take advantage of each other, but respect your God by being honest. I am the Lord.

The Seventh Year

¹⁸Obey me and keep my laws so you can have my protection and live in peace and safety in the land to which I'm taking you. ¹⁹The land will produce good crops for you. You will be able to eat to the full and live in peace. ²⁰If someone says, 'What are we going to live on during the seventh year when no crops are planted or harvested?' ²¹Tell them not to worry, for I will bless the land in the sixth year so that it will produce twice as much, enough for two years. ²²When you plant your crops in the eighth year you will still be eating from what you harvested during the sixth year. There will be enough from the sixth year bumper crop to last you until the harvest in the eighth year.

Buying Property Back

²³The land belongs to me, so you may not sell it on a permanent basis. You are my tenants and stewards. ²⁴Whenever a

piece of property is sold, the seller has the right to buy it back. If he chooses not to buy it back, only then may it be sold to another.

²⁵If an Israelite is poor and circumstances force him to sell his land, his closest relative should buy it back for him. ²⁶If the man has no relative who wants to buy it, only then may it be sold to another. But if the man later wants to buy his property back before the Year of Jubilee and has enough money to do so, ²⁷he is to offer the new owner an amount based on the number of harvests left until the next Jubilee, even though at that time he will get it back free. ²⁸But if he doesn't have enough money to buy it back before the Jubilee, the new owner has a right to keep it until then, but he must return it at the time of Jubilee.

²⁹"If a man lives in the city and sells his house, he has the right to buy it back during the first year after it's sold. ³⁰But if he doesn't buy it back by the end of that year, the house becomes the permanent property of the buyer and his descendants. It is not to be returned to the original owner at the time of the Jubilee. ³¹Houses in farming villages are to be treated as property in open country. They may be bought back at any time, and in the Year of Jubilee they are to be returned to their original owners. ³²The Levites, on the other hand, are allowed to buy back the houses in their cities any time they wish, for they have no land inheritance. ³³If a city house of theirs is sold and is not bought back it must be returned to the Levite at the Jubilee. It is not the permanent property of the buyer, but of the Levite. ³⁴Land that is common property of the Levites around their Levitical cities should never be sold. That land is always to be theirs.

The Poor Pay No Interest

³⁵"If an Israelite living near you becomes poor and is not able to support himself and his family, let him work off his debt as you would a neighbor or tenant in critical

need, so that he doesn't have to move and live among strangers. ³⁶If you help a fellow Israelite get established, do not charge interest on the money you loan him. Stand in awe of the Lord and deal reasonably with your brother so he will not object to live near you. ³⁷You shall not lend him money for interest or take advantage of his poverty by selling him food for a profit. ³⁸Remember that I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to bring you into the land I promised you, and you got it for nothing.

The Law Regulating Slavery

³⁹"If a fellow Israelite becomes so poor that he sells himself as a slave, and you buy him, you must not ask him to work for you as a slave. ⁴⁰Treat him as a temporary employee because you will own him only until the Year of Jubilee when you are to set him free. ⁴¹He and his family shall be allowed to return home to their own tribe and their own land which they inherited from their forefathers. ⁴²No Israelite shall be sold as a slave because all Israelites belong to me. I am the One who brought them out of the land of Egypt. ⁴³Never is anyone to treat a fellow Israelite ruthlessly and without concern. You must show him respect for I am his Lord. ⁴⁴If you need workers for your fields, you may buy men and women slaves from the nations around you. ⁴⁵You may also buy them from foreigners who have come to live among you or from their descendants. ⁴⁶You may pass such slaves on to your children as part of their inheritance. They may be redeemed, but they are not to be set free at the year of Jubilee as are the Israelites.

⁴⁷"If a foreigner living among you prospers and becomes rich and a fellow Israelite becomes poor and sells himself to that foreigner or to a member of his family, ⁴⁸he does not lose his right to be set free and his relatives always have the right to buy him back. ⁴⁹This can be done by his uncle, his cousin or any other blood relative of his. If over the years he

saves enough to buy his own freedom, he shall be allowed to do so. ⁵⁰He and his buyers shall count the number of years he worked for the man and the number of years left until the Year of Jubilee and from that determine the price of release. It should be based on the cost for a hired man for that length of time. ⁵¹If many years are left until the Year of Jubilee, the price may turn out to be higher than what the man paid for him to begin with, but they must pay it. ⁵²If only a few years are left until the Jubilee, those should be considered in paying for whatever remains, not taking into account the owner's benefit of the previous years served. ⁵³He is always to be treated as a man hired on a yearly basis. Do not let foreigners treat him cruelly. ⁵⁴If during this time he is not set free in any of these ways, when the Jubilee comes, he and his family will be free. ⁵⁵All Israelites belong to me. They are my servants. I am the One who brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord their God."

Consequences of Obedience and Disobedience

26 The Lord continued to speak to Moses, "Do not make idols or set up statues or sacred stone pillars and worship them. I am the Lord your God. ²Keep my Sabbath and show respect for my Sanctuary. I am the Lord.

³"If you obey me and follow my instructions, ⁴I will send you rain when you need it so that your land will produce crops and your trees will bear an abundance of fruit. ⁵Your crops will be so plentiful that you will still be threshing when the grape season comes, and you'll still be picking grapes when it's time to sow your fields again. You will have plenty to eat. ⁶I will give you peace in your land and you will be able to lie down and sleep at night without having to be afraid. I will remove any dangerous animals throughout your land and wars will not come near you. ⁷If others are so foolish as to attack you, you will pursue them and they will fall by your

sword. ⁸Five of you will be able to chase a hundred and a hundred of you will be able to chase ten thousand. Your enemies will run before you and they will fall by your sword.

⁹I will bless you and your children will be fruitful and multiply. I will keep my covenant that I made with you. ¹⁰You will still be eating from last year's crop when you have to make room for the new one. ¹¹I will live among you in my holy Sanctuary. I will never leave you. ¹²I will go with you and be your God and you will be my people. ¹³I am the Lord your God, the One who brought you out of Egypt and freed you from bondage. I broke the power that held you in slavery so you could be free and walk out with your head held high.

¹⁴But if you will not listen to me or follow my instructions, you will suffer the consequences. ¹⁵If you go against my laws, break my covenant and refuse to be corrected, ¹⁶I will allow disasters to come to your land. Diseases and fevers will take away your sight and drain your life forces. You will plant crops, but your enemies will come and eat them. ¹⁷I will let you be defeated and those who despise you will rule over you. You will be so scared of your enemies that you will run when no one is chasing you. ¹⁸If after all that, you still refuse to listen to me, I will discipline you seven times more than before. ¹⁹I will break your stubborn pride by withholding rain until the sky above you looks like copper and the ground under your feet feels like iron. ²⁰No matter how hard you work and what you do, your land will not produce the crops you need and your trees will not bear their full measure of fruit.

²¹If you still continue in your stubbornness, I will increase my discipline seven times greater, according to your sins. ²²I will direct wild animals to come into your land. They will be so numerous that you will not be able to destroy them fast enough. They will kill your cattle, attack your children and reduce you in

number so that your streets and roads will look empty.

²³If you still refuse to listen to me and you continue to be stubborn, ²⁴I will increase my discipline seven times again. ²⁵I will direct armies to attack you, and if you run to your fortified cities for protection, I will bring disease on you and you will be so weak you will be forced to surrender. ²⁶Your food supply will be so low that ten women will need only one oven to bake the bread they have. They will cut what little they have into ten pieces to feed ten families.

²⁷If after all of this, you still won't listen to me but continue to have a rebellious spirit, ²⁸I will show my hatred of sin and again increase your discipline sevenfold. ²⁹You will be so hungry and so insensitive that you will kill and eat your own infant sons and daughters just to survive. ³⁰I will destroy your mountain retreats where you worship your idols, crush your incense altars, knock down your sun images and heap up your dead bodies on top of your crushed idols. ³¹I will reduce your cities to ruins and destroy your pagan temples. Unless you change, I will not accept any offerings you bring to me. ³²I will destroy your country so completely that even your enemies who will come to live in it will be astonished at what happened to you. ³³I will bring the sword down on you and scatter you among the nations. Your farmland will be deserted and your cities will be in ruins.

³⁴All the time you're away in exile the land will finally enjoy the rest I had set aside for it every seventh year. ³⁵By lying desolate, the land will have the rest that it should have had while you were working it. ³⁶I will make those who survived the war and were taken into exile so afraid that even the sound of leaves in the wind will scare them. They will run and fall as if someone were chasing them with a sword, when actually no one is near them. ³⁷And even though no one is pursuing them, they will stumble over each

other as if they were. They will be too weak to stand up to any of their enemies. ³⁸They will die in exile and the land of their enemies will swallow up their dead. ³⁹Those who are left back home will waste away because of their own sins and the accumulated consequences of the sins of their fathers.

⁴⁰“But if they will confess their sins and acknowledge that their fathers have sinned and that they, like them, have been stubborn and refused to listen to me, I will forgive them. ⁴¹It was their stubbornness which caused me to discipline them by destroying their land and sending them into exile. But if they humble themselves and accept exile as the consequence of their own sins, ⁴²then I will reactivate the agreement I made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and bring them back home and once again bless their land. ⁴³It will have had its rest and enjoyed its Sabbaths while they were away. They will reap the consequences of their disobedience, from breaking my commandments and my laws. ⁴⁴Yet in spite of all this, I will not abandon them while they’re in exile, nor will I abhor them so as to completely destroy them for what they and their fathers have done. I am still the Lord their God. ⁴⁵I will remember the agreement I made with their ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt and in the sight of all the nations became their God.”

⁴⁶These are the instructions, the statutes and laws that the Lord gave Moses on Mount Sinai for the good of His people.

The Redemption Price of a Vow

27 The Lord said to Moses, ²“Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: If anyone vows to give himself or one of his family members to the full service of the Lord, and circumstances change so that he cannot keep his vow, he shall pay a redemption price to be freed from that vow. ³The value of an adult male from twenty to sixty years old

is to be set at fifty pieces of silver; ⁴for an adult female at thirty pieces of silver; ⁵for a young male from five to twenty years at twenty pieces of silver; for a young female at ten pieces of silver; ⁶for infant males from four weeks to five years of age at five pieces of silver; infant females at three pieces of silver; ⁷males above sixty at fifteen pieces of silver; and females at ten pieces of silver. ⁸If anyone making such a vow is too poor to pay the required amount, he must present himself or the other family member to the priest who will make an adjustment of the redemption price according to what the man can afford.

⁹“If he vows to give an animal to me and the animal is one that is acceptable as a sacrifice, that animal belongs to me; it cannot be bought back. ¹⁰If the man changes his mind and decides to substitute another animal for the prize animal he said he would give to me, both animals will then be holy and belong to me. ¹¹If all he has to give is an unclean animal, such as a donkey which is unacceptable, he must bring the animal to the priest ¹²who will decide its value and set a price for it to be sold, and whatever the priest decides will be final. ¹³If the person wants to buy back the animal instead of having it sold to someone else, he must pay whatever price the priest sets, plus twenty percent.

¹⁴“If someone promises to give his house to me, the priest will decide its value and set a price for it, and whatever price the priest decides on is to remain fixed. ¹⁵If the man wants to keep his house, he is to pay whatever price the priest decides on plus twenty percent.

¹⁶“If a man promises to give part of his family land to me, the price will be set according to the amount of seed required to sow it, at the rate of ten pieces of silver per bushel. ¹⁷If he promises to give part of his land to me during the year of Jubilee, the price will be arrived at the same way. ¹⁸If he promises to give part of his land to me after the Jubilee, the priest is to take into account the number of

years left until the next Jubilee and reduce the price according to the years that have passed. ¹⁹If the man changes his mind and wants to keep the land that he promised to give me, he must pay the price set by the priest plus twenty percent. ²⁰If he sells the land to someone and then turns around and promises it to me, he cannot buy it back. The family loses its right to own it. ²¹At the next Jubilee it will become the permanent property of the Lord and will belong to the priests. ²²If a man promises to give a field to me that he just bought, and then changes his mind and wants to keep it, ²³the priest will decide its value based on the number of years left until the next Jubilee and the man must pay the full price that very day; he does not have to pay the extra twenty percent since he has paid for it twice. ²⁴But whether he buys it back or it stays with me, at the next Jubilee the field must be returned to its original owner. ²⁵All prices are to be set according to the official Sanctuary standard.

²⁶No one shall promise to give the firstborn of certain clean animals such as cows, sheep or goats to me, because all such firstborn animals already belong to me. ²⁷If he promised the firstborn of an unclean animal to me, it shall be sold to someone at the price decided on by the priest, or the man can buy it back for the

same amount plus twenty percent.

²⁸Now if a man vows to devote something totally to my service, whether it's himself, someone from his family, an animal or a piece of land, he is not allowed to redeem it or buy it back. Whoever or whatever it is belongs to me and is most holy; nothing can be substituted for it. ²⁹Justice must be carried out in your land and someone who is under the ban of death must be executed. He is neither to be redeemed nor be allowed to pay his way free.

³⁰One tenth of everything, whether grain from the land or fruit from the trees, belongs to me. ³¹If a man wants to buy some of it back from me, he must pay the price set by the priest plus twenty percent. ³²One out of every ten animals, whether from the herd or the flock, belongs to me. The shepherd will mark such animals as he counts them when they come out of the pen and pass under his rod. ³³He must not line up the animals in such a way so as to make the nine good ones pass through the counting gate first, nor is he to make any substitutions. If he does, both the Lord's animal and the substitute animal will belong to me and cannot be bought back."

³⁴These are the instructions the Lord gave to Moses on Mount Sinai to give to the children of Israel.

NUMBERS

The First Census

1 And the Lord spoke to Moses from the newly erected Sanctuary in the Sinai wilderness on the first day of the second month in the second year after the children of Israel had left Egypt, saying, ²“Take a census of the children of Israel by tribes and families listing every male by name. ³You and Aaron are to keep a count of those who are twenty years old and up who are fit for military service. ⁴I have chosen one man from each tribe to help you; each one is a leader of his ancestral house.

⁵“Here are the names I have chosen: From the tribe of Reuben, Elizur the son of Shedeur, ⁶from the tribe of Simeon, Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai, ⁷from the tribe of Judah, Nahshon the son of Amminadab, ⁸from the tribe of Issachar, Nethanel the son of Zuar, ⁹from the tribe of Zebulun, Eliab the son of Helon, ¹⁰from the sons of Joseph for the tribe of Ephraim, Elishama the son of Ammihud; and from the tribe of Manasseh, Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur, ¹¹from the tribe of Benjamin, Abidan the son of Gideoni, ¹²from the tribe of Dan, Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai, ¹³from the tribe of Asher, Pagiel the son of Ochran, ¹⁴from the tribe of Gad, Eliasaph the son of Deuel, ¹⁵and from the tribe of Naphtali, Ahira the son of Enan.” ¹⁶These men were chosen by God from the community to be leaders of the twelve tribes that make up Israel.

¹⁷Moses and Aaron gladly accepted the men as leaders to help them. ¹⁸And the same day that the Lord asked for a census to be taken, Moses announced it to the people. So on the first day of the second month in the second year after the children of Israel had left Egypt, Moses and Aaron and the leaders chosen by God for the twelve tribes began to count the men twenty years old and up who were fit for military service. They did this by tribes and families, just as the

Lord had told them to do. ¹⁹Moses and Aaron took the census right there in the Sinai wilderness.

²⁰They began with the tribe of Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, by families, then by households, counting those twenty years old and up who could serve in the army. ²¹From the tribe of Reuben there were forty-six thousand, five hundred, ²²from the tribe of Simeon, ²³fifty-nine thousand, three hundred, ²⁴from the tribe of Gad, ²⁵forty-five thousand, six hundred and fifty, ²⁶from the tribe of Judah, ²⁷seventy-four thousand, six hundred, ²⁸from the tribe of Issachar, ²⁹fifty-four thousand, four hundred, ³⁰from the tribe of Zebulun, ³¹fifty-seven thousand, four hundred, ³²from the tribe of Ephraim, the son of Joseph, ³³forty thousand, five hundred, ³⁴from the tribe of Manasseh, ³⁵thirty-two thousand, two hundred, ³⁶from the tribe of Benjamin, ³⁷thirty-five thousand, four hundred, ³⁸from the tribe of Dan, ³⁹sixty-two thousand, seven hundred, ⁴⁰from the tribe of Asher, ⁴¹forty-one thousand, five hundred, ⁴²and from the tribe of Naphtali, ⁴³fifty-three thousand, four hundred.

⁴⁴These were the number of men fit for military service as counted by Moses and Aaron and the leaders chosen by the Lord to help them. ⁴⁵They were listed according to their tribes and family divisions and were registered as such for military service. ⁴⁶The total was six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty.

⁴⁷The tribe of Levi was not included in this census like the other tribes, ⁴⁸because the Lord had said to Moses, ⁴⁹“When you take the census, do not count the tribe of Levi, for those men are mine. ⁵⁰They are in charge of the Sanctuary and all its equipment. They are to care for it, carry it when you move, set it up at the next campsite, then pitch their tents around it. ⁵¹When I tell you to move, only the Levites are to take the

Sanctuary down, and only the Levites are to set it up again. Anyone else who comes near the Sanctuary to touch it or to help them is to be put to death. ⁵²Once the place of the Sanctuary is staked out at the new campsite, the children of Israel are to pitch their tents by tribes and family divisions, each under its own flag with its own insignia. ⁵³But the Levites are to keep others from carelessly going near it and touching it so I don't have to discipline them." ⁵⁴And the children of Israel did everything the Lord told Moses to tell them to do.

The Leaders of Tribes

2 The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron again, ²"When the children of Israel set up camp, each man is to pitch his tent under the banner of his tribe and family division. The tribes are to set up camp on all four sides of the Sanctuary. ³Looking east from the Sanctuary, toward the sunrise, the family divisions of the tribe of Judah shall camp under their tribal banner whose insignia is a lion. Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, will be the leader ⁴and commander over Judah's seventy-four thousand, six hundred men in his division. ⁵The tribe of Issachar shall camp to the right of Judah under their tribal banner. Nethanel, the son of Zuar, will be the leader ⁶and commander over Issachar's fifty-four thousand, four hundred men in his division. ⁷The tribe of Zebulun shall camp to the left of Judah under their tribal banner. Eliab, the son of Helon, will be the leader ⁸and commander over Zebulun's fifty-seven thousand, four hundred men in his division. ⁹The tribe of Judah shall be the lead tribe of this first set of three tribes to march out of camp with a combined total of one hundred and eighty-six thousand, four hundred men.

¹⁰"To the south of the Sanctuary, the tribe of Reuben shall set up camp under their tribal banner whose insignia is a man. Elizur, the son of Shedeur, will be

the leader ¹¹and commander over Reuben's forty-six thousand, five hundred men in his division. ¹²The tribe of Simeon shall camp to the left of Reuben under their tribal banner. Shelumiel, the son of Zurishaddai, will be the leader ¹³and commander over Simeon's fifty-nine thousand, three hundred men in his division. ¹⁴The tribe of Gad shall camp to the right of Reuben under their tribal banner. Eliasaph, the son of Deuel, will be the leader ¹⁵and commander over Gad's forty-five thousand, six hundred and fifty men in his division. ¹⁶The tribe of Reuben shall be the lead tribe of these three tribes and the second group to march out of camp with a combined total of one hundred and fifty-one thousand, four hundred and fifty men.

¹⁷"Behind each set of three, a group of Levites are to march. They are to carry the articles and materials of the Sanctuary and march according to their family divisions under their tribal banner.

¹⁸"To the west of the Sanctuary, the tribe of Ephraim shall set up camp under their tribal banner whose insignia is a bull. Elishama, the son of Ammihud, will be the leader ¹⁹and commander over Ephraim's forty thousand, five hundred men in his division. ²⁰The tribe of Manasseh shall camp to the left of Ephraim under their tribal banner. Gamaliel, the son of Pedahzur, will be the leader ²¹and commander over Manasseh's thirty-two thousand, two hundred men in his division. ²²The tribe of Benjamin shall camp to the right of Ephraim under their tribal banner. Abidan, the son of Gideoni, will be the leader ²³and commander over Benjamin's thirty-five thousand, four hundred men in his division. ²⁴The tribe of Ephraim shall be the lead tribe of these three tribes which are to follow behind the tribe of Levi carrying the articles and materials of the Sanctuary with a combined total of one hundred and eight thousand, one hundred men fit for war.

²⁵"To the north of the Sanctuary, the

tribe of Dan shall set up camp under their tribal banner whose insignia is an eagle, the killer of snakes. Ahiezer, the son of Ammishaddai, will be the leader ²⁶and commander of Dan's sixty-two thousand, seven hundred men in his division. ²⁷The tribe of Asher shall camp to the right of Dan under their tribal banner. Pagiel, the son of Ochran, will be the leader ²⁸and commander of Asher's forty-one thousand, five hundred men in his division. ²⁹The tribe of Naphtali shall camp to the left of Dan under their tribal banner. Ahira, the son of Enan, will be the leader ³⁰and commander of Naphtali's fifty-three thousand, four hundred men in his division. ³¹The tribe of Dan shall be the lead tribe of these last three tribes which are to follow the third set of three in the line of march with a combined total of one hundred and fifty-seven thousand, six hundred men fit for war.

³²"All the able-bodied men from the twelve tribes numbering six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty will serve under their respective leaders. ³³The Levites are not to be included in the numbering of the men fit for war."

³⁴The people of Israel did everything the Lord said according to the instructions He gave to Moses. Each tribe camped under its own banner in the place assigned to it, leaving a huge hollow square in the middle of the camp for the Sanctuary. And whenever the children of Israel broke camp they marched out in their assigned order.

The Sons of Aaron

3 The families of Moses and Aaron at the time the Lord spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai were as follows: ²Aaron had four sons whose names were Nadab the firstborn, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ³They were all anointed and set aside as priests for the Lord's service. ⁴But Nadab and Abihu fell dead before the Lord when they made an offering with unholy fire in the Sanctuary while the children of Israel were still in the wilderness. They had no

sons, so only Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests with their father Aaron during his lifetime.

The Levites and the Sanctuary

⁵It was also at Sinai that the Lord said to Moses, ⁶"Bring the tribe of Levi forward and set them before Aaron, for they are to be his support staff to serve him and his sons. ⁷The Levites are to help them perform their duties as required by the various services of the Sanctuary and to carry out their responsibilities of ministry to the people. ⁸They are to care for all the furnishings of the Sanctuary, do all the work of setting it up and taking it down, and any other duties needed to serve the children of Israel there. ⁹The Levites are responsible only to Aaron and his sons. They are the only tribe that has been set apart to serve me in this way. ¹⁰Appoint Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. Anyone else who approaches the Sanctuary to carry out a priestly function is to be put to death."

¹¹The Lord also said to Moses, ¹²"I have chosen the tribe of Levi to serve me in this way in place of all the firstborn males who have opened the womb. ¹³These firstborn males are mine because I spared them the night I brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. All the firstborn males are mine, both human and animal. I am the Lord."

Census of the Levites

¹⁴The Lord continued to speak to Moses at Sinai, saying, ¹⁵"Count the Levites by family divisions and register every male from a month old and up." ¹⁶Moses did as the Lord said and counted them all. ¹⁷These are the names of the three sons of Levi, who were the original heads of the divisions of families: Gershon, Kohath and Merari. ¹⁸Gershon had two sons named Libni and Shimei. ¹⁹Kohath had four sons named Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. ²⁰Merari had two sons named Mahli and Mushi. All of these were the ancestors of the Levite

families that bear their names.

²¹The Libnites and Shimeites belonged to Gershon and were known as the Gershonites. ²²Their males one month and older numbered seven thousand, five hundred. ²³The Gershonites were to camp west of the Sanctuary. ²⁴Their leader was Eliasaph, the son of Lael. ²⁵They were responsible for both the inner and outer coverings of the Sanctuary, as well as the curtain for the entrance going into the Holy Place. ²⁶all the courtyard curtains that go around the entire Sanctuary with its sacrificial altar, and the curtains for the courtyard entrance.

²⁷The Amramites, the Izharites, the Hebronites and the Uzzielites belonged to Kohath and were known as the Kohathites. ²⁸Their males one month and older numbered eight thousand, six hundred. They were responsible for the Sanctuary, ²⁹and were to camp to the south of it. ³⁰Their leader was Elizaphan, the son of Uzziel. ³¹They were responsible for the Ark of the Covenant, the table of showbread, the lampstand, the altar of incense, the sacrificial altar, the utensils used by the priests and the curtain going into the Most Holy Place. ³²Eleazar, the son of Aaron, who served as a priest was in charge of the Levites who took care of the Sanctuary.

³³The Mahlites and the Mushites were descendants of Merari, the other son of Aaron, and they were known as the Merarites. ³⁴Their males one month and older numbered six thousand, two hundred. ³⁵They were to camp to the north of the Sanctuary. Their leader was Zuriel, the son of Abihail. ³⁶They were responsible for the frames of the Sanctuary, its crossbars, posts, bases, all the fittings to hold them up and all the work connected with them. ³⁷They also were responsible for all the posts, bases, pegs and ropes that hold up the curtains for the courtyard.

³⁸The families of Moses and Aaron were to camp to the east of the Sanctuary on the side of its entrance.

Aaron and his sons were responsible for carrying out the services of the Sanctuary on behalf of the people. Anyone else who would attempt to do so was to be put to death. ³⁹The combined total of Levite males one month and older was twenty-two thousand.

Levites Take the Place of the Firstborn

⁴⁰Then the Lord said to Moses, "Now I want you to count all the firstborn males who opened the womb, those one month and older from all the tribes of Israel. ⁴¹Then set aside the Levites for me in place of all these firstborn males, and set aside the cattle of the Levites in place of the firstborn cattle of Israel. I am the Lord." ⁴²Moses did everything the Lord asked him to do. ⁴³These firstborn males from all the tribes of Israel numbered twenty-two thousand, two hundred and seventy-three.

⁴⁴Then the Lord spoke to Moses again, saying, ⁴⁵"In place of the firstborn of Israel, take the Levites to serve me, and in place of the firstborn cattle of Israel, take the cattle of the Levites. The Levites are mine. I am the Lord. ⁴⁶Since there are two hundred and seventy three more of these firstborn than there are Levites, these extra sons must pay a redemption price to me. ⁴⁷For each such firstborn collect five pieces of silver according to the standard of the Sanctuary, ⁴⁸and give the money paid for these extra firstborn to Aaron and his sons." ⁴⁹Moses did as the Lord had said and collected the redemption money for the firstborn that were more than the number of Levites. ⁵⁰He collected one thousand, three hundred and sixty-five pieces of silver ⁵¹and gave them to Aaron and his sons as the Lord had directed.

The Sons of Kohath

4 Again the Lord spoke to Moses, ²"Take a census of the Kohathites by families, ³and register all the men between the ages of thirty and fifty who are

qualified to do their assigned work for the Sanctuary, ⁴including the work that needs to be done in connection with those things that are most holy. ⁵When it is time to break camp and move, Aaron and his sons are to go into the Most Holy Place, take down the entry curtain and use it to cover the Ark of the Covenant. ⁶They are to put a fine leather covering over it, spread a blue cloth over that and make sure the carrying poles are in place. ⁷They also are to go into the Holy Place and spread a blue cloth over the table of showbread with the bread still on it. On top of that, lay the plates, spoons, bowls and jars used for the drink offerings. ⁸Over all these things they must spread a bright red cloth. They must spread a fine leather cover over that and make sure the carrying poles are in place.

⁹Next they are to put out the lights of the seven-branched lampstand and cover it, the wick trimmers and trays with a blue cloth. All the jars used for oil in the lamps must also be covered. ¹⁰Then they must wrap everything in fine leather and place them on a carrying frame. ¹¹After that they are to spread a blue cloth over the altar of incense, put a fine leather cover over that and make sure the carrying poles are in place. ¹²They are to take all the utensils used for ministering in the Holy Place, wrap them in a blue cloth, cover them with fine leather and place them on a carrying frame. ¹³Outside the Sanctuary, in the courtyard, they are to remove the ashes from the altar of sacrifice and spread a purple cloth over it. ¹⁴Then they are to take all the utensils used for ministering at the altar, such as firepans, meat forks, shovels and basins, and lay them on the altar. Over this they must spread a fine leather covering and then make sure the carrying poles are in place. They are to do the same thing to the laver.

¹⁵When Aaron and his sons have done all this and all the items have an outer cover of leather, except the Ark that has

an outer covering of blue, then break camp and move on. Only the Kohathites, the descendants of Levi, are to carry these things—no one else, or they will die. The Kohathites are to organize themselves into teams, so they can take turns carrying the Sanctuary to the next camp. ¹⁶Eleazar, the son of Aaron, is responsible to see that all of this is done right. He is also in charge of oil for the lamps, incense, grain offerings and anointing oil. He is to oversee all that is done for the entire Sanctuary and its contents."

¹⁷The Lord continued to speak to Moses and Aaron, saying, ¹⁸"Number all the men from the Kohathites from thirty to fifty years old who are qualified to do the work assigned to them and be sure to tell them not to touch any of the Sanctuary furniture, except for the carrying poles, or they will die. ¹⁹To keep them from losing their lives, Aaron and his sons are to take each carrying team into the Sanctuary and make sure that each man on the team knows what to do. ²⁰The Kohathites are not to enter the Sanctuary beforehand to watch the priests cover the furniture or they will die."

The Sons of Gershon

²¹Then the Lord said to Moses, ²²"Take a census of the Gershonites by families. ²³Register all men between the ages of thirty and fifty who are qualified to do their assigned work for the Sanctuary. ²⁴The Gershonites are responsible for carrying the following items: ²⁵the curtains of the Sanctuary, its tent coverings including the outer covering of fine leather, the curtain for the Holy Place, ²⁶the curtains for the courtyard, the ropes and all the things needed for ministering in the Sanctuary. ²⁷All this is to be done under the supervision of Aaron and his sons. They are to see to it that the Gershonites carry all the things assigned to them. ²⁸These responsibilities the Gershonites are to carry out under the direction of Ithamar, the son of Aaron.

The Sons of Merari

²⁹“Next, take a census of the Merarites by families. ³⁰Count all the men between the ages of thirty and fifty who are qualified to do their assigned work for the Sanctuary. ³¹They are to carry the frames of the Sanctuary, its crossbars, posts and bases, pegs and ropes, ³²the posts and bases for the courtyard with their pegs and ropes and all the things used with the poles of the courtyard. Each man is to be assigned the specific item he is to carry. ³³The Merarites also are to carry out these responsibilities under the direction of Ithamar, the son of Aaron.”

The Number of Levites

³⁴When Moses and Aaron with the help of the tribal leaders had counted the Kohathites with their families, ³⁵all the men from thirty to fifty years of age who were qualified to do their assigned work for the Sanctuary ³⁶numbered two thousand, seven hundred and fifty. ³⁷This was the total of the able-bodied Kohathite men assigned to the work of the Sanctuary, and they were registered by Moses and Aaron just as the Lord had told them.

³⁸When the Gershonites were counted with their families, ³⁹all the men from thirty to fifty years old who were qualified to do the work assigned them ⁴⁰numbered two thousand, six hundred and thirty. ⁴¹This was the total of the able-bodied Gershonite men assigned to the work of the Sanctuary, and they were registered by Moses and Aaron just like the others.

⁴²When the Merarites were counted by their families, ⁴³all the men from thirty to fifty years old who were qualified to do their assigned work for the Sanctuary ⁴⁴numbered three thousand, two hundred. ⁴⁵This was the total of the able-bodied Merarite men assigned to the work of the Sanctuary, and they also were registered by Moses and Aaron.

⁴⁶So together with the help of the tribal leaders, Moses and Aaron com-

pleted the census of all the descendants of Levi by their families, as the Lord had told them to do. ⁴⁷All men from thirty to fifty years old who were qualified to do their assigned work in the Sanctuary ⁴⁸numbered eight thousand, five hundred and eighty. ⁴⁹Moses and Aaron completed the census and assigned each man a specific task. Each one was told what to carry and how to do it. This was as the Lord had instructed them to do.

Unclean Persons

5 Then the Lord said to Moses, ²“The children of Israel are to send away from the camp anyone who has a contagious skin disease or a bodily discharge, and also anyone who is ritually unclean from contact with a corpse. ³This applies to both men and women. They must live outside the camp until they are clean, so as not to spread disease in the camp. And also because my presence is there.” ⁴So the Israelites sent all such persons away from the camp just as the Lord had asked them to do.

Confession and Restitution

⁵Again the Lord spoke to Moses, ⁶“When a man or a woman does something wrong against another person, he or she has sinned against the Lord and is guilty. ⁷The person is to confess his wrong, make full restitution plus twenty percent and give it all to the person he has wronged. ⁸If the person he wronged is dead and has no close relatives to whom the restitution can be paid, he is to take it to the Sanctuary and give it to the Lord for support of the priests. The priest must sacrifice a ram to remove that person’s guilt. ⁹All the contributions that the children of Israel bring to the Lord are sacred and are to be used for the support of the priests. ¹⁰Each person’s gift to the Lord is sacred and what he brings to the Sanctuary will belong to the priest to whom he gave it.”

Unfaithful Wives

¹¹Then the Lord said to Moses, ¹²“If among the children of Israel, a man suspects that his wife has been unfaithful to him, ¹³and he thinks she has slept with another man, but he isn’t sure because she denied it when he confronted her; if there is no witness to prove otherwise, ¹⁴yet he still suspects her of having done so and the feeling of jealousy will not leave him, ¹⁵he is to bring his wife to the Sanctuary to see the priest. He also is to bring with him the required offering of two pounds of barley flour, but he is not to pour the required olive oil or incense on the flour as is usually the case, because it is an offering brought by a suspecting husband to find out if she is guilty.

¹⁶“The priest is to ask the woman to come into the courtyard and stand before the Lord in front of the altar. ¹⁷He is to pour water from the laver into a clay jar and take some dust from the floor of the Holy Place and sprinkle it into the water. ¹⁸Then he is to ask the woman to loosen her hair and is to place in her hands the barley flour offering that her husband brought. While the priest is holding the clay jar with the water mixed with dust, ¹⁹he is to have the woman take an oath after he says to her, ‘If you have not slept with another man as you say, you will not be hurt by drinking this water, ²⁰but if you have been unfaithful to your husband and have slept with another man, ²¹the Lord will make you infertile. Your uterus will drop, you will miscarry and your abdomen will swell. When the people see this they will denounce you for what you have done. ²²As this water enters your body the Lord will bring all this upon you.’ The woman is to take an oath and agree to the conditions and say, ‘So be it.’

²³“Then the priest is to write the conditions down and when he has finished, he is to wash the writing off into the jar of water. ²⁴The woman is to get ready to drink this bitter mixture that will bring

on the consequences that were written down by the priest. ²⁵The priest is to take the two pounds of barley flour he asked her to hold and raise it up before the Lord. ²⁶Then he is to take a handful of it and burn it on the altar as a token offering to the Lord. After this the woman is to drink the bitter water as she was asked to do. ²⁷If she has been unfaithful to her husband, the water she drinks will bring on the consequences. Her uterus will drop, she will miscarry and her abdomen will swell. She will always be infertile and the people will turn against her. ²⁸If she’s innocent, the water will not hurt her body. She will be cleared of guilt and will be able to bear children.

²⁹“This is the law for cases where a husband suspects his wife of having been unfaithful to him, ³⁰or when a man feels jealous and wants to make sure that his wife still belongs to him. In any of these cases, the priest is to have her come before the Lord and carry out the law. ³¹If the woman is guilty, she has brought the consequences on herself. Her husband is not to be held guilty of causing these consequences.”

The Nazarite Law

6 Again the Lord spoke to Moses, ²“Tell the children of Israel that if a man or a woman decides to take a vow of special dedication to the Lord and for a specified time to become a Nazarite, this is what he or she is to do: ³He is to abstain from all wine and alcoholic drinks and from any kind of drink with alcohol in it. Neither is he to drink unfermented wine, eat grapes or raisins, or drink anything that has grape juice in it. ⁴As long as he is under this vow he is not to eat anything produced from grapes, from its seeds or from its skin.

⁵“A man is not to cut his hair or shave, and no razor is to touch him during this entire period. He is to let his hair and beard grow as a sign of his dedication. ⁶During this time he is not to touch a corpse or even go near it. ⁷Even if his

father, mother, brother or sister dies, he is not to touch them but is to stay ritually clean because he has set himself apart for God and is under a vow of special dedication. ⁸During this time he is holy to the Lord, because he has set himself apart.

⁹If someone next to him suddenly dies, he has become ritually unclean and is to wait seven days, then shave his head and beard. ¹⁰On the eighth day he is to bring two doves or two young pigeons to the Sanctuary. ¹¹The priest is to offer one of these as a sin offering and the other as a consecration offering to make atonement for him because the man became unclean by being in the presence of someone who died. On that day he is to rededicate himself to the Lord and begin to let his hair and beard grow again. ¹²His previous days under the vow were lost. He is to start his period of special dedication over again by bringing a one-year-old male lamb as a sin offering to the Lord.

¹³When the period of dedication is over, he is to come to the Sanctuary and present himself to the Lord. ¹⁴He is to bring with him three animals without defect, a one-year-old ram for a whole burnt offering, a one-year-old female lamb for a sin offering and a full-grown ram for a peace offering. ¹⁵He also is to bring a basket of unleavened bread made with flour mixed with olive oil and wafers brushed with olive oil. In addition he is to bring the regular grain and drink offering. ¹⁶The priest is to present all these to the Lord and offer up the sin offering and the whole burnt offering. ¹⁷He is to present the basket of bread and sacrifice the ram as a peace offering, presenting the grain and drink offerings with them. ¹⁸The one who has taken the vow of dedication is to perform the Nazarite ritual in the courtyard near the entrance of the Sanctuary. He is to shave his head and his beard and put the hair in the fire with the peace offering. ¹⁹After this the priest is to place in the hands of the man a boiled shoulder

from the ram that was kept back from the fire and also bread and a wafer from the basket. ²⁰Then the priest is to take each piece and hold it up before the Lord as a special offering. Such offerings are holy and belong to the priest, in addition to those parts of the offering that normally belong to him. After that, the one having taken the Nazarite vow may again drink from the grape.

²¹"This is the law for those who wish to take the vow of special dedication. If such a person promises to bring additional offerings to the Lord beyond what was required, he is to keep his promise just as he made it."

The Priestly Blessing

²²Then the Lord said to Moses, ²³"Tell Aaron and his sons that they are to bless the children of Israel with this prayer: ²⁴The Lord bless you and keep you; ²⁵the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶the Lord look joyfully and lovingly on you and give you peace.

²⁷"Aaron and his sons are to bless the people this way, and I will bless them."

Offerings Brought by the Leaders

7 The same day that Moses finished setting up the Sanctuary, he anointed and dedicated all its furnishings, including the sacrificial altar in the courtyard and all its utensils. ²Then the leaders of the tribes who had been in charge of taking the census ³brought their gifts to the Lord. They brought six covered carts to carry parts of the Sanctuary and twelve oxen to pull them. Each leader gave one ox and every two leaders one cart, and they brought them to the Sanctuary. ⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, ⁵"Accept these gifts from the leaders to be used for the Sanctuary and give them to the Levites for the work they need to do."

⁶So Moses took the six carts and the twelve oxen to pull them and gave them to the Levites. ⁷He gave two carts and four oxen to the Gershonites ⁸and four carts and eight oxen to the Merarites, all

of whom were under the supervision of Ithamar, the son of Aaron. ⁹But Moses did not give carts or oxen to the Kohathites because the holy things they were responsible for were to be carried on their shoulders. ¹⁰The twelve tribal leaders also brought special offerings to the Lord to be used for the dedication of the Sanctuary.

¹¹The Lord had said to Moses, "Each day for twelve days one tribal leader is to bring his gifts to the Lord including the offerings that are to be burned on the altar for the dedication of the Sanctuary."

¹²On the first day Nahshon, the son of Amminadab and leader of the tribe of Judah, brought his gifts. ¹³He brought one silver plate weighing three pounds and one silver bowl weighing two pounds, each holding a grain offering of fine flour mixed with olive oil, ¹⁴and one small bowl of solid gold weighing four ounces filled with incense. ¹⁵He also brought a young bull, a ram and a year-old lamb for a whole burnt offering, ¹⁶a goat for a sin offering, ¹⁷and two young bulls, five rams, five goats and five one-year-old lambs for a peace offering. These were the gifts and offerings of Nahshon.

¹⁸On the second day Nethanel, the son of Zuar and leader of the tribe of Issachar, brought his offerings and gifts. ¹⁹He brought one silver plate weighing three pounds and one silver bowl weighing two pounds, each holding a grain offering of fine flour mixed with olive oil, ²⁰and one small bowl of solid gold weighing four ounces filled with incense. ²¹He also brought a young bull, a ram and a one-year-old lamb for a whole burnt offering, ²²a goat for a sin offering, ²³and two young bulls, five rams, five goats and five one-year-old lambs for a peace offering. These were the gifts and offerings of Nethanel.

²⁴On the third day Eliab, the son of Helon and leader of the tribe of Zebulun, brought his offerings and gifts. ²⁵He brought one silver plate weighing three pounds and one silver bowl weighing two pounds, each holding a grain offering of

fine flour mixed with olive oil, ²⁶and one small bowl of solid gold weighing four ounces filled with incense. ²⁷He also brought a young bull, a ram and a one-year-old lamb for a whole burnt offering, ²⁸a goat for a sin offering, ²⁹and two young bulls, five rams, five goats and five one-year-old lambs for a peace offering. These were the gifts and offerings of Eliab.

³⁰On the fourth day Elizur, the son of Shedeur and leader of the tribe of Reuben, brought his offerings and gifts. ³¹He brought one silver plate weighing three pounds and one silver bowl weighing two pounds, each holding a grain offering of fine flour mixed with olive oil, ³²and one small bowl of solid gold weighing four ounces filled with incense. ³³He also brought a young bull, a ram and a one-year-old lamb for a whole burnt offering, ³⁴a goat for a sin offering, ³⁵and two young bulls, five rams, five goats and five one-year-old lambs for a peace offering. These were the gifts and offerings of Elizur.

³⁶On the fifth day Shelumiel, the son of Zurishaddai and leader of the tribe of Simeon, brought his offerings and gifts. ³⁷He brought one silver plate weighing three pounds and one silver bowl weighing two pounds, each holding a grain offering of fine flour mixed with olive oil, ³⁸and one small bowl of solid gold weighing four ounces filled with incense. ³⁹He also brought a young bull, a ram and a one-year-old lamb for a whole burnt offering, ⁴⁰a goat for a sin offering, ⁴¹and two young bulls, five rams, five goats and five one-year-old lambs for a peace offering. These were the gifts and offerings of Shelumiel.

⁴²On the sixth day Eliasaph, the son of Deuel and leader of the tribe of Gad, brought his offerings and gifts. ⁴³He brought one silver plate weighing three pounds and one silver bowl weighing two pounds, each holding a grain offering of fine flour mixed with olive oil, ⁴⁴and one small bowl of solid gold weighing four ounces filled with incense. ⁴⁵He also brought a young bull, a ram and a one-year-old lamb for a whole burnt offering,

⁴⁶a goat for a sin offering, ⁴⁷and two young bulls, five rams, five goats and five one-year-old lambs for a peace offering. These were the gifts and offerings of Eliasaph.

⁴⁸On the seventh day Elishama, the son of Ammihud and leader of the tribe of Ephraim, brought his offerings and gifts. ⁴⁹He brought one silver plate weighing three pounds and one silver bowl weighing two pounds, each holding a grain offering of fine flour mixed with olive oil, ⁵⁰and one small bowl of solid gold weighing four ounces filled with incense. ⁵¹He also brought a young bull, a ram and a one-year-old lamb for a whole burnt offering, ⁵²a goat for a sin offering, ⁵³and two young bulls, five rams, five goats and five one-year-old lambs for a peace offering. These were the gifts and offerings of Elishama.

⁵⁴On the eighth day Gamaliel, the son of Pedahzur and leader of the tribe of Manasseh, brought his offerings and gifts. ⁵⁵He brought one silver plate weighing three pounds and one silver bowl weighing two pounds, each holding a grain offering of fine flour mixed with olive oil, ⁵⁶and one small bowl of solid gold weighing four ounces filled with incense. ⁵⁷He also brought a young bull, a ram and a one-year-old lamb for a whole burnt offering, ⁵⁸a goat for a sin offering, ⁵⁹and two young bulls, five rams, five goats and five one-year-old lambs for a peace offering. These were the gifts and offerings of Gamaliel.

⁶⁰On the ninth day Abidan, the son of Gideoni and leader of the tribe of Benjamin, brought his offerings and gifts. ⁶¹He brought one silver plate weighing three pounds and one silver bowl weighing two pounds, each holding a grain offering of fine flour mixed with olive oil, ⁶²and one small bowl of solid gold weighing four ounces filled with incense. ⁶³He also brought a young bull, a ram and a one-year-old lamb for a whole burnt offering, ⁶⁴a goat for a sin offering, ⁶⁵and two young bulls, five rams, five goats and five one-year-old lambs for a peace offering. These

were the gifts and offerings of Abidan.

⁶⁶On the tenth day Ahiezer, the son of Ammishaddai and leader of the tribe of Dan, brought his offerings and gifts. ⁶⁷He brought one silver plate weighing three pounds and one silver bowl weighing two pounds, each holding a grain offering of fine flour mixed with olive oil, ⁶⁸and one small bowl of solid gold weighing four ounces filled with incense. ⁶⁹He also brought a young bull, a ram and a year-old lamb for a whole burnt offering, ⁷⁰a goat for a sin offering, ⁷¹and two young bulls, five rams, five goats and five one-year-old lambs for a peace offering. These were the gifts and offerings of Ahiezer.

⁷²On the eleventh day Pagiel, the son of Ochran and leader of the tribe of Asher, brought his offerings and gifts. ⁷³He brought one silver plate weighing three pounds and one silver bowl weighing two pounds, each holding a grain offering of fine flour mixed with olive oil, ⁷⁴and one small bowl of solid gold weighing four ounces filled with incense. ⁷⁵He also brought a young bull, a ram and a one-year-old lamb for a whole burnt offering, ⁷⁶a goat for a sin offering, ⁷⁷and two young bulls, five rams, five goats and five one-year-old lambs for a peace offering. These were the gifts and offerings of Pagiel.

⁷⁸On the twelfth day Ahira, the son of Enan and leader of the tribe of Naphtali, brought his offerings and gifts. ⁷⁹He brought one silver plate weighing three pounds and one silver bowl weighing two pounds, each holding a grain offering of fine flour mixed with olive oil, ⁸⁰and one small bowl of solid gold weighing four ounces filled with incense. ⁸¹He also brought a young bull, a ram and a one-year-old lamb for a whole burnt offering, ⁸²a goat for a sin offering, ⁸³and two young bulls, five rams, five goats and five one-year-old lambs for a peace offering. These were the gifts and offerings of Ahira.

⁸⁴Such were the offerings of the twelve tribal leaders of Israel for the dedication of the Sanctuary and the sacrificial altar. This was after Moses had anointed the

Sanctuary. They brought a total of twelve silver plates, twelve silver bowls and twelve small bowls of solid gold. ⁸⁵Each silver plate weighed three pounds and each silver bowl weighed two pounds. Altogether their gifts weighed sixty pounds, according to the weights and measures of the Sanctuary. ⁸⁶The twelve small gold bowls filled with incense weighed four ounces each. Altogether they weighed forty-eight ounces or three pounds, according to the weights and measures of the Sanctuary.

⁸⁷The total number of animals brought for consecration offerings was twelve young bulls, twelve rams and twelve one-year-old lambs, plus twelve grain offerings. Twelve goats were brought for sin offerings. ⁸⁸The total number of animals brought for peace offerings was twenty-four young bulls, sixty rams, sixty goats and sixty one-year-old lambs. These gifts and offerings were for the dedication of the Sanctuary and the sacrificial altar after Moses had already anointed everything.

⁸⁹When Moses went back into the Sanctuary to seek the Lord, he heard the Lord's voice coming from between the cherubim above the Ark of the Covenant. It was from there that the Lord spoke to him.

The Golden Lampstand

8 The Lord said to Moses, ²"Tell Aaron that when he puts the seven-branched lampstand in place, he is to set it against the wall so it will light the area in front of it." ³So Aaron set the lampstand against the wall just as he was told. ⁴The lampstand was one solid piece of gold hammered into shape from the bottom to the top, including its golden blossoms. It was made exactly like the pattern the Lord had shown Moses on the mountain.

The Levites Dedicated

⁵Then the Lord said to Moses, ⁶"Separate the Levites from the rest of the chil-

dren of Israel and purify them so they will be ceremonially clean. ⁷First, sprinkle them with the water of purification, then have them shave their bodies and wash their clothes. After they have done this, they will be ceremonially clean. ⁸They are to bring a young bull as a consecration offering, as well as a grain offering of fine flour mixed with olive oil. They are to take a second young bull for a sin offering. ⁹Have the Levites come in groups into the courtyard of the Sanctuary by the entrance into the Holy Place and present them to the Lord. Then call the people together to witness the event.

¹⁰"The leaders of Israel are to come into the courtyard and place their hands on the heads of the Levites. ¹¹Then Aaron is to dedicate the Levites and present them to me as a special offering from the people. The Levites are to be set apart for the work of the Lord. ¹²After this the Levites are to file by and lay their hands on the heads of the two bulls. One is to be offered for a sin offering and the other for a consecration offering to make an atonement for them. ¹³Then let them stand in front of Aaron and his sons who are to present them as a living offering to the Lord.

¹⁴"This is how the Levites are to be set apart from the people, because they are mine. ¹⁵After they've been dedicated to me, they are to begin their assigned work at the Sanctuary. ¹⁶These are the sons of Israel that in a special way belong to me, because I have claimed them in place of the firstborn males. ¹⁷Every firstborn male who opened the womb, whether from man or animal, is mine. When I struck down the firstborn of Egypt, I saved the firstborn of Israel. That's why they're mine. ¹⁸But I have decided to take the Levites in place of these firstborn males. That's why they are being set apart. ¹⁹I have given them to Aaron and his sons as support staff to help in the work of the Sanctuary. They will serve on behalf of the people, and no harm will come to them as it would to others who

might presume to serve there.”

²⁰So Moses, Aaron and the children of Israel set the Levites apart as the Lord had asked them to. ²¹The Levites purified themselves, washed their clothes, and Aaron presented them to the Lord as a special offering from the people and dedicated them to the Lord by making an atonement for them. ²²After this, the Levites began their work at the Sanctuary under the supervision of Aaron and his sons, who shared with them what the Lord had told them to do.

²³Then the Lord said to Moses, ²⁴“The Levites are to assume their responsibilities and to take part in the work of the Sanctuary beginning at the age of twenty-five. ²⁵At the age of fifty they are to retire from work at the Sanctuary and are freed from the responsibilities of service. ²⁶However, they may volunteer to help younger Levites with minor duties. But they are to do no heavy work such as lifting parts of animals or performing difficult services. This is how the responsibilities of the Levites are to be divided according to age.”

The Second Passover

9 The Lord spoke to Moses in the first month of the second year after the children of Israel had come out of Egypt, ²“Be sure to have the people keep the Passover at the appointed time. ³On the fourteenth day of this month beginning at sunset, the Israelites are to keep the Passover according to the instructions I have given you.” ⁴Then Moses told the people to prepare to keep the Passover.

⁵So while still in the wilderness of Sinai, on the fourteenth day of the first month of the second year, beginning at sunset, they kept the Passover according to the instructions of the Lord. ⁶But there were some who couldn't keep the Passover that day because they had touched a dead person and were ceremonially unclean. So they went to Moses and Aaron and said, ⁷“We understand that we are not fit to keep the Passover because

we are ritually unclean from having touched a dead person, but why can't we at least present an offering to the Lord as the other people do?” ⁸Moses answered, “Let me ask the Lord about this.”

⁹Moses asked the Lord, and the Lord said, ¹⁰“Tell the children of Israel that when any one of them or their descendants are ceremonially unfit to keep the Passover because they have touched a dead body or because they've not returned home from a journey, they still can keep the Passover, but not at the regular time. ¹¹They need to make arrangements to keep it one month later, on the fourteenth day of the second month, beginning at sunset the evening before. ¹²They are not to break any of the lamb's bones, and the next day they are not to eat any of the leftovers. When they keep the Passover on their own like this, they are to follow all the instructions that go with it. ¹³If a man was ceremonially unclean and couldn't keep the Passover the first month, or if he was on a distant journey during that time, he is to keep the Passover on the fourteenth day of the second month. If he fails to do so, he is to be cut off from the people, because he did not bring the Passover offering to the Lord at the appointed time. He is responsible for the consequences of his own sin. ¹⁴If a foreigner who lives among you wants to keep the Passover, he is to be allowed to do so in harmony with all the instructions given to the children of Israel. The same law applies to everyone, whether he is born a Jew or not.”

A Cloud by Day and a Fire by Night

¹⁵The same day that Moses set up the Sanctuary, the cloud of the Lord covered it. At night the cloud looked as if it were on fire and continued so until morning. ¹⁶That's how it was every day; the cloud of the Lord rested over the Sanctuary by day, and at sunset it began to give light as if it were on fire. ¹⁷Whenever the cloud lifted, the people knew that it was time to break camp and move. When the

cloud stopped they knew it was time to set up camp and erect the Sanctuary. ¹⁸So at the command of the Lord, the children of Israel moved on, and at His command they set up camp. As long as the Lord's cloud rested over the Sanctuary, they stayed where they were. ¹⁹Even if the cloud remained over the Sanctuary for days or weeks, they would stay right there.

²⁰At times the cloud remained over the Sanctuary for only a few days, but when it lifted, they would again break camp. ²¹Sometimes the cloud would light up a place for only one night, and when it lifted in the morning, they would move on. But whenever the cloud lifted they would start breaking camp and move on, whether it was day or night. ²²If the cloud stayed in a place for two days, a month or a whole year, the children of Israel would stay right there and not move, but as soon as it lifted, they would go on. ²³So at the Lord's command they stayed or moved. They followed all the instructions the Lord had given them through Moses.

The Silver Trumpets

10 Again the Lord spoke to Moses, ²"Make two trumpets out of silver and use them to call the people together for worship and for breaking camp. ³Give long blasts on both trumpets when calling the people together to meet you at the Sanctuary. ⁴Give long blasts on one trumpet when the leaders are to meet you at the Sanctuary. ⁵Give short blasts on both trumpets when it is time to break camp. The first set of short blasts will be the signal for the three tribes camped to the east of the Sanctuary to break camp. ⁶The second set of short blasts will be the signal for the three tribes camped to the south of the Sanctuary to break camp, and so on for the three tribes camped to the west and to the north of the Sanctuary. ⁷The signal to break camp is not the same as the one that calls the people to worship. ⁸Aaron's sons who are serving as priests

are to blow the trumpets. This is to be a lasting ordinance for generations to come. ⁹When war comes to your land and you need to defend yourselves against an invading army, give the sounds of war on these same trumpets as a call to arms, and the Lord will hear and give you the victory. ¹⁰Also on joyful occasions, such as your religious festivals, you are to sound the trumpets as you present your consecration offerings and peace offerings to the Lord. This is to remind the people that I am the Lord their God."

Departure From Sinai

¹¹On the twentieth day of the second month in the second year after the children of Israel came out of Egypt, the Lord's cloud lifted from the Sanctuary, and the people broke camp. ¹²They left the Sinai wilderness and camped at different places until the Lord's cloud signaled for them to set up camp in the wilderness of Paran where they stayed for some time. ¹³So they began their journey under the leadership of Moses as directed by the Lord. ¹⁴Each time they broke camp the tribe of Judah would be the first to take its banner and move out under the leadership of Nahshon, the son of Amminadab. ¹⁵The tribe of Issachar followed under the leadership of Nethanel, the son of Zuar. ¹⁶Then came the tribe of Zebulun under the leadership of Eliab, the son of Helon.

¹⁷The Sanctuary would be quickly taken down and the Gershonites and Merarites would pack it up and follow. ¹⁸Next the tribe of Reuben would take its banner and move out under the leadership of Elizur, the son of Shedeur. ¹⁹The tribe of Simeon followed under the leadership of Shelumiel, the son of Zurishaddai. ²⁰Then came the tribe of Gad under the leadership of Eliasaph, the son of Deuel.

²¹After that came the Kohathites carrying the holy things of the Sanctuary. This way the Sanctuary could be set up by the time the last tribe arrived and got settled.

²²Next the tribe of Ephraim would take its banner and move out under the leadership of Elishama, the son of Ammihud. ²³The tribe of Manasseh followed under the leadership of Gamaliel, the son of Pedahzur. ²⁴Then came the tribe of Benjamin under the leadership of Abidan, the son of Gideoni.

²⁵The tribe of Dan brought up the rear guard and would take its banner and move out under the leadership of Ahiezer, the son of Ammishaddai. ²⁶The tribe of Asher followed under the leadership of Pagiel, the son of Ochran. ²⁷The last tribe was the tribe of Naphtali under the leadership of Ahira, the son of Enan. ²⁸This was the order of march for the tribes as they moved. There were three tribes, followed by wagons carrying the Sanctuary, then came three more tribes followed by the Levites carrying the holy furnishings, then six tribes brought up the rear.

²⁹It was at this time that Moses said to Hobab, his brother-in-law who was the son of Jethro, "We're setting out to go to the land which the Lord said He would give us. So why don't you come along and share in the good things the Lord promised to give us." ³⁰Hobab said, "Thank you, but I think not. I'll go back to my own land and my own people."

³¹Moses pleaded with him and said, "Please come along. You're an excellent guide. You know so much about wilderness camping, you can be our eyes.

³²We'll share with you all the blessings the Lord gives." Then Hobab changed his mind and agreed to go with Moses.

³³So the children of Israel set out from the mountain of the Lord at Sinai and traveled for three days. The Levites carried the Ark of the Covenant and the cloud of the Lord went ahead of them, guiding them to the next place to camp.

³⁴The Lord's cloud shielded the children of Israel from the rays of the sun by day and gave them light at night.

³⁵When the Levites lifted the Ark of the Covenant to set out, Moses would

say, "Rise up, O Lord! Go before us and scatter our enemies! Put to flight those who would harm us." ³⁶And when the Ark was set down, he would say, "Return, O Lord, to the thousands upon thousands in Israel."

The People Dissatisfied

1 It wasn't long before the people complained to the Lord about their hardships, saying that He had brought them into the wilderness to die. The Lord heard them but was very displeased. One day as they were complaining, thunder sounded and lightning flashed from the cloud and the Lord struck down those on the fringes of the camp who were the most guilty. ²The children of Israel cried out to Moses for help. He pleaded with the Lord for the sake of the people, and the thunder and lightning stopped. ³So the Israelites called the place Taberah, which means Burning, because the fire of the Lord had burned there.

⁴Soon those who had intermarried with Egyptians complained again. Then others began to complain, "If only we had some meat to eat. ⁵The Egyptians said, "In Egypt we had all the fish we wanted and they were free. We also had plenty of cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic to eat. ⁶Now all we have to eat is this manna, and we don't have the appetite that we used to have when we were in Egypt."

⁷The white manna was the size of a tiny pea, crisp and delicate. ⁸Each morning the people would gather a fresh supply. Some would grind it or pound it into flour, others boiled it and ate it as cereal and still others baked it. When they ate it, it tasted like bread made with oil and honey. ⁹It always fell on the ground along with the dew while the people slept.

¹⁰When they were content in the Lord, the manna was welcome, but when they were dissatisfied with the Lord, the manna was repulsive. Soon the children of Israel complained to Moses, and whole

families stood outside their tents crying. The Lord heard their cries and was so displeased that even Moses became frightened.

¹¹Then Moses also complained to the Lord, "Why did you let this happen? Don't I have enough troubles trying to take care of these people. What have I done to deserve all this?" ¹²Did I father all these people? Did I bring them out of Egypt? Am I supposed to be their nursemaid and carry them in my arms across the wilderness from Egypt to the land you promised? ¹³Where am I supposed to get enough meat to feed all these people? They stand in front of their tents crying, and when I pass by, they say, 'Give us meat! Give us meat!' ¹⁴I can't take this anymore. The burden of caring for these people is too much for me. ¹⁵Is this what you expect me to put up with all the way to the Promised Land? If so, I might as well die right here. Then my troubles will be over. Have mercy on me. Don't let me see my own misery."

The Seventy Elders

¹⁶The Lord said to Moses, "Why have you assumed the responsibility for feeding these people? Are you their father? I have heard your prayer and have decided to give you some help. Pick out seventy respected men whom the people recognize as honest, dependable leaders and have them come to the entrance of the Sanctuary to stand beside you. ¹⁷I will come down and speak with you and will take some of the power of the Holy Spirit that is resting on you and put it on them. They will lighten your load and help you care for the people so you won't feel that you are doing it alone. ¹⁸Also tell the people to get ready, because I have heard their complaints and their crying, 'If we only had meat! We were better off in Egypt because there we had all the meat we wanted!' So tomorrow they'll have all the meat they can eat. ¹⁹They'll not only have meat for one or two days, or for five, ten or twenty

days, ²⁰but for a whole month until they get sick of it. I will give them what they want even though they've rejected me by saying that they would rather be back in Egypt and have their meat than to have a simple diet and be free."

²¹Moses answered, "Lord, there are more than six hundred thousand men, not counting women and children, and you say that they will have all the meat they can eat for a whole month? ²²We don't have enough cattle and sheep to feed so many people for a whole month even if we slaughtered every last animal we have. And if we were near a huge lake there wouldn't be enough fish in it to feed all these people for that length of time." ²³The Lord said to Moses, "Are you saying that there are some things the Lord can't do? Tomorrow you'll see that what I have told you will come true. Go to the people and tell them what I've said."

²⁴So Moses went and told the people what the Lord had said. He selected seventy honest men with leadership capabilities from the twelve tribes and called them together to meet the Lord at the entrance of the Sanctuary. ²⁵Then the Lord's cloud came down and hovered over Moses and the seventy leaders, and the Lord took some of the power of the Spirit from Moses and placed it on the seventy to fit them for the work they were called to do. When the power of the Spirit came on them, they saw the greatness of the Lord and began to prophesy. They never prophesied again, but the power of the Spirit continued to be with them.

²⁶Now two of the seventy leaders, Eldad and Medad, felt unworthy of so great a responsibility and didn't come to the Sanctuary but stayed in the camp. But the power of the Spirit still came on them, and they too saw the greatness of the Lord and began to prophesy and praise Him. ²⁷When one of the young men saw this he ran to Moses and said, "Eldad and Medad have received the power of the Holy Spirit! They look like they're in vision by the way they're praising the Lord!" ²⁸Joshua, who

had served Moses since he was a young man, immediately said, "Sir, you need to stop them before this sort of thing gets out of hand and divides the camp!"

²⁹But Moses replied, "You don't have to protect my leadership. I wish that the Spirit would come on all our people and all of them could see the greatness of the Lord and praise Him like that." ³⁰Moses and the seventy leaders continued praising the Lord and then they returned to their tents.

The Lord Sends Quail

³¹Suddenly a strong wind came up and brought with it thousands of little quail from the direction of the sea. They flew in about three feet above the ground all around the camp in every direction as far as a person could see. ³²All that day and into the night the people caught them. The least that any one family caught was sixty bushels. Many people quickly stripped the quail of their feathers, cleaned them and ate them partially cooked. Some meat was put out in the sun to dry. They had enough to last an entire month. ³³Because of their gluttony, the Lord allowed a disease to come on them while the meat was in their mouths, and many of them died. ³⁴That's why they called the place Kibroth Hattaavah, meaning, The Graves of Their Lusting. Those who would rather have gone back to Egypt than to go without meat were buried there. ³⁵From Kibroth Hattaavah the people moved on to Hazeroth and camped there.

Aaron and Miriam

12 It was about this time that Miriam and her brother Aaron began to criticize Moses for having married a darker-skinned Midianite woman instead of an Israelite. They were jealous of his authority and blamed his wife for encouraging him to make decisions on his own without first consulting them. ²They said to each other, "Is the Lord working for the people only through Moses?

Hasn't the Lord also used us? Hasn't He also given us prophetic and priestly gifts?" And the Lord heard all this. ³Moses, though he had been given great authority, was a humble man, more humble and meek than any other man on the face of the earth. He heard all their criticism but said nothing about it to either Aaron or Miriam.

⁴So the Lord called Moses, Miriam and Aaron to come into the courtyard and stand by the entrance of the Sanctuary. ⁵The Lord's cloud came down and settled over the Sanctuary where the three of them stood, and He asked Miriam and Aaron to step forward.

⁶Then the Lord said to the two of them, "Listen to me. When I choose someone to be a prophet, I reveal myself to him in visions and speak to him in dreams. ⁷But my servant Moses is different. I have put him in charge of all the people and he has faithfully done what I have told him to do. ⁸I don't speak to him in visions and dreams that people can question, but talk with him plainly, as two men face each other to talk together. I've allowed him to see only my back and protected him so he wouldn't die when he saw me. On what basis, then, do you have a right to be jealous and feel neglected because there were times he didn't consult you before doing what I asked him to do? Why would you blame his wife for this?"

⁹The Lord was very displeased with them, particularly with Miriam who had started all this with her seditious whispering. Then the Lord's cloud lifted. ¹⁰When it did, Miriam was covered with a disease that looked like leprosy, and her whole body turned deathly white. When Aaron saw what had happened to his sister, he felt severely rebuked for listening to her and said to Moses, ¹¹"Please forgive us! Don't hold this sin against us! We have been fools and were led astray by jealousy. We admit we were wrong and that we have sinned against the Lord. ¹²Don't let Miriam's body look like a baby born dead, whose body is partially

decomposed when it comes out of the womb!" ¹³Then Moses pleaded with the Lord, praying, "O Lord, please forgive her and heal her!"

¹⁴The Lord answered, "If her father had spit in her face to show his displeasure with her wickedness, as the custom is, would she not be shamed in the eyes of the people and have to live away from the camp for seven days? Let Miriam do the same now. Send her out of the camp for seven days. After that she can come back." Then the Lord healed her, and Moses asked her to move out of the camp as the Lord had said. ¹⁵Miriam stayed away for seven days according to the ritual of purification. The people did not leave until she returned. ¹⁶After this the children of Israel left Hazeroth and set up camp in the wilderness of Paran.

Twelve Spies

13 While the children of Israel were still camped in the Wilderness of Paran, the Lord said to Moses, ²"If that's what the people want, let each tribe choose one man to go and explore the land of Canaan which I promised to give to the children of Israel, and have them bring back a report of what they saw."

³So Moses let each tribe choose one man to be sent with the others into the land of Canaan. All twelve of them were leaders among the people. ⁴Their names were: Shammua, the son of Zaccur, from the tribe of Reuben; ⁵Shaphat, the son of Hori, from the tribe of Simeon; ⁶Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, the Kenizzite, to represent the tribe of Judah; ⁷Igal, the son of Joseph, from the tribe of Issachar; ⁸Joshua, the son of Nun, from the tribe of Ephraim; ⁹Palti, the son of Raphu, from the tribe of Benjamin; ¹⁰Gaddiel, the son of Sodi, from the tribe of Zebulun; ¹¹Gaddi, the son of Susi, from the tribe of Manasseh; ¹²Ammiel, the son of Gemalli, from the tribe of Dan; ¹³Sethur, the son of Michael, from the tribe of Asher; ¹⁴Nahbi, the son of Vophsi, from the tribe of

Naphtali; ¹⁵and Geuel, the son of Machi, from the tribe of Gad. ¹⁶These were the men chosen by the people to explore the land of Canaan. Before they left, Moses changed the name of Hoshea, the son of Nun, to Joshua.

¹⁷He charged them, "Go from here northward into the southern part of the land, then into the mountains. ¹⁸Find out what the land is like, what kind of people live there, whether there are many or few and how strong they are. ¹⁹Find out what the country itself is like. What kind of towns do the people live in? Are they open cities or are their cities fortified? ²⁰What is the soil like? Is it fertile? How much of the land is wooded and how much is open field? And bring back some of the grapes that grow there."

²¹So the twelve men left the camp and went to explore the land all the way from the Wilderness of Zin in the south to the city of Rehob near the entrance to the Hamath Pass in the north. ²²First they went up through the Negeb until they came to Hebron, which had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt was built. This was the land of the people of Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmi, all of whom were descendants of Anak the giant. ²³After they explored the land, they came to the Valley of Eshcol where they cut off a branch from a vine that had a huge cluster of grapes on it. This cluster was so heavy that it took two men to carry it hanging from a pole between them. They also took with them samples of pomegranates and figs. ²⁴The place was called The Valley of Eshcol meaning, Cluster of Grapes, because this was where the grapes were grown which the men brought back to camp with them.

²⁵The men explored the land for forty days and then returned home. ²⁶At this time Moses, Aaron and the children of Israel were camped near Kadesh in the Wilderness of Paran. The men showed everybody the fruit of the land and told them what they had seen. ²⁷They said to Moses, "We explored the land as you told

us to and it's truly a land that is rich and fertile, a land with an abundance of fruit. ²⁸The only problem is that the people who live there are giants. They're a powerful people and their cities are large and protected with high walls. They're the descendants of Anak. ²⁹The Amalekites live in the south; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the mountains to the north; and the original Canaanites are scattered along the Jordan River and on toward the Mediterranean Sea."

³⁰This report scared the children of Israel and they started complaining and criticizing Moses for taking them out of Egypt. Then Caleb and Joshua called for silence and said to the people, "Let's not be afraid to go up and take the land! Look at what God can do! Look at what He's done already! With His help we can do it!"

³¹But the other ten men said, "No! We can't take the land! The people there are giants! They're much bigger and stronger than we are! We'll never do it!" ³²Then the ten went among the people and frightened them even more with greatly exaggerated stories, saying, "Look, we're telling you the truth! The land can't produce enough food to feed the people who are there now, so what would happen if we went there? Besides, the place is full of giants! We'll never defeat them!" ³³They're descendants of Anak. We felt like grasshoppers in their presence, and that's the way they thought of us!"

Israel Refuses to Go Forward

14 The people believed the exaggerated reports of the ten and cried loudly all night about their misfortune for having left Egypt. ²The next morning they went to see Moses and Aaron, accusing them of deception. They said, "Would to God that we had stayed in Egypt and died there instead of coming all this way only to be killed by the Canaanites! It's even better to die and be buried out here in the wilderness than to be captured and mistreated by giants!" ³Why did the Lord do this to us? Why did

He tell us that He would give us the land of Canaan and then bring us all the way out here to be killed? If we fight these people, there's no way we can win. They'll take our wives and children from us and make them their playthings. The best thing to do is to head back to Egypt. Let's go! ⁴Let's choose another leader, one who will take us back home! What are we waiting for?"

⁵Then Moses and Aaron fell on their knees in the sight of the people and in great sorrow bowed with their faces to the ground. ⁶Joshua, the son of Nun, and Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, who also had explored the land of Canaan, tore their robes in grief and said to the people, ⁷"The land we saw is an excellent land! ⁸If the Lord wants us to have it, He will give it to us! It's a land with an abundance of fruit. ⁹Don't rebel against the Lord and accuse Him of deceiving us. He didn't bring us out here to kill us. Don't be afraid of the people living there. With the Lord's help we can easily take the land. Their gods are nothing. Our God is the God of heaven and earth! He can do anything!"

¹⁰But the people were so determined to go back to Egypt that they threatened to stone these two men. Suddenly the dazzling light of the presence of the Lord appeared above the Sanctuary.

Moses Pleads for the People

¹¹The Lord said to Moses, "How long will these people accuse me of deceiving them? How long will they refuse to trust me in the face of all the miraculous things I've done for them? ¹²I'll send a plague among them and destroy them all. Then I'll make a much larger and stronger nation from your descendants."

¹³Moses answered the Lord and said, "No, Lord! If you do this, the Egyptians will hear about it and see you as a God of death, not a God of freedom. ¹⁴The news will spread to other nations who have already heard about your goodness and what you have done for your people. Many already know that you're in our

midst and that your cloud hovers over us and guides us by day and protects us by a pillar of fire at night. ¹⁵If you let this plague come on the people and they all die, the nations around us will hear about it and say, ¹⁶'Their God brought them out of Egypt, but He wasn't able to make good on His promise to bring them into Canaan, so He killed them and let their bodies rot in the wilderness.' ¹⁷O Lord, let these nations see your compassion and mercy, and let them see that you're the kind of God you told me you were when you said, ¹⁸'I, the Lord, am not an angry God, but I abound in love, forgiving sin and rebellion. However, I will not stop the consequences of the sins of the parents on their children and grandchildren down to the third and fourth generation.' ¹⁹So forgive the people their sin in harmony with your great love. Forgive them just as you have done so many times before, ever since we left Egypt."

²⁰The Lord answered, "I'll forgive them as you asked. ²¹But, as surely as I live and as surely as my presence fills the earth, ²²not one of these complaining people will enter the land of Canaan. They saw the light of my glory and the miraculous things I did for them in Egypt and in the wilderness, but they refused to believe that I love them and have tested my love ten times, and still they don't trust me. ²³Not one of them will enter the Promised Land. No one who accused me of deceiving them will ever see it. ²⁴But because my servants Caleb and Joshua have a different spirit and believe what I say, I will bring them into the very land they explored. ²⁵Their descendants will inherit the valleys of the Amalekites and Canaanites of which the people were so afraid. So tomorrow morning, break camp, turn and go into the wilderness toward the Red Sea."

Sentence on the Rebels

²⁶Then the Lord said to both Moses and Aaron, ²⁷"How much longer will these people treat me the way they do

and not believe what I tell them? I've listened to their complaints time and time again. ²⁸So tell them that I will give them the very things they requested. ²⁹They will die in the desert just as they wanted to instead of going on to the land of Canaan. Everyone twenty years old and up who was counted in the first census and who didn't trust me will die and be buried in the wilderness. ³⁰Not one of them will enter the land of Canaan which I promised to give them when I spoke to their forefathers. The only exceptions will be Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua, the son of Nun. ³¹As for the people's children, the ones they were afraid would be captured and sold to become the playthings of giants, I will bring them safely into the land of Canaan to enjoy what their parents rejected. ³²But their parents will die in the wilderness and be buried there. ³³And their children will wander with them in the wilderness for the next forty years until all those who spoke out against me have died. ³⁴They will suffer the consequences of their sins for forty years, one year for each day the men explored the land, so they will know what it's like to be without my favor. ³⁵I, the Lord, have spoken and will discipline the people because they have not trusted my leadership and have united against me in spite of what I have done for them. They will live and die in the wilderness."

³⁶Then the men whom Moses sent to explore the land, who had given an exaggerated report of what they had seen and had made the people afraid to obey, ³⁷were struck with the plague and died. They died from the hand of the Lord because of the report they had given to the people. ³⁸Of the twelve men who went to explore the land, only Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh lived to go into the land of Canaan.

A Futile Invasion

³⁹When Moses told the people the Lord's decision, they mourned bitterly. ⁴⁰Early the next morning the people de-

cided to go ahead and take the land the Lord had promised to give them. They said, "We have sinned against the Lord, so we'll redeem ourselves in His eyes and He will bless us." ⁴¹But Moses stopped them and said, "Why are you disobeying the Lord? Without Him, you'll never do it! ⁴²Don't go! The Lord is not going with you. He doesn't want you to fight your way into the land. You'll be slaughtered just as you said you would be, because you'll be going there alone. ⁴³The Amalekites and Canaanites will attack you and hundreds of you will be killed. You didn't trust the Lord, so He will not protect you. He wants to bring you into the land His way, not by warfare, but the way He brought you out of Egypt."

⁴⁴But in their determination to redeem themselves, they presumed on the protection of the Lord. They went ahead in their own strength, without Moses and without the Ark of the Covenant. ⁴⁵The Amalekites and the Canaanites came down from the mountains where they lived, chasing the Israelites all the way to Hormah, slaughtering hundreds of them in the process.

Grain and Drink Offerings

15 After the people were defeated and humiliated by the Amalekites and Canaanites, the Lord said to Moses, ²"Talk to those who are young, who will not die in the wilderness, and say to them, 'When you come to the land I promised to give you, ³and bring to the Lord from your herds or flocks offerings to fulfill a special vow or simply as a freewill offering or a festival offering, ⁴you are to bring with it two pounds of flour mixed with one quart of olive oil. ⁵You are also to bring with it one quart of grape juice as a drink offering. When these offerings are given from the heart, they will greatly please the Lord. ⁶When a ram is offered it should be accompanied by four pounds of flour mixed with a quart and a half of olive oil, ⁷and with a quart and a half of grape juice as a drink

offering. This will please the Lord. ⁸When a young bull is offered as a sacrifice to fulfill a vow or as a peace offering, ⁹it should be brought with six pounds of flour mixed with two quarts of olive oil, ¹⁰and two quarts of grape juice as a drink offering. This will please the Lord.

¹¹Prepare each offering of a young bull, a ram, a lamb or young goat this way. ¹²When more than one such animal is sacrificed, the grain and drink offerings are to be increased proportionately. ¹³Every Israelite who brings these offerings is to do it this way. These offerings with the smell of fire will please the Lord. ¹⁴These rules and regulations apply to your descendants throughout your generations and to the foreigners who live among you. If those who are not Israelites wish to please the Lord, they are to offer offerings the same way you Israelites do. ¹⁵These rules and regulations apply to the whole community, to those who are native-born Israelites and to those who are not. You and the foreigners living among you are the same before the Lord. ¹⁶All the rules and regulations that apply to you also apply to the foreigners who have come to live among you."

¹⁷The Lord said to Moses, ¹⁸"Speak to the young Israelites and say to them, 'When you come into the land I promised to give you, ¹⁹and begin to eat the produce grown there, you are not to forget the Lord. You are to bring a portion of the produce as an offering of thanksgiving to the Lord. ²⁰You are also to bake a loaf of bread from the first grain you harvest and bring it to the Lord. It, too, is an offering of thanksgiving. ²¹This is to be done throughout your generations whenever you bake bread from the grain of the new harvest. It is to be an offering of thanksgiving to the Lord for what He has done for you.

Unintentional Sin

²²If someone goes astray unintentionally and fails to comply with any of the

Lord's commands, ²³or with any of the regulations and instruction previously given, his sin is to be acknowledged by bringing an offering to the Lord. ²⁴If this sin was committed by the community and was done unintentionally, then a sacrifice is to be offered for the whole community. The priest is to offer a young bull as a whole burnt offering along with the proper grain and drink offerings, plus a male goat as a sin offering. ²⁵He is to make atonement to purify the whole community and the people will be forgiven, because what they did was not intentional. They confessed their wrong and brought a sin offering to the Lord. ²⁶Both the Israelites and the foreigners living among them need to be forgiven because the nation is one and, as such, the people are responsible for what goes on in the community.

²⁷The person who went astray and sinned is to admit it publicly and bring a year-old female goat to the Lord for a sin offering. ²⁸The priest is to take the offering and make an atonement for the man's unintentional sin. After the atonement has been made for him, he will be forgiven. ²⁹The same law against sinning unintentionally applies to everyone who sins when he could have known better, whether he's an Israelite or a foreigner.

Presumptuous Sin

³⁰"But anyone who sins openly and defiantly, whether he is an Israelite or a foreigner, is guilty of showing public contempt for the Lord and is to be put to death. ³¹Because he has openly rejected what the Lord has said and has publicly defied Him, the man is responsible for his own death."

Penalty for Sabbathbreaking

³²While the children of Israel were camped in the wilderness, a man defied the Lord and went out to gather wood on the Sabbath when there was no need to do so. ³³Those who found him doing this brought him to Moses and Aaron to

stand trial in front of the whole community. ³⁴They put him under guard because they were not sure what to do. ³⁵Then the Lord said to Moses, "The man is to be put to death. The whole community is to take him outside the camp and stone him." ³⁶So the people took him outside the camp as the Lord had said and stoned him to death.

Special Garments

³⁷Again the Lord said to Moses, ³⁸"Tell the children of Israel, 'You are to make tassels by sewing a number of blue threads together and hang them with short blue cords from the hems of your clothes. You are to wear these tassels from now on. ³⁹These tassels will remind you that you belong to me and are to keep my commandments. Do not follow the lusts of your own bodies and the desires of your own eyes. ⁴⁰Remember to obey and keep my commandments and do so from your heart, then you will continue to be my holy people. ⁴¹I'm the Lord who brought you out of Egypt and set you free to be your God. I am the Lord your God!'"

Rebellion

16 Now Korah, Dathan and Abiram started a rebellion. Korah was the son of Izhar, the grandson of Kohath and the great-grandson of Levi. He and his children were assigned to the ministry of music. Dathan and Abiram were brothers, the sons of Eliab. On, the son of Peleth, joined the rebellion. They were all descendants of Reuben, the firstborn son of Jacob. ²They were joined by two hundred and fifty other leaders who were well known and highly respected among the people of Israel. ³They confronted Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You two have taken too much authority to yourselves. All of God's people have been set apart and the Lord is with each of us. So why shouldn't we have more freedom and be allowed to also serve as leaders and priests in Israel?"

⁴When Moses heard this he fell on his knees and bowed with his face to the ground and earnestly prayed to the Lord, offering to give up his leadership if the Lord indicated. ⁵He rose to his feet and spoke to Korah and his group, "Tomorrow morning the Lord will show us who from the community was set apart by Him and who was not. We'll all go to the Sanctuary, and the one the Lord will call to come forward will be allowed to approach Him at the altar. ⁶Now this is what I want you and your followers to do: ⁷Each one of you is to come to the Sanctuary with a censer of hot coals and incense. The one the Lord asks to come forward to talk to Him will be the new leader of Israel, and the rest of you will assist him. But you Levites have actually taken too much authority on yourselves to lead out in this!"

⁸Then Moses spoke directly to Korah himself, "You and your Levites need to listen. ⁹Isn't it enough recognition that God has given you to set you apart from the rest of Israel and ask you to serve Him at the Sanctuary and minister to His people? ¹⁰He has given you and all the Levites this special honor and now you're asking for still more recognition by demanding to be priests. That privilege was given only to Aaron and his descendants, and you know that. ¹¹When you complain about Aaron and his sons, you're really rebelling against the way the Lord has set things up." ¹²Then Moses called Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, to come to the Sanctuary. ¹³They said, "No, we will not come! Isn't it enough that you brought us out of Egypt, a land of plenty, to let us die out here in the wilderness? Do you also have to lord it over us by treating us as your personal slaves? ¹⁴You haven't given us land with lush fields and vineyards as you promised. And yet you demand obedience!"

¹⁵Moses was deeply hurt. He thought he could talk them out of the rebellion. He said to the Lord, "Lord, don't accept the offerings these men might bring to you until they repent. You know I have

not wronged them, nor have I taken so much as one donkey from them." ¹⁶Then he said to Korah, "Tomorrow morning you and your two hundred and fifty followers are to come before the Lord. I'll make sure that Aaron and his sons are there too. ¹⁷Each of you must bring a censer with hot coals and incense, and come stand before the Lord." ¹⁸So the next day, Korah and his followers came with their censers of hot coals and incense and stood together with Moses and Aaron before the Lord at the entrance of the Sanctuary. ¹⁹When Korah and his followers were assembled, suddenly the dazzling light of the Lord's presence appeared and it was seen throughout the camp.

²⁰The Lord said to Moses, ²¹"Move away from Korah and his followers for I will destroy them and those from among the people who have come out in support of them." ²²But Moses and Aaron fell on their knees, bowed their faces to the ground and cried out to the Lord, "Lord God of all life! Don't punish everyone here! It's only one man who's responsible for all this!" ²³The Lord answered, ²⁴"Tell those who have come out in support of Korah to move out of the way." While all this was going on, Korah went to get Dathan and Abiram.

²⁵Moses and Aaron got up from their knees and, together with the seventy elders, followed Korah back to camp. ²⁶As they came into camp they saw Korah standing by the tents of Dathan and Abiram, talking to them. Then Moses warned the people, "Move away from the tents of these men and don't touch anything that belongs to them or you will be destroyed with them!" ²⁷The people listened and moved away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. As Moses came closer he could see Dathan and Abiram standing defiantly with their families by their tents. ²⁸He stopped and said to them from a distance, "This is how you will know whether giving the priesthood to my brother Aaron was my idea

or the Lord's.²⁹ If nothing happens in the next few minutes and you and your families live, then Aaron was not the Lord's choice.³⁰ But if something happens that you've never seen before, and the earth opens up and swallows you and you fall into the earth alive, then you and all those standing here will know that you are the ones who started this rebellion."

³¹No sooner did Moses finish speaking when the ground under Korah, Dathan and Abiram opened up,³² and they were all swallowed up along with their families and all their goods.³³ They were buried alive, together with everything they owned. Then the earth closed up, and they were gone.³⁴ When the people nearby saw this, they ran and shouted, "Let's get away from here before we get swallowed up!"³⁵ Even though the followers of Korah, Dathan and Abiram saw them disappear, instead of repenting, they expressed sympathy for them and were angry with God for doing it. Then fire came out from the presence of the Lord and destroyed all two hundred and fifty of them.

³⁶The Lord said to Moses,³⁷ "Tell Eleazar, the son of Aaron, to go with his helpers among their bodies, collect the two hundred and fifty censers, take them out of the camp and scatter their hot coals on the ground. Then bring back the censers of the men who sinned at the cost of their lives, for these censers are now holy.³⁸ Take them and have them hammered into bronze sheets to overlay the bronze that's already on the altar. This will be a warning to the people against following men like that."

³⁹So Eleazar the priest and his helpers went and picked up the censers from among the dead, emptied them of the hot coals, then had them hammered into bronze sheets to overlay the altar as directed by Moses.⁴⁰ These sheets were a reminder to the children of Israel that no one except the descendants of Aaron should come into the Sanctuary to burn incense before the Lord or to perform any

other priestly function. If anyone, including a Levite, did so, he, too, would die.

The People Blame Moses

⁴¹The next day the people of Israel blamed Moses and Aaron for killing Korah and his followers, as if they had opened the earth. The people had looked up to Korah and the others as God's appointed leaders and now they were gone.⁴² They formed themselves into a large delegation and went to Moses and Aaron to accuse them of killing their leaders. As they walked toward the Sanctuary they noticed the Lord's cloud hovering over it. Suddenly the dazzling light of His presence ignited the cloud.⁴³ Moses and Aaron also saw the dazzling light of the Lord's presence and quickly made their way to the Sanctuary.⁴⁴ When they got there the Lord said to Moses,⁴⁵ "Get out of the way so I can destroy these rebels who are coming to see you. In their hearts they are still supporting Korah." But Moses and Aaron fell on their knees and bowed with their faces to the ground in prayer.⁴⁶ When they stood up Moses said to Aaron, "Quick! Go get your censer, put some hot coals from the altar in it, put incense on them and hurry toward the people to make atonement for their rebellion. Hurry! I can see from here that the Lord's plague has already struck them!"

⁴⁷Aaron did as Moses said and ran to get his censer, filled it with hot coals from the altar, sprinkled incense on the coals and ran toward the people to atone for their sin and stop the plague.⁴⁸ So Aaron stood between the living and the dead, waving his censer to atone for their sin, and the plague stopped.⁴⁹ By the time it was all over, about fourteen thousand, seven hundred people had died, not counting the two hundred and fifty who had died the day before.⁵⁰ Then Aaron returned to Moses who was still at the entrance of the Sanctuary.

Aaron's Rod

17 The Lord said to Moses, ²"Tell the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel to bring me twelve short walking sticks. Then write each man's name on his as he gives it to you. ³Write Aaron's name on the walking stick for the tribe of Levi. There should be only one stick for each tribe. ⁴Take the sticks into the Sanctuary and on into the Most Holy Place and lay them down in front of the Ark of the Covenant. Tomorrow morning I'll be there to meet you. ⁵The walking stick that belongs to the man I have chosen to serve me as priest will blossom by tomorrow morning. This will settle the question of the priesthood once and for all, and whether or not I called the two of you to lead these people." ⁶Moses spoke to the leaders of Israel and they brought him twelve walking sticks, one for each tribe, and Aaron's stick was one of them. ⁷Then Moses took the sticks into the Most Holy Place and laid them before the Lord.

⁸The next morning, when Moses went into the Most Holy Place to meet the Lord, he saw that Aaron's walking stick had budded, blossomed and even bore ripe almonds! ⁹He picked up all the sticks and brought them out to show the leaders. Each man picked out his stick and carefully looked at it to see if there were some buds on it, but there were none. Each stick looked just like it had before, except Aaron's. ¹⁰Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take Aaron's stick back into the Most Holy Place and put it inside the Ark of the Covenant as a reminder to all those who would question my leadership and my choice of priestly structure. This is to put an end to all future suspicions and complaints about who is to lead, so any who get the idea to rebel will stop before they die." ¹¹Moses did what the Lord had told him to do. He took Aaron's walking stick and put it inside the Ark of the Covenant.

¹²Then the leaders of the children of Israel said to Moses, "We will die! We are lost! All of us are lost! We, too, had thoughts of rebellion! ¹³If we come to

the Sanctuary will we die too? Or will we die in front of our tents like Korah?" And they greatly feared the Lord.

Duties of Priests and Levites

18 Then the Lord said to Aaron, "You and your sons and the whole tribe of Levi are to bear the responsibility for any sins committed in connection with the services of the Sanctuary, but only you and your sons are to bear the responsibility of sins committed in connection with the priesthood. ²Use the Levites to help you and your sons with the services at the Sanctuary. They will do much of the work that needs to be done. ³As they carry out their duties at the Sanctuary, they are not to go into the Holy Place or touch any of its furnishings. Neither are they to come in contact with the altar in the courtyard, or they will die. ⁴They are to help you and be responsible for the Sanctuary work assigned to them, but they are not to assume the duties of the priesthood which belong to you and your sons. ⁵You and your sons are to carry out the priestly functions of the Sanctuary, so I won't have to discipline my people again. ⁶I've taken the Levites from among the tribes of Israel and given them as a gift to you to help you with your duties at the Sanctuary. ⁷But only you and your sons are to carry out the responsibilities of the priesthood in the courtyard, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place."

Support of the Priests

⁸The Lord also said to Aaron, "I have personally chosen you to be in charge of the offerings that people bring to me, and I have given you and your sons a portion of what they bring. ⁹You and your sons are to have a portion of the most holy offerings, the ones that are not to be burned such as the grain offerings that accompany the sin offerings. ¹⁰You are to eat from these grain offerings in a place that is set apart. Any male from the priest's family may eat from them.

Respect these offerings, for they are holy. ¹¹In addition to these parts of the sin offering, any other special gifts that the people bring to me are to be yours. I am giving these things to you, to your sons and daughters for generations to come. Anyone in your family who is ritually clean can eat them. ¹²I'll accept only the best of the produce the people bring to me, such as their olive oil, unfermented wine and grain. In turn, I have given these to you. ¹³All firstfruits from the harvests that the people bring to me are to be yours, and anyone in your family who is ritually clean may eat them. ¹⁴Anything that the people dedicate to me belongs to you. ¹⁵Every firstborn son that opens the womb and every firstborn male of clean animals that opens the womb belongs to me, but I have given them to you. However, you must pay a substitution price for all firstborn sons and the firstborn males of unclean animals, for they cannot be offered. ¹⁶When such firstborn are a month old, they are to be redeemed by paying five pieces of silver according to the standard of the Sanctuary. ¹⁷The firstborn of animals that are ritually clean such as an ox, a sheep or a goat need not be bought back. They are to be sacrificed and their blood is to be sprinkled against the altar and their fat is to be burned. When these offerings are given from the heart they will greatly please the Lord. ¹⁸Their meat will belong to you, just as the breast and the right thigh of the regular offerings. ¹⁹I am giving these offerings to you and to your sons and daughters as a regular share for all generations to come. It is a covenant of salt, an everlasting Covenant, between me and you." ²⁰The Lord continued to speak to Aaron, "These offerings of mine are yours because you and your family will inherit no land, nor will you be allowed to own any property in Israel, for I am your land and your inheritance. Your first priority is to care for the spiritual welfare of the people, not your own temporal prosperity.

Tithes for the Levites

²¹"To the Levites I have given all the tithes in Israel for serving at the Sanctuary. That's why the Levites did not receive an inheritance. ²²No one except a Levite is to go near the Sanctuary to help with the services, or he will die. ²³Only the Levites are to assist the priests with the work at the Sanctuary and bear the responsibilities connected with it. This is a lasting ordinance throughout their generations. They are to inherit no land and own no property in Israel. ²⁴Instead I have given them the tithe that the people bring to the Sanctuary. This is their inheritance. That's why I told them that they will not be given an allotment of land."

Levites Pay Tithe

²⁵Then the Lord said to Moses, ²⁶"Tell the Levites, 'You will receive the tithes from the people as your inheritance, but you must give a tenth of that back to the Lord. ²⁷This will be in place of the required grain and grape offerings from the vineyards and the fields. ²⁸In this way you will have a grain and grape offering to bring me as the people do, only it will be from the tithes you receive from them. Give your tithe to Aaron, who represents the entire priesthood. ²⁹As the people bring their best to you, so you are to choose a tenth of the best of that and give it to Aaron, the high priest, as an offering to the Lord. ³⁰The rest is yours to keep, just as the people keep the rest of the grain and grapes for themselves. ³¹This portion is for you and your families wherever you live. It is your pay for serving at the Sanctuary. ³²You also may eat from special gifts the people bring to the Sanctuary, for they are not the sacrificial offerings but extra offerings. There is no guilt in eating from these. But you are to make sure that you give a tenth of what you receive to Aaron. If you do this, you will not be held guilty. You are not to treat holy things lightly or you will be put to death.'

Laws of Purification

19 Again the Lord said to Moses, ²“Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘This is a perpetual ordinance. If a man fears that he has become ritually unclean, he is to bring to the Sanctuary a red calf without defect, one that has never been harnessed for work. ³He will give it to Eleazar the priest, the son of Aaron, who is to take it outside the camp. There the man who brought the animal shall kill it in his presence. ⁴Then Eleazar will dip his finger in some of the blood and sprinkle it seven times toward the Sanctuary. ⁵While the priest watches, the whole body of the young animal is to be burned, its skin, meat, blood and intestines. ⁶Then Eleazar shall take a piece of cedar wood, a twig of hyssop and a piece of scarlet wool and throw them into the fire in which the body of the animal is burning. ⁷After the sacrifice has been consumed, the priest will wash his body and his clothes before returning to camp, and he’ll be ritually unclean until sundown that same day. ⁸The one who burned the animal must also wash his body and his clothes before coming back to camp, and he, too, will be unclean until sundown. ⁹Then someone who is ritually clean is to be appointed to pick up the ashes of the animal and take them to a clean place outside the camp. There they are to be kept for use with water in a special ceremony to purify from sin. ¹⁰The man who picks up the ashes and moves them is to wash his body and his clothes, and he, too, will be ritually unclean until sundown. This is to be a perpetual law for all time both for the Israelites and for the foreigners who live among you.

¹¹‘Anyone who touches a corpse is ritually unclean for seven days. ¹²He is to purify himself with the water of purification on the third day and again on the seventh day. Only then will he be ritually clean. But if he does not purify himself on both the third and the seventh days, he will re-

main ritually unclean. ¹³Anyone who touches a corpse and does not purify himself and goes to the Sanctuary will defile it. He is to be cut off from the people.

¹⁴‘If a person dies in a tent, anyone who is in the tent or who enters it will be ritually unclean for seven days. ¹⁵An open jar or pot that has no lid fastened on it will be ritually unclean. ¹⁶Anyone who is out in the open and touches someone who has been killed or who has died a natural death, or anyone who touches a human bone or a human grave will be ritually unclean for seven days. ¹⁷To purify such a person, put into a pot some ashes from the red calf that was sacrificed to remove ritual uncleanness, and add some fresh water to it. ¹⁸Then a man who is ritually clean is to be appointed to take a twig of hyssop, dip it into the water and sprinkle it on the tent and everything in it, on the people who were there when the person died and on anyone who touched the corpse. This same ritual of purification is to be carried out for those who touch a human bone when they are out in the open field, or who touch either a grave or someone who has been killed or who has died a natural death. ¹⁹The man who is ritually clean is to sprinkle the unclean person on the third and seventh day to ritually purify him. Then the one who was sprinkled is to wash his body and his clothes and pour clean water over himself and at sundown of the seventh day he will be ritually clean.

²⁰‘But anyone who does not purify himself in this way will be cut off from the people. He has defiled the Sanctuary by refusing to be ritually cleansed through sprinkling with the water of ceremonial purification. ²¹This is to be a lasting ordinance. When the man who sprinkled the water of purification on others is finished, he is to wash his clothes and pour fresh water over himself. And anyone who touches the water of purification will be ritually unclean until sundown. ²²Anything a ritually unclean person touches will be unclean,

and anyone who touches him will be unclean until sundown that same day.”

Moses' Sin

20 Then the children of Israel broke camp and moved on to the place called the Wilderness of Zin and set up camp not far from the city of Kadesh. It was here that Miriam, the sister of Moses, died and was buried.

²It was here also that the children of Israel complained to Moses and Aaron because there was no water. They said, ³“It would have been better for us to have died with Korah, Dathan and Abiram ⁴than to come out here in the wilderness and slowly die of thirst. Why have you brought us to this God-forsaken place if it isn't to punish us by letting us die? ⁵Why did you bring us to this terrible land? Why didn't you leave us in Egypt? Not only does this wilderness have no figs, grapes or pomegranates—it doesn't even have water to drink!”

⁶When Moses and Aaron heard this, they went to the Sanctuary, fell on their knees and bowed face down in prayer. Then the dazzling light of the presence of the Lord appeared. ⁷The Lord said to Moses, ⁸“Get up. Take the shepherd's rod and gather the people in front of the big rock over which the Lord's cloud will hover. Then just speak to the rock and I'll give you water. You'll have more than enough for the people and for their animals.” ⁹Moses got up from his knees, went into the Most Holy Place, took the shepherd's rod that he kept there and went out to the rock as the Lord had told him to.

¹⁰He and Aaron called the people together at the big rock outside the camp where the Lord's cloud hovered. Moses said to them, “Listen, you rebels! Do we have to bring water out of this rock to prove to you that the Lord is with us?” ¹¹Then he raised the shepherd's rod and angrily struck the rock twice. Instantly water gushed out of the rock, enough for all the people and their animals.

¹²Then the Lord said to Moses in Aaron's hearing, “Because you acted rashly and spoke passionately to the people, calling them rebels; because you struck the rock as you had previously done instead of speaking to it as I said; and because you told the people that you would give them water, as if you and Aaron were the ones who had brought them out of Egypt and fed them; therefore, I will not let you lead these people into Canaan. They need to know that what you said and did is not right. You have transferred their faith from me to you. I am the Lord.”

¹³All this happened near Kadesh at the place the people called Meribah, meaning The Place Where the People Quarreled With the Lord. It was here that He had shown them His holiness and mercy.

Passage Refused

¹⁴It was also from here that Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom, the land where the children of Esau had settled, saying, “The children of your brother Jacob whom God named Israel have a request to make. You know all about the hardships we have gone through. ¹⁵Our ancestors went down to Egypt and lived there many, many years and the Egyptians mistreated us. ¹⁶But we cried to the God of Israel and He heard our cries and sent His Angel, who brought us out of Egypt. Now we're camping not far from Kadesh, near your southern border. ¹⁷Please let us pass through your country on our way to the land of Canaan. We will not walk through any of your fields of grain or vineyards. We will not even stop to drink water from your wells. We will stay on the northern road called the King's Highway until we leave your country.” ¹⁸But the king of Edom said, “You may not pass through our country. If you try to, we'll come out and greet you with the sword.”

¹⁹Then Moses and the leaders sent back this answer, “We give you our word that we will travel only along the main

road, and if any of our people or cattle drink your water, we will pay you for it. We only want to pass through your country on foot and nothing more.”²⁰The king of Edom sent another short message which said, “We will not let you pass!” Then he came out to the border with a large and powerful army.

²¹So the children of Israel changed their plans and took the long way around, because the Edomites refused to let them go through their country.

Death of Aaron

²²The Israelites broke camp and left Kadesh and made their way south along the border of Edom until they came to Mount Hor.²³After they set up camp, the Lord said to Moses and Aaron,²⁴“It is time for Aaron to die. He will not be allowed to enter the land of Canaan because the two of you misrepresented me at Meribah when I told you to speak to the rock and it would give you water.²⁵Get Eleazar, Aaron’s son, and the three of you come up to the top of Mount Hor.²⁶There take Aaron’s priestly garments and put them on Eleazar. Aaron will die there and sleep with his ancestors.”

²⁷Moses did what the Lord had said. He called Eleazar and, together with Aaron, the three of them went up to the top of Mount Hor in the sight of all the children of Israel.²⁸When they got there, Moses took the priestly garments from his brother Aaron and put them on Eleazar. Aaron died, and Moses and Eleazar buried him there. Then the two of them came back down the mountain.²⁹When the people were told what had happened, the entire community wept over Aaron and mourned for him for one whole month.

Canaanites Defeated

21 When the king of Arad, a Canaanite city on the border of the Wilderness of Judah, heard that the Israelites were coming by the way of

Atharim, he attacked them and even captured some of them.²Then the Israelites made a vow to the Lord, saying, “We will counterattack, and if you will deliver the king and his people into our hands, we promise to totally destroy them and their city.”³The Lord listened to Israel’s plea and helped them. They counterattacked and defeated the Canaanites, completely destroying their city. They named the place Hormah, meaning Total Destruction.

The Bronze Serpent

⁴Then the children of Israel broke camp and from Mount Hor traveled along the road that led south through the barren region of Arabah to take the eastern road around Edom and from there up to Moab and on into Canaan. On the way, the people lost courage and began to complain.⁵They criticized the Lord again and said to Moses, “Why did you take us out of Egypt? You want us to die out here in the wilderness, don’t you? Admit it! There’s no food or water out here except that horrible food from heaven, and we’re tired of it!”⁶The Lord heard their complaints and decided to stop their criticisms by removing the restraint that He had placed on the poisonous snakes in that area. The snakes made their way into the camp, struck the Israelites and many of them died.⁷The people rushed to find Moses and said, “We have sinned by complaining and criticizing both you and the Lord. Please pray for us and ask the Lord to get rid of these poisonous snakes!”

⁸Moses prayed for the people and the Lord heard his prayer and said, “Make a bronze serpent and put it on a tall pole. Anyone who has been bitten by a snake can look at it and believe that I will heal them, and I will.”⁹Moses took a thin sheet of bronze metal and rolled it into the shape of a snake and wrapped it around a tall pole. Then he held the pole up as high as he could for the people to see. Those who looked toward it and turned to God in faith were healed, but

some refused to do so, and their lack of faith was fatal.

From Mount Hor to Moab

¹⁰After this experience the Israelites broke camp and moved eastward around the southern part of Edom to the area of the Wilderness of Oboth and camped there. ¹¹From Oboth they moved straight north to Iye Abarim, the territory on the border of Moab. ¹²Then they moved on and set up camp in the Valley of Zered. ¹³From here they went to camp on the north side of the Arnon River in the wilderness that extends into the territory of the Amorites. The Arnon River ran east and west and marked the border between the Moabites and the Amorites.

¹⁴The war records of the battles of the Lord identify this place as, "The Waheb in the area of Suphah near the valleys by the Arnon River." ¹⁵These valleys extend to the city of Ar as one travels toward Moab. ¹⁶From here the children of Israel went on to camp at a place named Beer (also called The Place of Wells). It was here that the Lord said to Moses, "I want you to stop and camp here, even though there is no water. I will fill these dry wells for you." ¹⁷That was the place where the children of Israel burst into song and said, "The wells produced their water and we greeted the water with joy!" ¹⁸These wells were dug by princes and leaders. They were dug at the command of royal scepters and by the hands of the local people. They went dry, and it was the Lord our God who filled them for us." From here the Israelites moved on to Mattanah, ¹⁹from Mattanah to Nahaliel and on to Bamoth. ²⁰Then from Bamoth they moved to a valley in Moab near Mount Pisgah from whose summit one can look out over the wilderness.

King Sihon Defeated

²¹From there the Israelites sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites,

saying, ²²"Do be so kind as to let us pass through your land. We promise not to go into your fields of grain and vineyards, nor will we let our cattle go there. We promise not to drink from your wells. We will take the main road and stay on the King's Highway until we have passed through your country." ²³But Sihon would not let the children of Israel pass through his land. He called up his troops and marched out to meet Israel. When he reached Jahaz, he ordered his men to attack. ²⁴Then Israel fought back and defeated Sihon and took over his land from the Arnon River northward to the Jabbok Brook and up to the Ammonite territory which had a well-fortified border. ²⁵Israel took all the cities of the Amorites, including Heshbon and its surrounding villages. ²⁶Heshbon was the capitol of the Amorites, and Sihon was the king who had defeated the Moabites who had first lived in this area. He had taken over this part of the country as far south as the Arnon River.

²⁷The Hebrew song writers wrote ballads about this, such as, "Come let us go to Heshbon and rebuild it! Let us restore this famous city!" ²⁸This was once the city of Sihon, king of the Amorites. It was from here that his army had gone out to devour his enemies as fire consumes dry wood. He destroyed the Moabite city of Ar and devoured the people living in the hills overlooking the Arnon River. ²⁹How terrible for the citizens of Moab! They worshiped Chemosh, but he did not help them and they were brought to ruin. He allowed the Moabite men to be destroyed and the Moabite women to be taken captive by Sihon, king of the Amorites. ³⁰But we have defeated Sihon's fiery army and have taken his land from Heshbon to Dibon. We left his cities in ruins from Nophah to Medeba."

³¹Some of the children of Israel decided to settle in the land that they had taken from the Amorites. ³²After Moses had sent spies to Jazer, the Israelites went out and took that city and its surrounding villages

and destroyed the Amorites who lived there. This made their conquest of the Amorites complete.

King Og Defeated

³³The children of Israel broke camp and moved along the road to Bashan. Then Og, the king of Bashan, marched out against them with his entire army and met them at Edrei. ³⁴The Lord said to Moses, "Don't be afraid of Og, the king of Bashan, because I have given him and his entire army over to you. When the battle is over, his land will be yours. You are to do to him what you did to Sihon, the king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon." ³⁵So the children of Israel met Og, king of Bashan, his sons and his people in battle and destroyed their entire army. No one was left alive. Some of the children of Israel decided to settle in that part of the land also .

Balak Sends for Balaam

22 Next the children of Israel broke camp and moved on to the plains of Moab. They camped east of the Jordan River across from the city of Jericho. ²When Balak, the king of Moab and son of Zippor, heard what the children of Israel had done to Sihon, king of the Amorites, and to Og, king of Bashan, ³and learned how many Israelites there were, he was afraid of them and of what they might do to him and to his people. ⁴So the Moabites sent word to their traditional enemies, the Midianites, saying, "This horde of people will take everything we have as easily as an ox eats up the grass of the field. We must stop them!" ⁵Balak, the son of Zippor, was the king of Moab at this time. He got together with the Midianite leaders and they decided to send messengers to Balaam, the son of Beor, for help. (At one time Balaam had been a faithful prophet of the Lord but had left Him and become more interested in making money, though he still professed to be faithful to God.) He lived in Pethor north of Moab

near the Euphrates River. Balak wrote a letter to him which said, "A nation of people has left Egypt and has settled right next to me. They've already defeated the Amorites and the King of Bashan and are now camped on my borders. ⁶Come and curse these people for me so they won't invade my land, because they're a powerful people and there are too many of them for me to defeat. But if you curse them then I'll be able to defeat them and drive them back into the wilderness. I know that those you bless are blessed and those you curse are cursed."

⁷Then he sent a delegation of leaders from Moab and Midian to Balaam with the letter and an offer of money for his services. When they arrived, they told Balaam about the children of Israel and gave him Balak's letter. ⁸Balaam read the letter, then said to them, "Stay overnight and I'll ask the Lord what to do. In the morning I'll let you know what He says." So the men stayed overnight. ⁹That night the Lord tried to help Balaam see the problem by asking him, "Who are these men who came to visit you last night? Where did they come from and what did they want?" ¹⁰Balaam answered, "They came from Moab and brought me a letter from King Balak, the son of Zippor. ¹¹In this letter he said, 'A nation of people has left Egypt and there are so many of them that they cover the ground as far as your eye can see. Come and curse them for me, then I'll be able to defeat them.'"

¹²God said to Balaam, "Don't go with these men. You are not to curse these people for they are mine and I have blessed them." ¹³The next morning Balaam said to Balak's messengers, "You'd better go back home, because I can't help you. The Lord refuses to let me go with you." ¹⁴So the messengers went back to Balak and said, "Balaam refused to come."

¹⁵Then Balak sent another delegation of leaders to see Balaam, even more important and distinguished than before. ¹⁶They greeted Balaam and said, "King

Balak would like you to reconsider his request. He still wants you to come and curse these people. This is what he says, 'Don't let any consideration stand in your way and keep you from coming. ¹⁷I will pay you more than you can imagine and will make whatever preparations you ask for in order to assist you. But I do want you to come and curse these Israelites before they overrun my country.'" ¹⁸Balaam answered, "Even if King Balak gave me his palace full of silver and gold, I couldn't do what the Lord has told me not to do, whether it's big or little. ¹⁹But stay overnight and I'll again ask the Lord what He wants me to do. Maybe He's changed His mind." ²⁰That night the Lord said to Balaam, "Since the men want you to go with them and you're so eager to go with them, go ahead, but say only what I tell you to say."

²¹The next morning Balaam found that the messengers had gotten up early and left without him because they expected another refusal. So Balaam quickly saddled his donkey and headed for Moab, determined to catch up with them.

Balaam and the Donkey

²²When God saw how desperate Balaam was to go to Moab to accept Balak's offer, He was very displeased. He knew that Balaam was eager to curse Israel for money. So He sent an angel to stop Balaam and his two servants by blocking their way. ²³The Lord opened the eyes of Balaam's donkey and it saw an angel with a drawn sword in his hand standing in the middle of the road. The startled animal turned off the road into the field. Then Balaam beat his donkey and made it get back on the road. ²⁴The angel then stood where there was a stone fence on either side of the road to protect the vineyards. ²⁵When the donkey saw the angel, it tried to go around him and pressed against the stone fence, hurting Balaam's leg. He beat his donkey even more severely than before. ²⁶Then the angel went on ahead and stood in a much

narrower place with no room for the donkey to go around him on either side.

²⁷This time when the donkey saw the angel, it stopped and laid down under Balaam. This made Balaam extremely angry. So he took his stick and beat his donkey unmercifully. ²⁸Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to deserve these three beatings?" ²⁹In his rage Balaam didn't even realize that it was his donkey speaking to him and he said, "Three times you slowed me down and made me look like a fool. If I had a sword, I'd kill you!" ³⁰The donkey said, "Am I not your very own donkey and have I not always taken you where you wanted to go? Have I ever done this to you before?" Balaam, still in a rage, said, "No, you haven't, but you've done it now!"

³¹Then the Lord let Balaam see the angel standing there with a drawn sword. Trembling with fear, Balaam fell on his knees in front of the angel and threw himself face down on the ground. ³²The angel said to him, "Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I've been sent here to stop you from going to Moab. You're more determined to get rich by cursing Israel than to say what the Lord wants you to say. ³³The Lord opened the donkey's eyes and let it see me first. That's why it turned into the field, squeezed against the stone fence, then fell down in front of me. If your donkey hadn't done this, you would have been killed." ³⁴Then Balaam wept and said, "I have sinned against the Lord. I didn't know you were standing there in the road to keep me from going to Moab. If you think I should turn back, I will." ³⁵The angel said to Balaam, "Since you're so eager to catch up with the messengers and go to Moab, go ahead, but don't get any ideas about cursing Israel. You are to say only what the Lord tells you to say." The angel disappeared and Balaam mounted his donkey and went on his way.

³⁶When King Balak got word that Balaam was coming, he and his leaders

went out to meet him. They met at Ar, a Moab city near the Arnon River that forms the border of Moab. ³⁷Balak greeted Balaam and said, "Why didn't you come when I first contacted you? Wasn't the money I offered you enough? Don't you know that I'm willing to pay you any amount you ask for?" ³⁸Balaam answered, "Well, I'm here, but I won't be able to say just anything. I'll have to say what the Lord wants me to say." ³⁹Then Balak took Balaam to the city of Kiriath Huzoth and on up to the high places where the Moabites worship the god Baal. From here he wanted to give Balaam a view of the large number of Israelites that were camped nearby, hoping he would change his mind and curse them. ⁴⁰Balak asked for young bulls and sheep, sacrificed them to Baal and then invited Balaam to join him and his officials for the sacrificial meal in honor of the power of Baal, which Balaam did.

⁴¹The next day Balak took Balaam to the heights of Bamoth Baal from which Balaam could get an even better look at Israel.

Balaam's First Prophecy

23 Balaam said to Balak, "Build me seven altars right here, and bring me seven of the best bulls and seven of the best rams you have." ²So Balak did just as Balaam asked him to do, and together they sacrificed one bull and one ram on each of the seven altars. ³Then Balaam said to the king, "Stay here by the offerings while I go aside to talk to the Lord to see whether or not He'll speak to me. If He does, I'll come back and tell you what He said." So Balaam climbed to the top of a nearby barren hill to talk to the Lord. ⁴He said to the Lord, "I have built seven altars and offered a prize bull and a prize ram on each. These offerings are better than any the Israelites can give you. What do you think, Lord?" ⁵The Lord answered Balaam by giving him, in vision, a quick glimpse of Israel's future greatness and

of God's people to the end of time. Then He said, "Go back to Balak and I will tell you what to say."

⁶So Balaam went back to Balak and his leaders, who were standing by the offerings waiting for him, and gave them this message from the Lord: ⁷"The king of Moab brought me here from Aram in the eastern mountains and asked me to come and curse Israel. ⁸But how can I curse what God has blessed? How can I doom a people whom the God of heaven has made His own? ⁹From the high rocks I saw them, from the heights I saw their encampment. They're a different nation, a nation set apart. They don't think of themselves as just another people. ¹⁰Who can stand here and count them? They cover the ground like grains of sand. Even a fourth of them are too many for me to count. Let me die with the hope of this righteous nation! May my end be as theirs!"

¹¹When Balaam finished speaking, Balak said to him, "Do you know what you just did? I brought you here to curse Israel and you've turned around and blessed them!" ¹²Balaam said, "I intended to curse them, but I can only say what the Lord tells me to say!"

Balaam's Second Prophecy

¹³Then Balak said, "Come, let me take you to another place from where you can see only a part of Israel. Maybe you won't feel so intimidated and can curse them from there." ¹⁴So he took Balaam to an open area on top of Mount Pisgah called Zophim. Again he ordered seven altars built as Balaam had suggested and together they offered a prize bull and a prize ram on each. ¹⁵Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stay here by the offering while I go aside to talk to the Lord." ¹⁶Again the Lord told Balaam what to say and sent him back to Balak. ¹⁷When Balaam got back to the king and his leaders, they were standing by the offerings waiting for him. Balak said, "Well, what did the Lord say?"

¹⁸Then Balaam gave him this message: “Balak, son of Zippor, king of Moab, listen to what the Lord has told me to say to you: ¹⁹God is not a man, that He would lie, nor is He a mortal that can be persuaded to change His mind. Does He speak and not act? Does He promise and not fulfill? ²⁰He has told me to bless Israel. I can’t change that. ²¹Israel’s greatness is sure. Nothing can stop their onward march. Misfortune and trouble will not come against Israel as long as they follow Him. The Lord their God is with them. He is their King! ²²He brought them out of Egypt and is ready to fight for them like a wild bull. ²³No curse can stop them; no witchcraft can hurt them. Israel will prosper and people everywhere will say, ‘See what God has done for them!’ ²⁴Israel is like a mighty lion and will not rest until it has caught its prey, licked its blood and devoured its meat.”

²⁵When Balak heard that, he said to Balaam, “If you can’t curse Israel, at least don’t bless them!” ²⁶Balaam said, “Didn’t I tell you that I have to do what the Lord tells me to do?”

²⁷Then Balak said, “Come, let me take you to another place. Maybe God will change His mind and let you curse Israel from there.” ²⁸Balaam agreed, so the king took him to another place on the top of Mount Peor from which they could see Israel. ²⁹Then Balaam said, “Let’s build seven altars and sacrifice a prize bull and a prize ram on each.” ³⁰Balak ordered it done, and together they offered a prize bull and a prize ram on each altar.

Balaam’s Third Prophecy

24 Balaam finally realized that the Lord wanted him to bless Israel and that He would not change His mind. So he no longer tried to use sorcery to bring on a curse. Again he looked out over the wilderness and scanned the encampment of Israel. ²This time he noticed how orderly and clean their camp was and that each tribe had its own designated area around the Sanctuary.

As he admired the scene, the Holy Spirit took control of him and Balaam began to prophesy, ³“The message of Balaam, the son of Beor, who now sees things clearly, ⁴who has heard the words of God, who fell prostrate before the Almighty and while in vision saw with open eyes the greatness of Israel. ⁵The tents of Israel are most beautiful, her encampment is a joy to behold. ⁶They are like groves of palm trees, like gardens beside a river, like aloes planted by the Lord Himself and like cedars growing beside a lake. ⁷Israel will have plenty of rainfall wherever the people make their home. Their seed will grow and their fields will produce abundantly. Their first king will be greater than Agag, the king of the Amalekites, and his rule will be exalted among the nations. ⁸God brought them out of Egypt and is ready to fight for them like a wild bull. Israel will devour its enemies and break the backs of well-trained armies. With its arrows it will penetrate the defenses of its enemies and pierce the hearts of their warriors. ⁹Israel is like a mighty lion who lies asleep and no one should try to wake it up. Whoever blesses Israel will be blessed and whoever curses Israel will be cursed.”

¹⁰When Balak heard that, he clenched his fists in anger and said to Balaam, “I called you here to cast a spell on Israel and you’ve blessed them three times! ¹¹Get out of my sight! Go back to where you came from and forget about your reward! The God of Israel just kept you from getting rich!” ¹²Balaam answered, “I told your messengers what I could and couldn’t say. ¹³I told them that even if they gave me all the silver and gold in your palace, I couldn’t say anything good or bad about Israel except what the Lord told me to say. ¹⁴I’m going back home, but before I go I need to let you know what Israel will do to your people.”

Balaam’s Fourth Prophecy

¹⁵Then Balaam gave a message to Balak

from the God of Israel, saying, "This is the message of Balaam, the son of Beor, who now sees clearly, ¹⁶who has heard the words of God, who fell prostrate before the Almighty and while in vision saw with open eyes the greatness of Israel. ¹⁷I saw Him who is not yet born become the rightful King of Israel. I saw Him rise like a star from Jacob. I saw Him rescue His people, crush the leaders of Moab and smite the descendants of a proud and violent nation. ¹⁸Israel will conquer the land of Edom with its mountain fortresses. Israel will not be defeated but will be valiant and victorious. ¹⁹One with authority will come out of Jacob to become King over Israel, and He will destroy the remnant of the enemies of His people."

²⁰In that same vision Balaam saw the future of the Amalekites and said, "And Amalek, the first among powerful nations to attack Israel, will come to ruin and will never rise again." ²¹He also saw the future of the Kenites who turned their backs on God, and said, "You think you are secure, sitting like an eagle's nest high on the top of a mountain. ²²You will be destroyed by a different enemy. Assyria will come and take you captive and carry you away."

²³Then Balaam said, "Who can stand up against God when He does such things? ²⁴Ships will come from the direction of Cyprus against the nations from Assyria to Persia and they will be no more." ²⁵Then Balaam went home and Balak returned to his palace very discouraged.

The Moabite Women

25 Balaam was bitterly disappointed in not receiving his rewards, so he devised a scheme to entice Israel to sin. He knew that if they did, the Lord would withdraw His blessings from them. So he returned to Moab and suggested his plan to Balak. The king agreed and invited the Israelites camped among the acacia trees at the border of Moab to be his guests at a religious festival. Many Israelite men, including some of the lead-

ers, accepted the invitation. ²They ate and drank with the Moabites and soon were having sex with the women as part of the pagan worship. ³That's how Balaam succeeded in getting Israel to worship Baal, and the Lord was extremely displeased with what the men of Israel had done. ⁴He said to Moses, "Take these leaders and others who have come back into camp and stone them. Then hang their bodies in the sun as punishment for their open sin that my justice might be restrained and not fully fall on Israel." ⁵Moses called for the judges and said to them, "Each of you must order the execution of those who went to Moab, got drunk and worshiped Baal by having sex with the Moabite women."

⁶As these leaders and the others who had sinned were brought to trial, the Lord sent a plague among the people. And as the people were weeping before the Lord over what had happened, one of the leaders staggered into camp with a Midianite princess and took her to his tent near the Sanctuary which was open on one side in full view of everyone. ⁷When Phinehas, the son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron, saw this, he left the people who were weeping before the Lord at the Sanctuary, took a spear ⁸and went over to the open tent. When he got there and saw them lying in a sexual embrace, he drove his spear through both of them—through the Israelite and into the woman's body. Immediately the plague that the Lord had sent among the people stopped. ⁹Because of Israel's sin, twenty-four thousand people died, counting the one thousand who had been executed before.

¹⁰Then the Lord said to Moses, ¹¹"Because Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the grandson of Aaron, refused to stand by and tolerate such open defiance and was jealous to preserve my honor by not tolerating the worship of other gods, I decided to stop the plague. ¹²Tell him that I am making a covenant of peace with him and his family. ¹³He and his descendants will have a lasting part in the

priesthood of Israel, because he did not allow any rival gods among the people, and I approve of what he did.”

¹⁴The name of the leader who was killed in his tent with the Midianite woman was Zimri, the son of Salu, the head of the family belonging to the tribe of Simeon. ¹⁵The name of the woman who was brought into the camp was Cozbi, the daughter of Zur, a tribal leader among the Midianites who had joined the Moabites to oppose Israel.

¹⁶The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁷“The Midianites are your enemies just like the Moabites, so when you attack them, don’t leave any of them alive. ¹⁸They were foremost in deceiving you into taking part in the sexual rituals connected with the worship of Baal. You saw the boldness of their women in the case of Cozbi, the daughter of a Midianite leader, when she came with Zimri into the Israelite camp.”

The Second Census of Israel

26 After the plague had stopped, the Lord said to Moses and Eleazar, the son of Aaron, ²⁴“Count the children of Israel by ancestral families, all those who are twenty years old and up who are fit for military service.” ³So on the plains of Moab across the Jordan River from Jericho, Moses and Eleazar said to the people, ⁴“The Lord has asked us to take a census of all men twenty years old and up who are fit for military service.” When the census was over, this was the count of the men who were children of those who had come out of Egypt:

⁵The men descended from Reuben through Hanoch, Pallu, ⁶Hezron and Carmi ⁷numbered forty-three thousand, seven hundred and thirty. ⁸The son of Pallu was Eliab, ⁹and the sons of Eliab were Nemuel, Dathan and Abiram. The latter two led the children of Israel to turn against Moses and Aaron and were the most active of Korah’s followers in the rebellion he led against the Lord. ¹⁰The earth opened up and swallowed

them and Korah alive, and fire from the Lord destroyed two hundred and fifty of their followers. ¹¹This stopped the rebellion, but the line of Korah did not die out.

¹²The men descended from Simeon through Nemuel, Jamin, Jakin or Jarib, ¹³Zerah and Shaul ¹⁴numbered twenty-two thousand, two hundred.

¹⁵The men descended from Gad through Zephon, Haggi, Shuni, ¹⁶Ozni, Eri, ¹⁷Arod and Areli ¹⁸numbered forty thousand, five hundred.

¹⁹Two of the sons of Judah, Er and Onan, died in the land of Canaan before the family of Jacob moved to Egypt. ²⁰The men descended from Judah through Shelah, Perez, Zerah, ²¹Hezron and Hamul ²²numbered seventy-six thousand, five hundred.

²³The men descended from Issachar through Tola, Puah, ²⁴Jashub and Shimron ²⁵numbered sixty-four thousand, three hundred.

²⁶The men descended from Zebulun through Sered, Elon and Jahleel ²⁷numbered sixty thousand, five hundred.

²⁸The men descended from Joseph through Manasseh and Ephraim were as follows: ²⁹The men descended from Manasseh through Makir, Gilead, ³⁰Iezer, Helek, ³¹Asriel, Shechem, ³²Shemida and Hephher, ³³(the son of Hephher, whose name was Zelophehad, had only daughters whose names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah), ³⁴the men numbered fifty-two thousand, seven hundred.

³⁵The men descended from Ephraim through Shuthelah, Beker, Tahan ³⁶and from Shuthelah through Eran who were fit for service, ³⁷numbered thirty-two thousand, five hundred. These were the male descendants from Joseph through Manasseh and Ephraim.

³⁸The men descended from Benjamin through Bela, Ashbel, Ahiram, ³⁹Shupham, Hupham, ⁴⁰Ard and Naaman ⁴¹numbered forty-five thousand, six hundred.

⁴²The men descended from Dan through Shuham ⁴³numbered sixty-four thousand, four hundred.

⁴⁴The men descended from Asher through Imnah, Ishvi, Beriah, ⁴⁵Heber, Malkiel, ⁴⁶(Asher had only one daughter and her name was Serah) ⁴⁷the men of Asher's family numbered fifty-three thousand, four hundred.

⁴⁸The men descended from Naphtali through Jahzeel, Guni, ⁴⁹Jezer and Shillem ⁵⁰numbered forty-five thousand, four hundred.

⁵¹So the total number of men in Israel from twenty years old and up who were fit for military service numbered six hundred and one thousand, seven hundred and thirty.

⁵²Then the Lord said to Moses, ⁵³"The land in Canaan is to be allotted to the tribes as their inheritance according to this census. ⁵⁴The larger tribes get the larger portions and the smaller tribes get the smaller portions based on the list of names you have. ⁵⁵The location of each tribe is to be determined by casting lots, but the size is to be based on the number of men in each tribe according to this census. ⁵⁶The location of each family within each tribe is to be determined by casting lots, but the size of the inheritance is to be based on the size of the family."

⁵⁷The men descended from Levi came through his sons Gershon, Kohath and Merari, ⁵⁸and their sons Libnah, Hebron, Mahali, Mushi and Kohath's grandson Korah. ⁵⁹Kohath was the father of Amram and Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi and the younger sister of Kohath, who was born while the children of Israel were still in Egypt. She gave Amram three children, Aaron, Moses and Miriam. ⁶⁰And Aaron was the father of Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ⁶¹But Nadab and Abihu died when they came before the Lord partially drunk and used common fire instead of holy fire from the altar which was contrary to what they had been taught. ⁶²Those descended from Levi numbered twenty-three thousand, including the males from one month old and up. But the Levites were not consid-

ered part of this census because their inheritance was to serve the Lord.

⁶³So Moses and Eleazar finished taking the census while the children of Israel were still camped on the plains of Moab across the Jordan River east of Jericho just as the Lord had instructed them. ⁶⁴Except for Caleb and Joshua, not one of the men who first explored the land of Canaan was still alive who had been counted in the first census taken more than thirty-eight years before in the Sinai Desert, a year after the children of Israel had come out of Egypt. ⁶⁵The Lord had told the Israelites they would die and be buried in the wilderness because of their distrust of Him in the face of all that He had done for them. And not one of them was left except Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua, the son of Nun.

Laws of Inheritance

27 Now the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hephher, the son of Gilead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasse, who was the son of Joseph, were not on the list to receive an inheritance. Their names were: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. ²They went to Moses at the entrance of the Sanctuary and met with him, Eleazar the high priest, and the leaders. They said, ³"Our father, Zelophehad, died in the wilderness with the previous generation, but not because he took part in the rebellion with Korah, Dathan and Abiram. He died there like all the others who listened to the men who explored the land of Canaan who said that the Lord could not take us in because the people there were too big and strong. He left us no brothers through whom we can have an inheritance and keep the family name alive. ⁴Why should our family name disappear from the tribe just because our father had no sons? Give us his inheritance so we don't have to depend on our relatives."

⁵So Moses took their case to the Lord. ⁶The Lord said, ⁷"Zelophehad's daughters have a legitimate request. You need

to give them their father's inheritance so the family name will not disappear from the tribe and the daughters won't have to depend on their relatives. ⁸Tell the children of Israel that if a man dies and has no sons, his inheritance goes to his daughters. ⁹If he has no children at all, his inheritance goes to his brothers. ¹⁰If he has no brothers, the inheritance goes to his father's brothers. ¹¹If his father has no brothers, the inheritance is to go to the man's nearest male relative. This is to be the law of inheritance for all the children of Israel. I, the Lord, have spoken."

Joshua Leads Israel

¹²Some days later the Lord spoke to Moses again, "I want you to climb the mountain in the Abarim range that I will point out to you, and from there I will give you a view of the land of Canaan. ¹³After you have seen it, you will die, as your brother Aaron did. ¹⁴I need to do this because you disobeyed me at Meribah near Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin when you dishonored me by becoming angry, striking the rock twice and taking credit for providing the water. You sinned against me in front of the people, so I must judge you in front of the people." ¹⁵Moses said to the Lord, ¹⁶"Lord, before I go, may the God of all flesh let me know who is to take my place. ¹⁷It needs to be someone who has the respect of the people, who can lead them and whom they will follow so they won't be as sheep without a shepherd." ¹⁸The Lord said, ¹⁹"Go and get Joshua, the son of Nun. He is humble and listens to me. He is someone through whom the Holy Spirit can work. He will be your successor. ²⁰You need to transfer your authority to him in front of the people, and they'll accept him as their new leader. ²¹Take him to Eleazar, the high priest, and in the presence of the people lay your hands on him to indicate the transfer of leadership. Tell the children of Israel that Joshua will receive directions from me through the two stones, the Urim and Thummim, that are on the garments

of the high priest. One stone will light up to give a 'Yes' answer or the other one will cloud over to give a 'No' answer. Israel is to move at his command."

²²Moses obeyed and did what the Lord had asked him to do. He called for Joshua and had him stand in front of Eleazar, the high priest, in the sight of the children of Israel. ²³Then he laid his hands on Joshua and transferred the responsibilities of leadership and authority to him as the Lord had instructed him.

Daily Offerings

28 Before Moses died, God spoke to him, saying, ²"Tell the children of Israel that they are not to forget to bring the required food offerings at the appointed time, and if they bring it in the right spirit it will greatly please the Lord. ³Each day the priests are to bring two year-old male lambs without defect to the Lord. They constitute a single offering. ⁴One of the lambs is to be offered in the morning and the other in the evening. ⁵They are to be offered with a grain offering of two pounds of the best flour mixed with one quart of the best olive oil. ⁶This is the offering I first told you about at Sinai. It is an offering by fire to the Lord. ⁷Also to be offered with each lamb is one quart of pure grape juice as a drink offering. ⁸The evening sacrifice is to be done the same way as the morning sacrifice. It is to be accompanied by a grain offering, and a drink offering. If done in the right spirit, these daily offerings will greatly please the Lord.

Sabbath Offerings

⁹"On the Sabbath, bring four one-year-old male lambs to the Lord, two for the morning and two for the evening sacrifice, and double the amount for the grain and drink offering. ¹⁰These are the Sabbath offerings which are in addition to the regular morning and evening sacrifices with their grain and drink offerings.

Monthly Offerings

¹¹“At the beginning of each month bring an additional whole burnt offering of two young bulls, one ram and seven one-year-old male lambs, all without defects. ¹²With each young bull give a grain offering of six pounds of flour mixed with olive oil, with the ram four pounds of flour with oil, ¹³and with each lamb give two pounds of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil. This will please the Lord. ¹⁴A drink offering of two quarts of the best grape juice is to be added to the offering of each young bull, a quart and a half to the offering of the ram and a quart to the offering of each lamb. These offerings are to be made monthly throughout the year in addition to the regular daily offerings. ¹⁵In addition to the regular morning and evening sacrifices, the priests are to bring one young male goat without defect as a monthly sin offering to the Lord.

Offerings at Passover

¹⁶“The Passover lamb is to be killed and eaten on the fourteenth day of the first month. ¹⁷On the fifteenth day the religious festival of Unleavened Bread is to begin. It is to last for one week, and during this time, only bread made without yeast is to be eaten. ¹⁸The fifteenth day of that month is to be a holy day like the Sabbath; no regular work is to be done. It is a day for worship and praise. ¹⁹On that day bring to the Lord a whole burnt offering of two young bulls, one ram and seven one-year-old male lambs, all without defects, plus the necessary grain offering. ²⁰With each bull a grain offering of six pounds of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil is to be offered, with the ram four pounds of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil, ²¹and with each of the seven lambs two pounds of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil. ²²Also, one young male goat is to be offered as a sin offering. ²³All these offerings are to be in addition to the regular morning and evening sacrifices. ²⁴The grain and drink

offerings are in addition to the daily grain and drink offerings. If this is done in the right spirit, it will greatly please the Lord. ²⁵The last day of this week-long festival is to be a holy day like the Sabbath: no regular work is to be done. It is a day for worship and praise.

Offerings at the Festival of Weeks

²⁶“Now fifty days after the Passover, on the sixth day of the third month, the people are to hold the Festival of Weeks (later called Pentecost). It is to be kept as a Sabbath, and the people are to bring to the Lord a sample of the new grain and praise Him for the harvest. No regular work is to be done. ²⁷The priests are to offer two young bulls, one ram and seven one-year-old male lambs, all without defect, to the Lord. ²⁸A grain offering of six pounds of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil is to be added to the offering of each bull; four pounds of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil for the ram; ²⁹and two pounds of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil with each of the seven lambs. ³⁰Also a kid goat is to be offered as a sin offering. ³¹All these offerings, including the grain and drink offering, are in addition to the regular morning and evening public sacrifices.”

Offerings at the Festival of Trumpets

29 The Lord continued to speak to Moses, “On the first day of the seventh month, the beginning of your civil year, the people are to come together for the Festival of Trumpets. It is a holy convocation during which no regular work is to be done. ²The priests are to offer to the Lord, as a whole burnt offering, one young bull, one ram and seven one-year-old male lambs, all without defects. ³With the young bull they are to bring a grain offering of six pounds of the best flour mixed with the purest olive oil, four pounds of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil with the ram, ⁴and two pounds of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil with each of the seven

lambs.⁵The priests also are to offer one young male goat for a sin offering.⁶These offerings are in addition to the daily and monthly offerings with their grain and drink offerings. If all these offerings are done properly and in the right spirit, it will greatly please the Lord.

Offerings on the Day of Atonement

⁷“On the tenth day of the seventh month you are to fast and do no work. It is like a Sabbath, a holy convocation. It is the Day of Atonement, a time to examine your hearts, to make things right with God and man and to enter into the spiritual significance that the day gives you.⁸So bring one young bull, one ram and seven one-year-old male lambs, all without defects, as whole burnt offerings to the Lord.⁹With the young bull offer six pounds of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil; with the ram bring four pounds of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil; ¹⁰and with each of the seven lambs offer two pounds of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil.¹¹The priests are also to offer one young male goat for a sin offering, in addition to the sin offering of atonement and the regular morning and evening sacrifices with their grain and drink offerings.

Offerings at the Festival of Tabernacles

¹²“Five days later, on the fifteenth day of that same month you are to hold the Festival of Tabernacles. This is to last a whole week like the festival held at the beginning of the year in connection with the Passover. This week is to begin and end with a day as holy as the Sabbath, in which no regular work is to be done.¹³On the first day of this special week bring an offering to me of thirteen young bulls, two rams and fourteen one-year-old male lambs, all without defects.¹⁴Offer six pounds of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil with each of the bulls, four pounds of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil with each ram,¹⁵and two

pounds of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil with each of the fourteen lambs.¹⁶In addition, the priest is to offer one young male goat as a sin offering. These offerings are to be in addition to the daily offerings with their grain and drink offerings.

¹⁷“On the second day of the festival you are to offer twelve young bulls, two rams and fourteen one-year-old male lambs, all without defects.¹⁸With each of the animals offer the specified amount of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil.¹⁹Add one young male goat as a sin offering in addition to the morning and evening sacrifices with their grain and drink offerings.

²⁰“On the third day bring eleven young bulls, two rams and fourteen one-year-old male lambs, all without defects.²¹With the bulls, the rams and the lambs offer the specified amount of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil.²²Add one young male goat as a sin offering in addition to the regular morning and evening sacrifices with their grain and drink offerings.

²³“On the fourth day bring ten young bulls, two rams and fourteen one-year-old male lambs, all without defects.²⁴With the bulls, the rams and the lambs offer the specified amount of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil.²⁵Add one young male goat as a sin offering in addition to the regular morning and evening sacrifices with their grain and drink offerings.

²⁶“On the fifth day bring nine young bulls, two rams and fourteen one-year-old male lambs, all without defects.²⁷With the bulls, the rams and the lambs offer the specified amount of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil.²⁸Add one young male goat as a sin offering in addition to the regular morning and evening sacrifices with their grain and drink offerings.

²⁹“On the sixth day bring eight young bulls, two rams and fourteen one-year-old male lambs, all without defects.³⁰With

the bulls, the rams and the lambs offer the specified amount of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil. ³¹Add one young male goat as a sin offering in addition to the morning and evening sacrifices with their grain and drink offerings.

³²“On the seventh day bring seven young bulls, two rams and fourteen one-year-old male lambs, all without defects. ³³With the bulls, the rams and the lambs offer the specified amount of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil. ³⁴Add one young male goat as a sin offering in addition to the morning and evening sacrifices with their grain and drink offerings.

³⁵“The eighth day is to be holy, like the Sabbath; no regular work is to be done on that day. ³⁶Offer one young bull, one ram and seven one-year-old male lambs, all without defects. ³⁷With the bull, the ram and the lambs offer the specified amount of fine flour mixed with the purest olive oil. ³⁸Add one young male goat as a sin offering in addition to the morning and evening sacrifices with their grain and drink offerings.

³⁹“At these festivals you are to bring your whole burnt offerings, grain offerings and drink offerings. These are in addition to other promised offerings, thank offerings and special gifts you want to give the Lord.”

⁴⁰Moses told the children of Israel everything the Lord had told him.

Vows Made to God

30 Then Moses told the children of Israel about the other laws which he had received from God. ²He said, “When a man promises the Lord that he will do something or not do something, or binds himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but is unconditionally bound to what he promised to do. ³When a young woman living at home promises the Lord that she will do something or pledges not to do something, or binds herself by a pledge, ⁴and her father hears about it but does not object, then what she vowed will stand. ⁵However, if her

father hears about it and disapproves of her vow by which she obligated herself to the Lord, it will not stand. The Lord will release her from her vow because her father decided not to accept it.

⁶“If she carelessly makes a promise to the Lord or carelessly binds herself by a pledge before she’s married and her father didn’t hear about it, ⁷but later her husband hears about it and does not object, then her promise or pledge by which she obligated herself to the Lord will stand. ⁸However, if her husband hears about it and objects to the promise or pledge she made, she’s no longer obligated to carry it out. The Lord will release her from her obligation. ⁹Any vow that a divorced woman or a widow makes will be binding.

¹⁰“If a woman living with a husband makes a pledge to the Lord and confirms it with an oath, ¹¹and afterward her husband hears about it but says nothing and does not object, then her vow by which she obligated herself will stand. ¹²But if her husband hears about it and objects, then her vow by which she obligated herself will not stand. Her husband has nullified it and the Lord will release her from her obligation. ¹³Her husband can accept or reject any vow by which she has obligated herself to the Lord. ¹⁴If he says nothing to her about her vow the day after he hears about it, his silence indicates that he has accepted the vow she made to the Lord. ¹⁵If, on the other hand, he says nothing for some time and then suddenly he tries to stop her from carrying out her obligation and from doing what she promised or pledged, he becomes guilty.”

¹⁶These are the laws that the Lord gave to Moses, which he in turn passed on to the children of Israel covering the relationship between a husband and his wife and between a father and his unmarried daughter living at home.

The Midianites Defeated

31 The Lord said to Moses, ²“The Moabites and the Midianites need to be punished for what they did to Israel. But for now you need to punish the Midianites because they were the most aggressive in tempting the men of Israel to sin by leading them into adultery and idolatry. After that you need to come up the mountain and prepare to die.” ³Then Moses said to the children of Israel, “Let us arm ourselves because we’ll be going against the Midianites to punish them for leading us to sin against our God. ⁴We only need a thousand men from each tribe. That will be enough.”

⁵So twelve thousand men were chosen and armed, one thousand from each tribe, and soon they were ready. ⁶The men were placed under the command of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, who took the holy trumpets of the Sanctuary along with him to sound the charge. ⁷The children of Israel attacked the Midianites as the Lord had commanded and slew every man in the Midianite force. ⁸Among those killed were the five kings of Midian: Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba. The Israelites also killed Balaam, the son of Beor, who was with the Midianite army at the time. ⁹The Israelites took the women and children captive as well as the herds, flocks and goods of the Midianites as the rightful spoils of war. ¹⁰Before they left the land they burned down all the cities of the Midianites. ¹¹They took the people, herds of animals and countless spoils of war.

Return From the War

¹²Then they brought them home to present them to Moses, Eleazar and the people who were still camped in the plains of Moab east of the Jordan River across from Jericho. ¹³As they approached the camp, Moses, Eleazar and the tribal leaders all went out to meet them. ¹⁴When Moses saw the captives and the spoils of war he became angry with what the officers and commanders

of hundreds and thousands had done. ¹⁵He said, “Why have you spared the women? Are you so attracted by them that you have to bring them home with you? Don’t you know that Midianite women dedicate their bodies to their gods? ¹⁶These women led Israel into adultery and then into the worship of Baal on the advice of Balaam! This is what brought the displeasure of the Lord on all of us at Peor where many of our people died. ¹⁷So execute every male of military age, even if he did not serve in the Midianite army, and every woman who has had sexual relations, because they have dedicated their bodies to Baal, ¹⁸but save the children and the young girls to live among you because they’re still virgins and have not yet given their bodies to their god. ¹⁹Now those of you who have killed someone, or have touched a dead body, must stay outside the camp with your young captives for one full week. On the third and seventh days you are to ritually purify yourselves and the young captives. ²⁰Every piece of clothing and everything made of leather, goat’s hair or wood is to be ritually cleansed.”

²¹Then Eleazar, the high priest, said to the troops, “These are the requirements for purification that the Lord gave to us: ²²Everything that will not burn, like gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, lead ²³and anything else that can stand the heat of ordinary flames is to be passed through the fire and it will be considered clean. Everything else is to be made ritually clean with water specifically set aside for purification. ²⁴On the last day, after you have washed your clothes, you may come back to camp.”

Division of the Plunder

²⁵Then the Lord said to Moses, ²⁶“You, Eleazar and the leaders of the people are to count all the captured people, animals and goods that are with you. ²⁷Then divide these spoils of war equally between the soldiers who were chosen to go out to fight and the rest of the people. ²⁸From

the troops who went out to war, set aside for the Lord one out of every five hundred persons, cattle, donkeys, sheep or goats. ²⁹Give these to Eleazar to help support the priests who minister to the Lord at the Sanctuary. ³⁰From the spoils that go to those who stayed home, set aside one out of every fifty persons, cattle, donkeys, sheep or goats for the Levites who take care of the Sanctuary of the Lord." ³¹So Moses, Eleazar and the leaders of the people did what the Lord had asked them to do.

³²The total spoils of war that were taken were six hundred and seventy-five thousand sheep, ³³seventy-two thousand cattle, ³⁴sixty-one thousand donkeys ³⁵and thirty-two thousand young women and children who had not had sexual relations with a man. ³⁶The spoils that were given to those who went out to battle were three hundred and thirty-seven thousand, five hundred sheep, ³⁷of which six hundred and seventy-five were set aside for the Lord, ³⁸thirty-six thousand cattle, of which seventy-two were set aside for the Lord, ³⁹thirty thousand, five hundred donkeys, of which sixty-one were set aside for the Lord, ⁴⁰and sixteen thousand persons, of which thirty-two were set aside for the Lord. ⁴¹Moses gave all these to Eleazar to use for the priests as the Lord had instructed him.

⁴²Moses separated the peoples' half from the soldiers' half of the spoils. ⁴³There were three hundred and thirty-seven thousand, five hundred sheep, ⁴⁴thirty-six thousand cattle, ⁴⁵thirty thousand, five hundred donkeys, ⁴⁶and sixteen thousand persons. ⁴⁷From these Moses set aside one out of every fifty persons and animals as the Lord had said and gave them to the Levites who took care of the Sanctuary.

⁴⁸Then the officers who were in charge of the troops, those over hundreds and over thousands, went to Moses and said, ⁴⁹"We have counted the men under our individual commands and not one of them is missing! ⁵⁰So we decided to give

to the Lord a portion of all the ornaments we collected, the armlets, bracelets, rings, earrings and necklaces, as a thank offering for protecting us." ⁵¹Moses and Eleazar accepted these gifts from the commanders and the troops on behalf of the Lord. ⁵²The gold that the commanders collected from their troops and gave to the Lord weighed over four hundred pounds. ⁵³Each man that had gone out to battle gave from the spoils of war that he had personally taken. ⁵⁴Then Moses and Eleazar took the gifts that they had received from the commanders and brought them into the Sanctuary as a memorial of what the Lord had done for His people.

The Tribes East of the Jordan

32 Now the tribes of Reuben and Gad had huge herds and flocks, and they noticed that the land of Jazer in Gilead was quite suitable for cattle. ²So they went to Moses, Eleazar and the other leaders of Israel and said, ³"The land of Gilead around Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo and Beon is an excellent place for cattle. ⁴The Lord helped the children of Israel to subdue this land and it must be part of the land that He wants His people to have. This would be a good place for our herds and flocks. ⁵So if it pleases you, let us have this part of the country for our inheritance. Don't make us cross the Jordan and settle on the other side with the rest of the tribes."

⁶Moses replied, "You mean you want to stay here while your brothers go and fight to subdue the land on the other side? ⁷If you do this, you'll discourage the rest of the tribes from crossing Jordan. They'll all want to settle over here. ⁸This is what happened years ago when I sent out twelve men from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land of Canaan and bring us back a report. ⁹They went as far as the Eshcol Valley, looked at the land, then came back and discouraged everybody from going in, and the people listened to

them. ¹⁰That's when the Lord took an oath and swore by His own name, saying, ¹¹'Because they did not listen to me or do what I asked them to do, but believed the exaggerated report of these men and let themselves be discouraged, none of the men twenty years old and up who came out of Egypt will live in the land that I promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ¹²This includes all the men who explored the land except Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua, the son of Nun, because they believed in me and encouraged the children of Israel to go in and take the land.' ¹³So the Lord made us go back into the wilderness for almost forty years until all those who did not believe that the Lord could bring them into the land had died. ¹⁴Now here you are, a new generation, and if word gets out that you don't want to cross Jordan, you'll influence your brothers the same way those men did, and the Lord will really be displeased with us this time. ¹⁵If you don't go with us to subdue the land as the Lord has promised us, you will be responsible for our staying in the wilderness many more years."

¹⁶The leaders of Reuben and Gad answered, "We are ready to cross Jordan together with our brothers and help them subdue and occupy the land that the Lord promised us, but first we would like to build enclosures for our herds and flocks and houses for our women and children. ¹⁷We'll go to battle with our brothers until all the tribes have received their portion of the land. In the meantime our families and those men who are not fit for war can live in these fortified towns and feel safe. ¹⁸We will not return to our families until all the tribes have received their share of the new land. ¹⁹Also we're willing to forego any rights that we might have had to the land on the other side of Jordan, because we freely chose to take this part of the country instead."

²⁰Moses said, "If you're true to your word and to the Lord, then get ready, and arm yourselves for battle. ²¹Cross

over Jordan with us, and under God's command, help us secure the land by fighting alongside your brothers. ²²When the land has been secured for our other tribes and God's people are settled as He directs, then you'll be free from your obligation to the Lord and the rest of the tribes, and the land on this side of Jordan will be yours. ²³But if you fail to do this, you'll sin against the Lord and reap the consequences of your duplicity. You can be sure that you'll not be able to escape the consequences of your sins. ²⁴So go ahead and build enclosures for your animals, houses for your women and children, and make sure your towns and cities are walled in, but don't forget that you promised the Lord to help your brothers secure their inheritance." ²⁵Then the leaders of Reuben and Gad said, "We promise to obey the Lord. ²⁶While our women and children, as well as our flocks and herds, will stay here in Gilead, ²⁷we are ready to do as the Lord says and under His command, prepare for battle and cross over Jordan with our brothers to secure their inheritance."

²⁸Then Moses gave the following orders to Eleazar, Joshua and the other leaders of Israel, ²⁹"If the men from the tribe of Reuben and from the tribe of Gad arm themselves for battle and cross over Jordan and fight alongside of you to secure the land for you, then let them have Gilead for their inheritance. ³⁰But if they refuse to fight alongside you, then they are not to receive Gilead, but let them have land west of the Jordan." ³¹Again the leaders of Reuben and Gad pledged themselves to fight alongside their brothers and did so in the hearing of all the leaders of Israel. They said, "We will do what the Lord has asked us to do. ³²We will fight alongside our brothers under the Lord's command and cross over Jordan to do battle, but the land on this side of Jordan in Gilead will be ours."

³³Moses gave the people of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh with their flocks and herds the territory of

Sihon, king of the Amorites, the territory of Og, king of Bashan, and all the territory that the children of Israel had just conquered, together with its cities. ³⁴So the tribe of Gad rebuilt the fortified cities and towns of Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, ³⁵Atroth Shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, ³⁶Beth Nimrah and Beth Haran. ³⁷The tribe of Reuben rebuilt the fortified cities and towns of Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim, ³⁸Nebo, Baal Meon and Sibmah. These were the original names of the cities and towns, some of which were later changed. ³⁹The descendants of Manasseh through Makir decided on the part of Gilead that had not yet been taken and went ahead and drove out any Amorites who still lived there. ⁴⁰Then Moses gave that part of Gilead to the descendants of Manasseh through his son Makir. ⁴¹Jair, one of the leaders of the descendants of Manasseh through Makir, renamed the group of villages he captured The Villages of Jair. ⁴²Nobah, another leader of the descendants of Manasseh through Makir, renamed the city of Kenath and its surrounding settlements Nobah, after himself.

Israel's Journey

33 Now the names of the various places the children of Israel camped as they made their way from Egypt to the land of Canaan under the leadership of Moses and Aaron were all recorded. ²The Lord had told Moses to record the name of each place where the people camped during their long journey of forty years. ³The children of Israel had left Egypt on the fifteenth day of the first month of the year, which was the day after the Passover. They left in full view of the Egyptians, ⁴who were still burying their firstborn sons who had died. The Lord had done this as a judgment on their gods and as payment for all the Israelite baby boys that Pharaoh had ordered killed.

⁵When the children of Israel left Rameses they first headed southeast to Soccoth, ⁶and from there north and east

to Etham near the edge of the wilderness. ⁷Then they turned north to Pi Hahiroth by the mouth of the Egyptian canal, and from there east again toward the town of Baal Zephon where they set up camp, which was not far from the Egyptian border post of Migdol. ⁸That's where they crossed the Red Sea. Then they headed south through the Wilderness of Etham for three days and set up camp at Marah. ⁹From Marah they went on to Elim and camped there because it had twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, which made it a good place to rest. ¹⁰Then they left Elim and camped near the lower end of the Red Sea.

¹¹Next they went and camped in the Desert of Sin, ¹²then at Dophkah, ¹³after Dophkah, at Alush, ¹⁴and then at Rephidim where they expected to find water but didn't. ¹⁵After Rephidim they continued to camp in the Wilderness of Sinai and on toward Mount Hor. ¹⁶Then they continued and camped at the following places: Kibroth Hattaavah, ¹⁷Hazereth, ¹⁸Rithmah, ¹⁹Rimmon Perez, ²⁰Libnah, ²¹Rissah, ²²Kehelethah, ²³Mount Shepher, ²⁴Haradah, ²⁵Makheleth, ²⁶Tahath, ²⁷Terah, ²⁸Mithkah, ²⁹Hashmonah, ³⁰Moseroth, ³¹Bene Jaakan, ³²Hor Haggidgad, ³³Jotbathah, ³⁴Abroah, ³⁵Ezion Geber, ³⁶Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin ³⁷and finally at Mount Hor on the border of Edom.

³⁸It was here that the Lord asked Aaron to come to the top of Mount Hor where he died. They buried him there on the first day of the fifth month in the fortieth year after the children of Israel had left Egypt. ³⁹He was one hundred and twenty-three years old when he died. ⁴⁰By this time the king of Arad in Canaan had already heard about the Israelites and knew they were coming.

⁴¹From Mount Hor the children of Israel traveled on to Zalmonah, ⁴²then to Punon, ⁴³Obboth, ⁴⁴Iye Abarim, ⁴⁵Dibon Gad, ⁴⁶Almon Diblathaim, ⁴⁷and from there to the Abarim mountain range, which includes Mount Nebo, where Moses later died and was buried. ⁴⁸After

this they went on to camp in the plains of Moab by the Jordan River just across from Jericho. ⁴⁹Their campsites extended from Beth Jeshimoth on the south to Abel Shittim, the Acacia Valley, on the north.

The Conquest of Canaan

⁵⁰It was here on the plains of Moab that the Lord said to Moses, ⁵¹“Tell the children of Israel that when they cross Jordan into Canaan, ⁵²they are to drive out all the people who are living there, because there is plenty of land for those people to live elsewhere. Crush all their idols, destroy their carved images and demolish their places of worship. ⁵³Take possession of the land and settle there because this is the land I promised to give you. ⁵⁴The land should be divided according to families and the locations are to be chosen by drawing lots; only make sure that the larger sections of the country go to the larger tribes and the smaller sections go to the smaller tribes. Other than that, whatever location each family gets by drawing lots will be theirs, depending on their size. ⁵⁵If you don’t drive out the inhabitants of the land and if you allow some of them to live with you, they’ll cause you no end of trouble and will turn you away from me. They’ll be as irritating to you as a splinter in your eye and a thorn in your side. They’ll try to draw you into their way of life and will not hesitate to kill you. ⁵⁶If you don’t drive them out and you end up doing what they do, I will have to do to you the same thing I am going to do to them.”

The Boundaries of Canaan

34 The Lord said to Moses, ²“Tell the children of Israel that the area of Canaan that they will inherit will be defined by these boundaries: ³The southern border will run along the Wilderness of Zin. It will begin with the southernmost tip of the Dead Sea, ⁴run through the Akrabim Pass, also called Scorpion Pass, to Kadesh Barnea, from there to

Hazar Addar, on to Azmon, ⁵touch the border of Egypt and then end at the Sea.

⁶“The western border will be the Mediterranean. ⁷The northern border will go from the Mediterranean to Mount Hor, in Lebanon. ⁸then through the Hamath Pass on to Zedad, ⁹and from there to Ziphron ending at Hazar Enan.

¹⁰“The eastern border will begin at Hazar Enan and extend to the Shepham, ¹¹from there to Riblah, on to the hills on the other side of the Lake of Galilee, then down along the Jordan River ending at the Dead Sea. ¹²These are the four borders of the land that I will give you. This will be your country.”

¹³Moses called the leaders of the children of Israel together, described the boundaries of their land to them, then said, “Go in and take the land and assign a portion of it to each tribe by drawing lots. The Lord has commanded that all of Canaan be given to the nine-and-a-half tribes, ¹⁴because the tribes of Reuben and Gad and one-half of the tribe of Manasseh have already claimed their inheritance. ¹⁵They chose to settle on this side of the Jordan River, across from Jericho.”

Leaders Divide the Land

¹⁶Then the Lord said to Moses, ¹⁷“The men I want to lead out in assigning the land will be Eleazar, the high priest, and Joshua, the son of Nun, ¹⁸together with the following men from the other tribes: ¹⁹Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, from Judah, ²⁰Shemuel, the son of Ammihud, from Simeon, ²¹Elidad, the son of Kislou, from Benjamin, ²²Bukki, the son of Jogli, from Dan, ²³Hanniel, the son of Ephod, from the other half of Manasseh, ²⁴Kemuel, the son of Shiphtan, from Ephraim, ²⁵Elizaphan, the son of Parnach, from Zebulun, ²⁶Paltiel, the son of Azzan, from Issachar, ²⁷Ahivud, the son of Shelomi, from Asher, ²⁸and Pedahel, the son of Ammihud, from Naphtali.” ²⁹These were the men the Lord chose to divide the land among the children of Israel.

Cities for the Levites

35 The Lord spoke to Moses on the plains of Moab by the Jordan River across from Jericho, before the children of Israel crossed over, saying, ²“Tell the people that when they receive their inheritance they are to give some of the cities and pasture lands around them to the Levites because they will receive no other inheritance. ³This way they, too, will have a place to call their own and will have some pasture land for their animals. ⁴The pasture lands are to extend fifteen hundred feet from the city walls. ⁵measure three thousand feet for each side—three thousand feet for the east side, the south side, the west side and the north side, making a huge square with the city in the middle. This will be the Levites’ pasture land. ⁶Six of the cities you give the Levites will be cities of refuge. If a man accidentally kills someone, he can escape to one of them so he won’t be killed by the dead man’s relatives. ⁷These six cities are to be in addition to the forty-two cities the Levites are to have, making a total of forty-eight cities that you are to give them. ⁸The number of cities in each tribal area is to be determined by the size of the population.”

Cities of Refuge

⁹The Lord continued to speak to Moses, ¹⁰“Tell the children of Israel that as soon as they cross over into Canaan and get settled, ¹¹they are to select these cities of refuge and give them to the Levites, so that a man who accidentally kills someone can run to one before an avenger can kill him. ¹²There he’ll be safe from the hostile relatives of the person who was killed, because they’ll try to take the law into their own hands. Anyone accused of murder is not to be executed without a proper public trial. ¹³These six cities are to be scattered throughout the land, ¹⁴with three of them this side of Jordan in the land of Gilead where the tribes of Reuben and

Gad with half the tribe of Manasseh have settled. The other three are to be on the other side of Jordan. ¹⁵They are to be cities of refuge for the children of Israel and for the foreigners living among them so anyone who has accidentally killed someone can have a place to run to for asylum and to feel safe.

¹⁶“If a man in anger hits someone with a weapon or any kind of iron object with the intention of killing him, and that person dies, the man is a murderer. He is to stand trial and then be executed. ¹⁷Or, if anyone picks up a rock and hits another man with intent to kill, and the man dies, he is a murderer and is to stand trial and then be executed. ¹⁸Even if someone hits a person with a piece of wood with the intention of killing him and that person dies, he is still a murderer and is to stand trial and then be executed. ¹⁹The dead person’s nearest relative has the right to locate the murderer and when he finds him he has permission to kill him. There is to be no widespread manhunt by the people, nor is any special police force to be set aside for such a purpose. ²⁰If a man hates someone so much that he kills him by pushing him off some height, throwing something at him ²¹or hitting him with his fist, he, too, is a murderer and is to stand trial and then be executed. If the nearest relative finds who did it, he has permission to kill him. If the killer feels that the whole thing was an accident, he is to run to one of the six cities of refuge for asylum and there he’ll be safe.

²²“If a man unintentionally bumps against another at some height, or does something innocently causing him to fall, ²³or, carelessly drops a brick on someone below and that person dies, but there was no malice or hatred, ²⁴he is to be arrested and taken under escort to a place outside the city of refuge where a fair trial can be held. The judges are to present evidence in favor of his innocence. Then the people are to decide against allowing the dead man’s relatives to seek revenge.

²⁵The people are responsible for protecting the man who kills someone accidentally. They are to see to it that after the trial he is safely returned to the city of refuge, and he is to live there the rest of his life or until the death of the high priest under whose protection he had been placed. ²⁶If the man leaves the city of refuge and goes outside the city limits, ²⁷and the dead man's nearest relative finds him and kills him, the relative is not to be charged with murder. ²⁸The man is to stay in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest when what he did will be expunged from the records. Then he is free to return home.

²⁹"This is to be the law for the children of Israel throughout their generations, no matter where they live in the country. ³⁰Anyone who intentionally kills a person is to stand trial and be executed, but only on the testimony of two or three witnesses, not just the testimony of one witness or the decision of the judge. ³¹You are not to accept payment for the life of a murderer, because he cannot be ransomed no matter what price is offered to have the death sentence waived. ³²You are not to accept a ransom for the release of someone who was careless and accidentally killed someone, then ran to the city of refuge for asylum. You are not to let him go free for any price or any reason while the high priest is still alive. It will be a life for a life. ³³Do not let the people defile the country I have given them by murdering and killing each other. Bloodshed of any kind pollutes the land and it can be purified only as those who kill are brought to trial and executed for what they have done. ³⁴Do not allow murderers to live or those who are careless with other people's lives to go free and roam the country at will. I am the Lord, I am holy and I live in that land with you. Do not defile it with murder."

Female Heirs

36 The leaders of Gilead's family group went to talk to Moses. (Gilead was the son of Makir, who was the son of Manasseh, who was the son of Joseph.) They said to him, ²"When the Lord asked you to divide the land among the families of Israel by drawing lots, the Lord also said to give a portion to our brother Zelophehad's daughters because he had no sons. ³Now suppose they marry men from others tribes. Their land will be taken from us and will go with them to the men from those tribes. ⁴Then during the Year of Jubilee when all properties go back to their original owners, the inheritance of these women will be permanently assigned to the descendants of their husbands. So our inheritance will be taken away from us."

⁵The Lord said to Moses, "The descendants of Joseph are right in having this concern. ⁶Tell them that the daughters of Zelophehad may marry whom they please as long as it is someone from their own tribe. The property of each tribe is to stay within that tribe. That way no woman will be forced to marry someone who pretends to love her so he can get the rights to property belonging to another tribe. ⁷No land is to pass from one tribe to another. Each inheritance is to stay with the family to which it was originally assigned. ⁸Every daughter who inherits land is to marry someone within her tribe so that no inheritance can pass to another tribe by marriage. ⁹Land is not to pass from tribe to tribe. The land assigned to each tribe is to be theirs forever."

¹⁰So Zelophehad's daughters did as the Lord said, ¹¹and Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah all married their cousins. ¹²They married within the tribe of Manasseh, the son of Joseph, and their inheritance stayed within that tribe.

¹³These then are the laws that the Lord gave to Israel through Moses on the plains of Moab west of Jordan, near Jericho.

DEUTERONOMY

Moses' Farewell Address

1 These are the words Moses spoke to the children of Israel shortly before he died while they were on the east side of the Jordan River ready to cross over into Canaan. Their camp was located near Suph, between Paran on one side and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth and Dizahab on the other side. ²It would have taken them only eleven days to go from Sinai to Kadesh Barnea on the road around the southern border of Canaan. ³But now it had been forty years since they had left Egypt, because they had rebelled against the Lord. So on the first day of the eleventh month in the last year of their journey, Moses spoke to them one final time. ⁴This was after he had defeated Sihon, king of the Amorites who had ruled from Heshbon, and Og, the king of Bashan who had ruled from Ashteroth and Edrei. ⁵It was here on the plains of Moab that Moses explained to the children of Israel the laws and teachings of God. He began by recalling their history as follows:

⁶“After camping at the foot of Mount Sinai for almost a year, the Lord our God said to us, ‘You have been at the foot of this mountain long enough. ⁷Break camp and move on. I want you to make your way up into the mountains of the Amorites, then on into the plains and valleys of the surrounding regions. From there I want you to go into the Negeb, up the Jordan Valley, and into the land of the Canaanites. Then, I want you to go all the way to the Mediterranean coast and follow it into Lebanon, as far north as the Euphrates River. ⁸You see, this is the land which I promised to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and to their descendants. So go in and take possession of the land—it’s now yours.’

Leaders Appointed

⁹“At that time I said to you, ‘The responsibility for all of you is too much for

me. I can’t carry it by myself. ¹⁰The Lord God has blessed us so much that it’s as hard to count all of you as it is to count the stars in the sky. ¹¹I pray that the Lord will continue to bless you and increase your descendants a thousandfold just as He has promised. ¹²But as you multiply in numbers, how can I continue to solve your problems and settle your differences all by myself? ¹³Select some men of experience with wisdom and understanding, one from each tribe, and they can help me solve many of your problems and settle your differences.’

¹⁴“You agreed that the proposal I had made was good. ¹⁵So I took the men whom you had chosen from your tribes, wise and reputable men, and appointed them to share in leadership. I put some in charge of thousands, others in charge of hundreds and still others in charge of fifties and tens. They were to serve you as judges, helping me in my work. ¹⁶I told them to listen to your disputes and quarrels and always to judge rightly, whether it had to do with you or with the foreigners who lived among you. ¹⁷These judges were to show no partiality but to judge everyone on the same basis no matter who they were. They were not to let themselves be intimidated by anyone, because they must do what is right. I told them that all judgment belongs to the Lord and that He knows whether they’re doing what’s right or not. I also told them to bring the hard cases to me. ¹⁸It was during that same time that I told you what your responsibilities were.

Israel's Refusal to Enter Canaan

¹⁹“Then we broke camp and set out in the direction the Lord told us to go. We left Mount Sinai, crossed the vast and dangerous desert and headed toward the mountains of the Amorites until we reached Kadesh Barnea. ²⁰It was there that I encouraged you by saying, ‘We have reached the mountains of the

Amorites and are on the borders of the land which the Lord our God has promised to give us. ²¹Let's go in and take the land as the Lord told us to do. Don't be afraid of the inhabitants, and don't let the things you see there discourage you.' ²²You came to me and said, 'Let's first send some men ahead of us to see what's there and bring back a report. Let them find out the best route to take and how fortified the cities are, then we'll be ready to go.' ²³This seemed like a good idea, so I let you choose twelve men, one from each tribe and sent them on their way. ²⁴First, they explored the mountains and then the Valley of Eshcol. ²⁵When they came back, they even brought some fruit with them and told us what a good land it was to which we were going, that it was just as the Lord had said it would be.

²⁶"But you were afraid and didn't think the Lord could give us the land, so you rebelled against Him and refused to trust in what He could do for us. ²⁷You grumbled and said, 'The Lord brought us out here to die! He wants to turn us over to the Amorites to destroy us!' ²⁸Where do we go now? The men who explored the land told us how huge and strong the Amorites were, that their cities were fortified with walls so high they looked as if they were touching the sky, and that the Anakites who lived there were giants! We doubt if we can ever go in and possess the land.' ²⁹I begged you at the time not to be discouraged or terrified by what you had heard, but to obey the Lord and step out in faith. ³⁰I reminded you of what the Lord had done for you in Egypt and in the desert. You had seen how He fought for you there. ³¹I pointed out to you what He had done for you in the wilderness and that He had protected you as a loving father cares for his only son. ³²But in spite of all this, you refused to believe that the Lord would do it, ³³even though you knew He had led you in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night and had showed you the way to go and where to camp.

The Penalty for Rebellion

³⁴"When the Lord saw your lack of faith in Him, He was extremely displeased with you and said, ³⁵'Not a single man from this generation will inhabit the land which I promised to give them, ³⁶except Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua, the son of Nun. They will see it, and I will give them and their descendants the very land which they explored for you.' ³⁷The Lord would not even let me go in and see the land, because I became angry with you later at the waters of Meribah near Kadesh Barnea and took credit for bringing you out of Egypt when actually the Lord had done it all. ³⁸That was when the Lord told me that Joshua, the son of Nun, would take the people into the land of Canaan, because years before he and Caleb believed wholeheartedly that the Lord could do what He had said, and they were ready to go. So Joshua is the one who will lead you into the Promised Land. ³⁹After you had accepted the negative report of the men and rebelled against the Lord, He said, 'As for your little ones, those who today don't know right from wrong, the ones you're so afraid will be taken from you by the inhabitants of the land, they will go in and possess the land that I promised to give you as an inheritance. ⁴⁰But as for you, I want you to turn around and head back into the wilderness along the road by the Red Sea.'

⁴¹"Then you said, 'We have sinned! We were wrong in giving in to our feelings the way we did! We'll now make up for it by doing what the Lord wants us to do. We will go in and fight for the land that He has given us.' And you gathered your weapons together. ⁴²Then the Lord said to me, 'Tell the children of Israel not to react and go up to take the land by force, because I will not go with them, and without me they'll be defeated.' ⁴³I told you all of this, but again, you wouldn't listen. You rebelled against the Lord's discipline, and in self-confidence and pride, you marched up into the mountains to

fight the Amorites. ⁴⁴And the Amorites came out against you like a swarm of bees and you ran. They chased you for miles, all the way from the region of Seir to Hormah, where they slaughtered you. ⁴⁵You came back into camp and wept before the Lord, but He turned a deaf ear to your tale of woe and didn't listen to your prayers of self-pity. ⁴⁶So we camped near Kadesh Barnea for a long time until you were willing to go back into the wilderness as the Lord had asked us to do."

The Desert Years

2"When you were ready to obey the Lord, we turned and went back into the wilderness and took the road going toward the Red Sea which we had crossed the year before when we first came out of Egypt. This is the road the Lord had told us to take, and we skirted the mountains of Edom for many days. ²Then the Lord said to me, ³'You've been skirting the mountains long enough. I want you to turn north. ⁴Tell the children of Israel it's time to head toward Edom. You'll be going through a section of the mountains that belong to the descendants of your relative Esau, the brother of Jacob. The people who live there are afraid of you and are watching your every move, ⁵so be careful not to start anything and end up in a war with them. Their land is not included in the land I promised to give you. I have given this land to Esau and to his descendants. ⁶Whatever food and water you need, you are to buy it from them and pay them in silver.' ⁷That's how the Lord directed us for nearly forty years, and we went wherever He told us to go. And the Lord watched over us and blessed us and gave us everything we needed. ⁸After the descendants of Esau refused to let us go through their country, we left and turned off the Arabah road. This is the road that goes from the twin cities of Elath and Ezion Geber on the Gulf of Aqabah in the south to the Dead Sea in the north.

"So we took the desert road that goes northeast toward Moab. ⁹Then the Lord said to me, 'Don't do anything to stir up the Moabites against you or start a war because I have given their land and cities such as Ar to the descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew, for their possession.' ¹⁰The Emites used to live in the city of Ar and in the surrounding area. They were another race of giants like the Anakites. ¹¹The people also called them Rephaites, which simply means Giants. But the Moabites called them Emites, meaning The Fighting Men. ¹²In those days the Horites (also known as the Hurrians) lived in the mountains around Mount Seir until the descendants of Esau drove them out. That's what the Lord wants us to do with the Canaanites. ¹³The Lord told us to break camp and cross the Zered valley, and after that He would tell us where to go next. So we did. ¹⁴By this time thirty-eight years had gone by since we left Kadesh Barnea (where we had sent out men to explore the land) until we crossed the Zered river valley on the borders of Moab. Nearly forty years had passed since we left Egypt. By then that whole generation of fighting men had died in the wilderness as the Lord had said they would. ¹⁵The Lord had been against them going into Canaan so He waited until they all died.

¹⁶"When the last of them had died, ¹⁷the Lord said to me, ¹⁸'Now it's time for you to cross over into Moab by the border city of Ar. ¹⁹As you go, you'll come to the land of the Ammonites. These also are descendants of Abraham's nephew, Lot, so don't do anything to stir them up against you or start a war. I will not give you their land for I have given it to them as their possession.' ²⁰That territory also once belonged to the Rephaites whom the Ammonites called Zamzummites, meaning The Strong People. ²¹They, too, were a race of giants, tall and strong like the Anakites. The Lord helped the Ammonites to drive them out and settle in the land. ²²The Lord did the same

thing for the descendants of Esau when He helped them drive out the Horites in the hill country of Seir. ²³There was also a change in population along the Mediterranean coast by Gaza where the Avvites once lived. The Caphtorites from the island of Crete came in, drove the inhabitants out and settled there. ²⁴So after we had passed through Moab, the Lord said to me, 'Keep going and cross the Arnon River. I will give you power to defeat Sihon, king of the Amorites living in Heshbon. He will not let you pass peacefully through his land, but I have given this land to you. Go ahead and begin to take it. ²⁵From now on I will make all the nations in the area afraid of you. They will shake with fear when they hear your name.'

King Sihon Defeated

²⁶'So from where we were camped at Kedemoth, I sent a message to Sihon, who lived in Heshbon, offering him peace. ²⁷I said to him, 'Let us pass through your country on our way to Canaan. We will stay on the main road all the way and promise not to get off. ²⁸We'll buy our food and water from you with silver. Just let us pass through your land. We promise to do so peacefully. ²⁹We did not start a war with the descendants of Esau in Edom, nor with the Moabites, the descendants of Lot, who lived in Ar as we approached their territories. We want to cross the Jordan River into the land God has given us.' ³⁰But Sihon sent our messengers back and refused to let us pass. He was just as stubborn as Pharaoh had been years before. The Lord knew that Sihon would harden his heart as Pharaoh had, and that's why He told us not to be afraid. He said that He would be with us and give King Sihon into our hands, which He did. And now Sihon's land is ours. ³¹The Lord encouraged us to do this by saying to me, 'In addition to the land of Canaan, I have given you Sihon's land. It's yours, so go in and take it.' ³²Then Sihon and his army came

out and fought us at the battle of Jahaz.

³³'The Lord kept His promise and delivered Sihon into our hands, and we defeated him, his sons and his whole army. ³⁴We also destroyed all his cities and left no one in them alive, neither men, women, nor children. ³⁵But we did keep the livestock and the other things of value we had taken from the cities. ³⁶We captured all the cities from Aroer on the edge of the Arnon Valley, including the city in the middle of that valley, as far north as Gilead. The Lord was with us, and there were no cities too strong for us. ³⁷We were careful to keep the Lord's command and did not go near the land of the Ammonites, who are descendants of Lot, or along the Jabbok River or any of the mountain cities which the Lord had told us to leave alone.'

King Og Defeated

3'Then we made our way up to Bashan, and King Og came against us with his army near the city of Edrei. ²The Lord said to me, 'Don't be afraid of him because I will give him and his army into your hands, and his land will be yours. Do the same thing to him that you did to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon.' ³So the Lord helped us gain the victory over King Og and his men as He promised. We defeated them and when it was all over, not one of them survived. ⁴We also captured every one of his sixty cities. There was not a city that we did not take from him. The whole area of Argob, which made up the kingdom of Og in Bashan, was now ours. ⁵Every city we took was heavily fortified with high walls and strong gates, though many of the villages were not. ⁶We completely destroyed the cities of Bashan just as we had destroyed the cities of the kingdom of Sihon. We destroyed everyone who lived there, men, women and children. ⁷We did keep the livestock and the valuables for ourselves.

⁸'We took from these two Amorite kings all the land east of the Jordan River from the Arnon River in the south to

Mount Hermon in the north. ⁹Mount Hermon is also called Sirion by the Sidonians and Senir by the Amorites. ¹⁰The territory we took from King Og included all the cities on the plateau, all of Gilead and all the territory as far east as the towns of Salecah and Edrei where we first engaged him in battle. ¹¹King Og was the last king of the great race of men we defeated. He himself was a giant of a man. His bed was made out of iron which is very scarce. It was over thirteen feet long and six feet wide and is still on display in the Ammonite city of Rabbah.

The Land East of the Jordan

¹²“So after we had taken the kingdom of Og east of Jordan, I gave it to the tribes of Reuben and Gad. It included all the territory north of the Arnon River and half of the mountainous country of Gilead and all of the cities and towns in it. ¹³The other half of Gilead and all of Bashan, which was ruled by King Og, I gave to half the tribe of Manasseh. This whole area was once known as the land of giants. ¹⁴Then Jair, the leader of half the tribe of Manasseh, had his people take the territory as far north as the borders of Geshur and Maacah. He named that whole region after himself, calling it Havvoth Jair meaning The Villages of Jair. ¹⁵So that half of Gilead was the inheritance of the descendants of Makir, the firstborn son of Manasseh who was the son of Joseph. ¹⁶I gave all the territory south of there to the Arnon River to the tribes of Reuben and Gad. The middle of the river was their southern border and the middle of the Jabbok River was their northern border, which also served as a border for the Ammonites. ¹⁷The western boundary of the territory for these tribes was the Jordan River, which flows from the Lake of Galilee down to the Dead Sea, with the lower slopes of Mount Pisgah on the east.

¹⁸“At that time I said to these tribes, ‘The Lord our God has given you this land east of Jordan on the condition that

you go with your brothers westward into Canaan and be ready to do battle for the land the Lord promised to give them. ¹⁹You may let your families stay in the cities this side of Jordan and you may leave your flocks and herds here too. ²⁰But you are to stay by your brothers and help them get their inheritance just as they helped you get yours. Only then may you go back to the land the Lord our God has given you.’ ²¹It was then that I said to Joshua, ‘You have been with me from the beginning and you have seen all that the Lord has done for His people and what He has done to Sihon and Og, those two giant kings. The Lord will do the same to any other king who will oppose you. ²²So don’t be afraid to push forward. The Lord our God will be with you.’

Moses Forbidden to Enter Canaan

²³“I also pleaded with the Lord, ²⁴“O Sovereign Lord, I know that you have let me see only the beginning of the great things that you have in mind to do for your people. There is no idol or god that can do the things that you have done. ²⁵Please let me cross Jordan and at least set foot in the land of promise. Let me see that fertile land with my own eyes and look at those beautiful mountains of Lebanon that you told us about.’ ²⁶But the Lord said, ‘That’s enough! I don’t want to hear any more about it. You know how much I would like to answer your prayer. But you took credit to yourself for leading the people out of Egypt and didn’t listen to me. I also told you to speak to the rock but you struck it. As much as I would like to, I cannot let you go in.

²⁷“‘However, I will let you see the land from a distance. Go to the top of Mount Pisgah and take a good look. Look in all directions—west, north, south and east. I will give you special vision so you can feast your eyes on the whole land, but I cannot let you go in. ²⁸After you have looked at it, appoint Joshua to take your place. He will be the one to lead the chil-

dren of Israel into Canaan. Encourage him and give him moral support as he takes on the responsibility of leadership and goes in to possess the land.' ²⁹As you know, we stayed in the valley opposite Beth Peor for some time."

The Importance of Obedience

4 Then Moses said to the people, "Now listen to me before you cross over Jordan. Obey the Lord your God and make Him first in your lives. Follow His instructions so that you may live and occupy the land which He promised to our ancestors, which He's now ready to give you. ²Don't add anything or take anything away from His instructions, but stay with what the law says and obey the commandments as I have given them to you. ³You saw with your own eyes what the Lord did at Baal Peor to those who disobeyed. He destroyed all who took part in Baal worship and participated in the disgusting sexual rituals that go along with it.

⁴But those of you who obeyed and were faithful to the Lord are still alive. ⁵I gave you all the laws that the Lord our God gave to me, and I want you to continue obeying them even after you've settled in the land of Canaan. ⁶If you keep these laws faithfully, soon the neighboring nations will see what these laws can do for people. They'll say to themselves, 'What wisdom and understanding these newcomers have.' Then they'll come to visit your country and you can talk to them about our God. ⁷Tell me, what other people have gods as near to them as our God is to us? Our God hears our prayers and answers them. He is there whenever we call on Him for help, and He answers our prayers in the best way for our own good. ⁸What other nation is governed by such righteous laws and teachings as we have? The Lord is the One who gave these laws to us. He gave them to me to give to you.

⁹"Make sure that you don't forget the things your eyes have seen and your ears have heard. Don't let them slip from

your hearts or you'll lose your love for the Lord and your appreciation for what He has done for you. Teach these things to your children and grandchildren and share your experiences with them so they, too, will love the Lord. ¹⁰Remember the day when you stood before the Lord your God at the foot of Mount Sinai? Remember how He said to me, 'Call the people together because I want them to know what to do when I ask them to obey me. I not only want them to respect me, but I want them to know that I love them and that they can depend on me as long as they live. I want them to teach this to their children and to their children's children.'

¹¹"So tell your children what the Lord said that day as you stood at the foot of Mount Sinai. Tell them how the lower part of the mountain was wrapped in total darkness while the top of it was ablaze with fire. ¹²The Lord Himself spoke to you from the midst of the fire, and even though you couldn't see Him, you could hear Him speaking. ¹³He told you what to do to keep the covenant He made with you. He told you to keep the Ten Commandments He wrote on the two tablets of stone which are now in the Sanctuary. ¹⁴On that mountain the Lord told me to explain to you all His laws and commandments. He wanted me to do this before you went in to possess the land He promised you so you would know what was required of you.

Warning Against Idolatry

¹⁵"Remember how, when the Lord spoke to you that day from the midst of the fire, He didn't let you see Him? ¹⁶He did this for your own good so you wouldn't be tempted to make an idol to look like Him, then turn it into your god. Don't sin by making idols that look human. You are not to make an idol of anyone, male or female, and worship it. ¹⁷Don't make statues of any animals or birds ¹⁸or creatures that creep, slither on the ground, or swim, and turn them into

idols. ¹⁹When you're fascinated by the sun, moon, stars and constellations, don't worship them, because they're only lifeless objects. They can't influence your life, much less determine what happens to you.

²⁰"You are God's people. The Lord brought you out of Egypt and rescued you from the heat of oppression to be a special people for Him, which you are.

²¹He doesn't want you to belong to someone else. That's why He wasn't pleased when I gave you the impression that I was the one who had led you out of Egypt and given you water. That's why He told me that I could not go with you into Canaan. ²²So I will have to die and be buried this side of Jordan. But He will take you into the land just as He promised. ²³So don't forget who your Leader is and the covenant He has made with you. Don't make idols for yourselves of things you see or of things you imagine, not even of the Lord. The Lord Himself has told you not to do that. ²⁴The Lord is not only a God of love but also a consuming fire, and for your sake He tolerates no worship of other gods.

²⁵"After the Lord brings you into the land He promised to give you, and you settle down and have children and grandchildren, don't do evil by making idols for yourselves. If you do, the Lord will be extremely displeased. He will have to discipline you, as He has done before. ²⁶I call on heaven and earth as my witness. If you disobey the Lord, you'll not only lose the land the Lord wants to give you, but your enemies will come and destroy you. ²⁷The Lord will let them capture you and the few of you who survive will be scattered among the nations. ²⁸There you'll be made to serve gods of wood and stone which can't see, hear, smell, eat or talk. ²⁹But even there, if you look to the Lord your God and search for Him with all your heart and soul, you will find Him. ³⁰Even after these dreadful things happen to you, if, in the days that follow, you find the Lord again, then you'll gladly listen to

Him and obey Him. ³¹The Lord your God is a loving and merciful God. He will never abandon you. He will not break the covenant which He made with your ancestors and confirmed by an oath.

³²"Stop and ask yourself: Has anything like this happened before? Study the past, go back before you were born. Go way back to the beginning when God created man. Search from one end of the earth to the other and see if anyone has heard of anything like this, and you'll find that no such thing has ever been heard of. ³³Have any other people heard the voice of God speak to them from the midst of blazing fire and lived to tell about it? ³⁴Have any idols ever gone into the middle of another nation and taken out a people for themselves by plagues, miracles, signs in the sky, awesome deeds of wonder and victories in war as the Lord your God has done for you? ³⁵The Lord did this for your sakes to prove to you that He alone is God and that there are no other gods beside Him.

³⁶"He also spoke to you from the midst of a cloud in the sky, teaching you things for your own good. He spoke to you from the midst of a pillar of fire right here on this earth and let you see His burning presence. ³⁷He did all this because He loved your ancestors and claimed them and their descendants as His own. He brought you out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ³⁸He forced bigger and stronger nations than you out of the land and gave the land to you as an inheritance. It is yours. ³⁹Remember all this and take it to heart. The Lord our God is the God of heaven and earth. Don't ever forget it. There is no other God! ⁴⁰Keep His commandments and laws and all will go well with you and your children after you, and you'll continue to live in this land which the Lord your God is giving you forever."

Cities of Refuge East of the Jordan

⁴¹Then Moses designated three cities of refuge east of Jordan, as the Lord had instructed him. ⁴²These cities were set

aside so that a man who unintentionally killed someone without malice or forethought could escape to them and be safe. That way he wouldn't have to live in fear that the dead man's relatives would pursue and kill him. ⁴³The three cities that Moses set aside were: Bezer on the plateau where the tribe of Reuben settled, Ramoth in Gilead where the tribe of Gad was, and Golan in Bashan where half the tribe of Manasseh decided to live.

God's Law

⁴⁴These are God's instructions which Moses gave the Israelites. ⁴⁵These rules, commands and laws were given to the children of Israel by Moses after they had come out of Egypt ⁴⁶while they were still camped in the valley opposite Beth Peor east of Jordan. This whole area had belonged to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who had his capitol in Heshbon, but he was defeated by Moses and the children of Israel as they came out of Egypt. ⁴⁷Under the leadership of Moses they also had defeated Og, king of Bashan, and took over his land. Both these Amorite kings had ruled the land east of Jordan. ⁴⁸Their territory extended from the city of Aroer on the banks of the Arnon River in the south, all the way to Mount Hermon in the north. ⁴⁹Their western boundary ran from Mount Hermon all along the Jordan River as far south as the upper end of the Dead Sea, near the lower slopes of Mount Pisgah. On the east their territory extended all the way to the Arabian Desert.

The Ten Commandments Repeated

5 Again Moses called the children of Israel together and said to them, "People of Israel, I want you to listen. Listen carefully to the meaning of the laws that the Lord has given us. These are His laws, so you need to learn them and carefully obey them. ²Remember how the Lord spoke to us at Mount Sinai and made a covenant with us? ³It wasn't

with our ancestors that He made a written covenant, but with us and with all who are alive today. ⁴The Lord spoke to you as a people face to face from the midst of the flames of fire. He spoke so clearly that you felt you could almost see Him. ⁵I stood between you and the Lord and told you what He was saying because you were afraid of the fire surrounding Him and stood away from the mountain.

⁶"When the Lord spoke from the top of Mount Sinai, He said, 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt and set you free. If you want to be like me, there are certain behaviors you must observe:

⁷"Do not love any other gods besides me.

⁸"Do not make idols for yourselves or carve images to resemble anything in the heavens, on earth or in the seas. ⁹Don't bow down and worship such carved idols for I will tolerate no rivals. Influences from such worship will extend to the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those who turn away from me, and I will not prevent such consequences. ¹⁰But I will show special kindness to thousands who love me and keep my commandments.

¹¹"Do not use my name irreverently for I will not tolerate such abuse.

¹²"Remember to honor the Sabbath and keep it holy as the Lord your God commanded you, because I, the Lord, have given you this day and have set it aside for you and me. ¹³There are six days for you to do all your work, ¹⁴but the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath and belongs to the Lord your God. On that day you are to do no regular work, you, nor your family, your servants, your animals or the foreigners living among you, because they have the same privileges that you do. ¹⁵Don't forget that you were slaves in a foreign land, but I brought you out of there with my power and strength so you could be free to keep the Sabbath as I, the Lord your God, have commanded you.

¹⁶"Honor your parents. Show respect

to them, and I will bless you with long life, and things will go well for you in the land I have promised to give you.

17“Do not commit murder.

18“Do not commit adultery.

19“Do not steal.

20“Do not lie or make false accusations.

21“Do not desire another man’s wife, his house, his land, his servants, his cattle or anything else that he owns, because all such selfishness is sin.’

22“These are the laws the Lord gave us when He spoke to us out of the midst of the fire and the cloud of deep darkness. After the Lord had spoken these ten laws, He added no more. Then He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.

The People Afraid of God

23“When you heard God’s voice speaking to you from the midst of the fire, your older leaders and heads of tribes came to me and said, 24“‘The Lord our God has shown us His glory and how great He is, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire for ourselves. Now we know that men can hear God’s voice and still live. 25But how can we be sure that the fire will not consume us if God speaks to us another time? 26When has a man heard the voice of the living God speaking to him from the midst of a blazing fire and lived to tell about it? 27We don’t want to take a chance and have the Lord speak to us again. We’re afraid to hear His voice a second time because of what might happen to us. Ask Him not to speak to us again, but to speak to you. You go up and listen to what He has to say, then come back and tell us. We will do whatever the Lord wants us to do.’

28“‘The Lord heard this and when I went up to the top of the mountain He said to me, ‘I have listened to what the leaders and elders of Israel had to say to you, and what they asked you to do is right. 29It’s good that they have respect for me and want me to talk to you instead of to them. If they continue to respect me

and love me with all their hearts and obey my commandments, all will go well with them and their children. 30Go back down and tell the leaders and elders of Israel to return to their tents and be at peace, for I have heard their requests. From now on I will speak to you instead. 31Then I want you to come back up here and I will give you additional instructions. You can teach them to the people so they’ll know what to do when they get to the land I will be giving them.’ 32This is what the Lord told me. So I want you to listen carefully to what I have to say, because I want you to follow the Lord’s commands and do exactly what He says. 33Live the way the Lord has instructed you so that you may live a long life and it may go well with you and your children in the land to which you’re going.”

The Greatest Commandment

6 Moses continued, “These are the laws and decrees that the Lord our God has asked me to teach you so you can understand them and obey Him in the land where you are about to go. 2You are to respect the Lord your God and show it by obeying Him. Then things will go well with you and with your children in the land where you’re going and you’ll enjoy a long, happy life. 3So listen to what I have to say, and do what the Lord has asked you to do. Then all His blessings will be yours, and you will become a mighty nation with fertile fields and rich harvests just as the God of our fathers promised you.

4“Listen to me, Israel! The Lord our God is one God! 5So love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your mind and your strength. 6Remember these commands of the Lord as long as you live. Keep them because you love your God. 7Teach your children to love the Lord by obeying Him. Talk to them about Him whether you’re at home or traveling with them, in the morning and in the evening. 8Do whatever you need to do so as not to forget what the Lord has said, even if you have to write it on the

backs of your hands or on your forehead,⁹ on the doors of your houses or on your fence posts and gates.

Warning Against Disobedience

¹⁰“The Lord will bring you into the land He promised to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and it will be a land of flourishing cities which you didn’t even have to build. ¹¹The houses will be full of good things you did not buy; there will be wells of water that you did not dig and vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant. ¹²So when you have eaten and feel satisfied, don’t forget the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt and slavery. ¹³Never lose your reverence and respect for the Lord. He is your God. Serve only Him. If you ever have to take an oath, take it only in His name. ¹⁴Don’t get caught up in worshiping the gods and things that the people around you worship. ¹⁵The Lord your God is a jealous God; He is jealous for your good. So He will discipline you when necessary. If nothing else works, He will let your enemies conquer you and almost totally destroy you.

¹⁶“Don’t test Him to see how far you can go or what you can get away with. Don’t do as you did at Massah where you doubted His presence when you needed water. ¹⁷Be sure to faithfully obey the commandments of the Lord and pay attention to the instructions He has given you. ¹⁸Do what is right and good in the Lord’s sight and all will go well with you. You will be able to go in and possess the land that the Lord promised you. ¹⁹You’ll defeat your enemies as the Lord has said you would.

²⁰“In the years to come when your children ask you, ‘Why did the Lord give us all these laws?’ ²¹Say to them, ‘We were once slaves in Egypt under the harsh treatment of Pharaoh, but the Lord set us free and brought us out with a demonstration of great power. ²²We saw Him work mighty miracles that terrified Pharaoh and his people until they let

us go. ²³After He freed us and brought us out of Egypt, He gave us the land He had promised our ancestors. ²⁴He also gave us these commandments and laws and asked us to keep them and reverence Him because He doesn’t want us to lose His protection. When you look around you can see how He has prospered us. He has kept His word. ²⁵So the right thing for us to do is to faithfully obey Him and do what He asks us to do. He loves us and wants our nation to prosper. That’s why He has given us these laws.’”

A Chosen People

7“The Lord your God will bring you into the land just as He has promised. He will help you drive out the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—seven nations much bigger and stronger than you. ²So when the Lord delivers these people into your hands and you have defeated them, you are not to allow any of them to live. Make no peace treaties with them, but utterly destroy them, showing no mercy. ³You are not to marry any of them nor are you to give your daughters in marriage to their sons or to agree to have their daughters marry your sons. ⁴If you do this, their influence will turn your young people away from the Lord to follow other gods, and the Lord will be greatly displeased and will have to destroy you. ⁵You are to tear down their altars, break up their sacred stone pillars, cut to pieces the wooden images of the goddess Asherah and burn these idols in the fire.

⁶“You are a people set apart, and the Lord your God wants you to be holy and pure. He has chosen you out of all the people in the whole world to be His special people, to be a witness of His greatness and love. ⁷The Lord did not love you or choose you because you were so numerous, for you were comparatively few in number. ⁸But He loved you and chose you as His own because of the covenant He made with Abraham. That’s

why He stepped in and brought you out of slavery and delivered you by His great power from the hand of Pharaoh. ⁹This is what makes Him our God, because of what He has done for us. He keeps His word and holds to what He has said. He's loyal to His covenant promise through endless generations of those who love Him and blesses those who keep His commandments. ¹⁰But He will discipline those who merely say they love Him, but turn from Him and do wickedly. He will confront them with their duplicity and repay them accordingly. ¹¹Listen to Him, because He loves you. Do what He has asked you to do. It's your happiness that He's interested in.

Blessings of Obedience

¹²“So if you pay attention to His laws and keep His commandments and obey Him, then He'll keep His word and shower you with His love as He has promised. ¹³He will love you and bless you as a nation, and you will continue to prosper and grow. He will bless all your crops, your grain, grapes and oil; He will bless your herds of cattle, your flocks of sheep and your other animals just as He promised your forefathers He would do. ¹⁴There will be no other people in the whole world as blessed as you. Not one of your women will be childless, and not one animal from your herds and flocks will be without offspring. ¹⁵You will be healthy because the Lord will protect you from those dreadful diseases that you had when you were in Egypt, but He will not take them away from those who hate you. ¹⁶You will drive out every nation that the Lord gives into your hands. Don't be swayed with pity and let them stay and live with you, because they will seduce you into worshipping their gods as they did when we were on the borders of Moab.

¹⁷“Don't tell yourselves, ‘These nations are much stronger than we are. We can never hope to drive them out of the land.’ ¹⁸Remember what the Lord did to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. There is no

need for you to be afraid. ¹⁹You know what the Lord did for you. You saw it with your own eyes. You saw the miracles and other wonders He did to bring you out of Egypt. He will do great things for you again. So there's no need for you to be afraid. ²⁰The Lord will send hornets ahead of you to drive out every man, woman and child, even if they hide in places where they think you won't find them. ²¹So don't be afraid. The Lord your God is a great and awesome God.

²²“Little by little He will drive out the nations that now occupy the land. He will not drive them out all at once, but only as you grow and are ready to take over. Otherwise, wild animals will come and take over those sections of the country that have been left vacant. ²³So the Lord will drive these nations out before you rather slowly, but He will do so through you until all are gone. ²⁴He will give all these kings into your hands, and if they refuse to leave, and they fight against you, you are to make war with them and wipe out their names from under heaven. They will not be able to stand up against you, and you will be victorious over them and destroy them.

²⁵“You are to crush their idols and burn them. Don't take any of the silver or gold from these idols because it will remind you of them and be a snare to you, turning you from the Lord your God. ²⁶Don't bring any of these idols into your homes as war trophies or souvenirs, no matter how small they are, for they will be a curse to you just as they were to the Canaanites. You are to hate anything that has to do with idolatry, because it will take you away from the Lord. Such things are to be totally destroyed.”

Don't Forget the Lord Your God

8 “Be sure to keep all the laws and commandments I have given you so that you may enter the land of promise and live there in peace, as you prosper and multiply. ²Remember what the Lord has done for you these past forty years. He

was with you in the wilderness and humbled and tested you so that you would know what was in your own heart, whether you really loved Him or not. ³He humbled you by letting you get hungry, then He fed you with manna, which no one had ever heard of, to teach you that man is not sustained by bread alone but by feeding on the word that comes from God. ⁴He also blessed you in other ways. During all those years your clothes didn't wear out, and your feet didn't swell from all the walking you had to do. ⁵I want you to know that the Lord disciplined you just as a loving father disciplines his son. ⁶So keep the commandments and laws of the Lord, walk in His ways and give Him the respect that is due Him.

⁷"The Lord your God is taking you into a good land, a land with streams and lakes, with mountain springs that send their gushing waters down into the valley; ⁸a land full of wheat and barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; ⁹a land with enough bread to satisfy all your needs, and a land with iron in its rocks and copper in its hills. ¹⁰When you have settled in the land and have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord God for what He has done for you and thank Him for the good land He has given you.

¹¹"But be careful not to forget the Lord your God. Show Him that you love Him by keeping His commandments and His laws that I have passed on to you. ¹²Once you have settled down and built yourselves fine houses and have all you want to eat; ¹³after your herds and flocks have grown, your silver and gold has multiplied and you are rich and increased with goods, it will be easy to forget the Lord your God. ¹⁴You'll begin to focus on yourselves and will slowly slip into forgetting what the Lord has done for you and how He brought you out of slavery from the land of Egypt. ¹⁵He led you through the harsh wilderness, gave you water out of solid rock and protected you and your children from wild animals, snakes and scor-

pions. ¹⁶He fed you with bread from heaven for many years, which was something even your forefathers had never heard of. He humbled and tested you so you would know what was in your own hearts—all for your own good.

¹⁷"You'll be tempted to forget all this and think it was what you did that brought you all this wealth and success. ¹⁸But don't forget it is the Lord your God who gives you energy and ability to get wealth and to be successful. He does this because He loves you and because of the covenant He made with your fathers. ¹⁹If you forget what the Lord your God did for you and begin to worship other gods or your own abilities, the Lord God of heaven will discipline you, even if He has to allow your nation to be destroyed. ²⁰He has done this to other nations before you came on the scene of action, and He will do it to you if you don't listen to what He has said."

Israel's Rebellions Reviewed

9"Israel, listen to me! You're about to cross the Jordan River to go in and possess the land the Lord promised to give you. It's a land occupied by nations much bigger and more powerful than you, and they have large fortified cities surrounded by walls so high that when you stand at the bottom and look up, it seems as if they're touching the sky. ²The people who live there are tall and strong, and some of them are the descendants of Anak, the father of giants. You've heard the saying, 'Who can stand against the Anakites?' ³But the Lord your God will go ahead of you like a raging fire. You will see with your own eyes what a mighty God your God is. He will subdue the people before you so you'll be able to force them out and, if they fight you, destroy them, just as the Lord tells you to do.

⁴"After it's all over, don't say to yourselves, 'The Lord brought us here and helped us to defeat these people because we're a good people and deserved all these blessings.' No! It's because these

people are so wicked and beyond help that the Lord will drive them out and destroy them. ⁵It's not because you're so righteous that the Lord will go before you and drive out the people living there, but because of the awful wickedness of the people now living there that He will drive them out. This is the land that He promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

⁶“So let it be clear in your own mind that it is not because you're righteous or deserve this land that the Lord is giving it to you. You're a very strong-willed people, and you can be very stubborn. ⁷Just think back and you'll remember how you gave the Lord a hard time from the day you left Egypt even until now. ⁸At Sinai you worshipped the golden calf and turned against the Lord with such anger that He would have been justified in destroying you. ⁹When the Lord asked me to come up to the top of the mountain to get the two tablets of stone on which He had written the Ten Commandments, I was up there forty days and forty nights. He wanted these commandments to be the basis of the covenant that He had just made with you. While I was there, the Lord kept me alive because I had nothing to eat or drink. ¹⁰Then the Lord handed me the two tablets of stone on which He had written His law, burning the words into the stone with his own finger. These were the same commandments that you heard Him speak from the top of the mountain when it was on fire and you were so afraid. ¹¹At the end of the forty days He handed me the two tablets of stone and told me that they were the basis of the covenant He had just made with you. ¹²He said to me, ‘You had better go back down the mountain because the people you led out of Egypt have gone mad. They've made themselves a golden calf to represent me and are going through the same filthy sexual rituals the pagans do when they worship their gods.’

¹³“He also said, ‘These people are extremely strong-willed and stubborn. ¹⁴So leave me alone and don't try to stop me.

I'm going to destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven and no one will remember that there ever were such people. Then I'll make you the father of a new nation, one much bigger and stronger than they would ever be.’

¹⁵“So I went down the mountain while the top of it was still on fire, and I had in my hand the two tablets of stone that the Lord had given me. ¹⁶When I looked at the camp, I couldn't believe what I saw. You had turned away from the Lord your God and had made for yourselves an idol in the shape of a young bull. This was one of the things the Lord had just told us not to do. ¹⁷I was so angry with what you had done that I threw down the tablets of stone so hard that they broke into pieces. This should have made you realize that you had already broken the covenant which the Lord had made with you only days before and which you had agreed to keep. ¹⁸Then once more I went up the mountain, and there I pleaded with the Lord for you. I prayed for another forty days and nights without anything to eat or drink, asking the Lord to forgive you for all you had done to hurt Him, and for worshiping that golden calf. ¹⁹I was fearful for you because you were so determined to do your own thing that even the Lord decided you were beyond help, and He was ready to destroy you. ²⁰The Lord was very angry with Aaron and was ready to destroy him, so I prayed for him too. ²¹Before I went back up the mountain, remember how I took that golden idol, ordered you to melt it down and grind it into powder, which I threw into the mountain stream and made you drink from it?

²²“Later you rebelled against the Lord at Taberah, Massah and Kibroth Hattaavah. ²³And at Kadesh Barnea when the Lord told you to go in and take possession of the land that He had promised to give you, you rebelled again. You didn't trust Him, so you didn't obey Him. ²⁴You have been a stubborn and rebellious people ever since I have known you.

²⁵“But when I was up on the mountain for the second forty days and nights I prayed for you that the Lord would not destroy you. ²⁶I prayed and said, ‘Lord, please don’t destroy your people, even though they deserve it. They’re your own inheritance. You redeemed them from Egypt and brought them out of slavery with a great show of power for everyone to see. ²⁷Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the ancestors of these people, and how much those men loved you and trusted you. Don’t look at the rebellious nature of these people and what they’ve just done. ²⁸If you should destroy them, the Egyptians will say that you couldn’t take care of them, that you really didn’t love them but hated them and brought them out here in the wilderness to kill them. ²⁹Besides, they are your own people. You made them your own by bringing them out of Egypt with such a show of power that no one doubts that they’re yours!’”

The Second Pair of Stone Tablets

10“The Lord said to me, ‘Go back down the mountain and chisel out two tablets of stone like the first ones. Also make a wooden chest to put them in. ²Then come back up and I will write on your tablets the same words I wrote on the tablets of stone I gave you before. The tablets can then be kept in the chest.’ ³So I went down the mountain and chiseled out two tablets of stone like the ones the Lord had given me and made a chest from acacia wood and went back up the mountain. ⁴Then the Lord wrote the same words on this set that He had written on the first set, the same Ten Commandments that He spoke to you from the midst of the flames on top of the mountain while you stood below and listened. ⁵So the Lord gave me back the two tablets of stone that I had chiseled out for Him, and I came down the mountain. After we built the Sanctuary, I put them in the Ark of the Covenant as He told me to, and they’ve been there ever since.

⁶“From Sinai we traveled on and eventually reached the place called the Wells of Bene Jaakan. Then we went on to Moserah. It was there that Aaron died and was buried, and Eleazar his son took his place as priest. ⁷From there we went on to Gudgodah and Jotbathah, places flowing with streams of water. ⁸At Sinai the Lord set aside the Levites to be in charge of the Sanctuary. They were the only ones allowed to carry the Ark of the Covenant, to minister before the Lord with the priests and to pronounce blessings in the Lord’s name. ⁹That’s why the tribe of Levi didn’t receive a promise of land as the other tribes did. Their inheritance is the privilege of serving the Lord.

¹⁰“As I said before, at Sinai I stayed on the mountain for forty days and forty nights a second time. That’s when the Lord answered my prayer and didn’t destroy you, because in His heart He really wanted to bless you. ¹¹So He told me to go back down the mountain and lead you to the Promised Land as He would direct. Again He promised that the land would be ours just as He had told our forefathers.

The Heart of the Law

¹²“Now listen! What does the Lord ask of you? All He asks is that you respect Him, love Him and serve Him with all your heart, soul and mind. ¹³He wants you to obey Him and to keep His commandments and laws that I have given to you for your own good. ¹⁴All things belong to the Lord from the heavens above to the earth beneath, including everything on it. ¹⁵He is such a powerful God and yet He set His great heart of love on your ancestors and chose you above all other people in the world to be His own. That’s how it is today. ¹⁶So circumcise your hearts and minds by being a humble and grateful people, and stop being so strong-willed and stubborn.

¹⁷“The Lord your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords. He’s the only true God, the great and mighty King who shows no partiality and will never be

brided by anyone. ¹⁸He is on the side of the widows and orphans, and longs to have foreigners come and live with His people. He provides them with food and clothing and wants to use you as instruments of kindness to help them. ¹⁹He wants you to love and accept the foreigners who come to live among you as if they were your own people. You were once foreigners yourselves and know what it's like not to be accepted. ²⁰So love the Lord your God and serve Him with your whole heart and soul and mind. Be loyal to Him and keep the promises you make to Him just as He keeps the promises He makes to you. ²¹He should be your joy and praise. You saw what great things He did for you when, as little children, you came with your parents out of Egypt. Your God is the One who did all this. ²²Years ago, when your ancestors went down to Egypt to escape the famine in the land there were only seventy of them, but look at you now. The Lord God has blessed you and there are so many that you look as numerous as the stars in the sky."

Obedience Rewarded

11 "So love the Lord your God, keep His commandments and His laws, and always listen to what He says. ²Don't forget the experiences you've had with the Lord and what you've learned about Him and about yourselves. You—not your little ones—saw the majesty and power of the Lord and the great things He has done, so you need to listen to what I'm trying to tell you. ³You saw what the Lord did to Pharaoh and to the land of Egypt. ⁴You saw what he did to the Egyptians, to their horses and chariots—how they got stuck in the Red Sea and drowned when they came after you to take you back to Egypt. ⁵You're the ones who saw all these things, not your children. You saw what the Lord did for you in the wilderness all along the way to this very day. ⁶You saw what He did to Korah from the tribe of Levi and to Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab from the tribe of

Reuben, when in the sight of all the people the earth suddenly opened and swallowed them up. ⁷You saw all these things with your own eyes.

⁸"So listen to me and do what I'm telling you so you'll be able to cross Jordan and go in and take the land the Lord has promised to give you. ⁹Only then will you live a long and happy life and be able to enjoy this good land the Lord promised your ancestors. It's a rich and fertile land, and it will be yours forever. ¹⁰This land is not like the land of Egypt where you planted the seed, then had to irrigate whole fields by hand as you would a vegetable garden. ¹¹But the land that you're going to is a land of mountains and valleys, richly watered by streams and rain. ¹²It's a land that the Lord of heaven waters and cares for. His eyes are on it the year around.

¹³"Be grateful and love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind. Serve Him faithfully and do the things He's asking you to do. ¹⁴Then the Lord will continue to water your fields for you and send His rain in the fall when you plant and in the spring when you look for the grain to ripen. Your olive trees and grape vines will flourish. ¹⁵There will be plenty of grass for your cattle and sheep. You'll have all the food you want and more. ¹⁶So when you're settled and satisfied, you need to be careful not to be enticed to worship other gods, especially the pleasure gods of your neighbors. ¹⁷If you do, the Lord will have to discipline you. He will close up the heavens so it won't rain, and your seeds will not sprout, your crops will not grow and even this precious land will dry up. Then you and your little ones will suffer and die in the very land that the Lord has given you.

¹⁸"So fix in your minds and in your hearts these things that I'm telling. If you have to, write them on the backs of your hands or on your foreheads so you won't forget what I've said. ¹⁹Pass these things on to your children and teach them what

they all mean. Tell them why these things are important. Don't take for granted that they'll pick up the reason for all this. Every chance you have to help them understand, whether it's at home, along the road, when they get up or before they go to bed, take advantage of it. ²⁰If you have to, write them down and nail them on the doors of your houses and on the gate posts of your yards so you won't forget what I've told you.

²¹"If you stay close to the Lord and obey Him, you'll live a long and happy life and so will your children. You'll live in this good land as long as there's a heaven above the earth. ²²If you put the Lord first in all you do, keep His commandments, walk in His ways and love Him with all your heart, ²³then He'll drive out all the people who now live in this land, people much bigger and stronger than you are. ²⁴The whole land will be yours, from the wilderness in the south to the mountains of Lebanon in the north, from the Euphrates in the east to the Mediterranean in the west. ²⁵The Lord will put fear of you in the hearts of all your enemies, and no nation will be able to stand up against you.

²⁶"I'm telling you all this to give you a choice—you can choose to reap a blessing or a curse. ²⁷If you love the Lord your God and obey Him, He will bless you. ²⁸If you ignore the Lord and disobey Him, going your own way and doing your own thing, not walking in His way, but worshiping other gods, He'll withhold His blessings and your land will become as one that is cursed. ²⁹One of the first things I want you to do when you enter the land is to recite from Mount Gerizim the blessings that will be yours for obedience, and from Mount Ebal the consequences that will be a curse to you for disobedience. ³⁰These two mountains are on the other side of Jordan in the land of the Canaanites. A short distance to the west are the giant oaks. ³¹Soon you'll cross Jordan and take possession of the land the Lord promised to give you.

When you take it over and settle there, ³²be sure not to forget what I've just told you and the laws that I've given you."

The One Place of Worship

12 "Listen! I want to make some things a bit clearer so you'll understand God's laws and requirements, which you are to follow even after you enter the land the Lord is about to give you. ²You must completely destroy all places where these people worship and serve their gods, whether on the hill-sides, high on the mountains or in groves of trees. ³Destroy their altars and their stone idols and burn the statues of Asherah, their mother goddess, in the fire. Chop down all the wooden poles that they've turned into idols and throw them into the fire so the land will be cleansed and these filthy places of worship will be gone forever. ⁴Never worship the Lord your God in the same way these people worship their idol gods. That's an abomination!

⁵"The Lord will decide the place where He is to be worshiped and where He will put His name. Go there to worship Him. ⁶That's where you will bring your tithes, your various offerings, and the firstborn from your flocks and herds. ⁷That's the place to worship and praise the Lord for all that He has done for you. There you are to sit down in the presence of the Lord and eat and be happy over what you were able to accomplish under His blessings. ⁸You are not to think that you can decide to worship the Lord wherever you choose just because you wandered from place to place in the wilderness. You did the best you could then. ⁹You have not yet settled in the land the Lord promised to give you.

¹⁰"But once you cross Jordan and settle in the land the Lord has chosen to give you as your inheritance and begin to live there in peace under the protection of the Lord your God, ¹¹then He will choose a place where He is to be worshiped. That's the place where you are to

bring your burnt offerings, your tithes, your sacrifices, your gifts and all the things you promised to give Him.

¹²That's where you are to come to worship Him and to rejoice in His presence. That includes you, your sons and daughters, the men and women who work for you and the Levites living in your home towns who have no land of their own. ¹³Don't sacrifice your burnt offerings at any place of worship you happen to see, or as you please, ¹⁴but offer them only at the place that the Lord has chosen. That's where you are to bring your offerings and carry out all the sacred rituals I have told you about.

¹⁵At home, you may kill any animal from your herds and flocks and eat its meat, whether you are ritually clean or not, just as you're allowed to eat a wild deer or gazelle. ¹⁶But do not eat the meat while it's still red with blood, and don't drink blood or eat it baked as a pudding as some do. You are to drain all the blood out on the ground and cook the meat well. ¹⁷You are not to use the tithe of grapes and grain or have a festival to the Lord in your home towns, nor are you to slaughter the firstborn of your herds and flocks for such a festival, or use any other offerings that are set aside for the Lord in any place and for whatever occasion you choose. ¹⁸You are to come to the place of worship that the Lord will pick out for you. That's where you, your sons and daughters, the men and women who work for you and the Levites from your cities are to come and hold the Lord's festivals and rejoice together in all that He has done for you. ¹⁹As long as you live, do not neglect the Levites who live among you.

²⁰So when the Lord brings you into the land and increases your territory, you can eat all the meat you want and you can eat it where you please, all except the Lord's offerings. ²¹Now what happens when you live too far from the place where the Lord chooses for you to come? Only then can you keep the Lord's

festivals in your home towns. Take animals from your herds or sheep from your flocks, slaughter them there, and eat as much as you want, praising the Lord for what He has done for you. ²²You can eat these animals just as you would eat a wild deer or gazelle, except for those animals that belong to the Lord. Both the people who are ritually clean and unclean may eat this meat.

²³Just don't eat the meat while it's still red with blood, because blood is a symbol of life and shed blood means death. ²⁴So drain out all of the blood and pour it on the ground. ²⁵Do not eat it. If you're careful and follow these directions, it will go well with you, your children and your grandchildren because you will be doing what the Lord has asked you to do. ²⁶But when you can, bring the animals you decide to offer to the Lord as a required sacrifice to the place of worship the Lord has chosen, including any extra sacrifices you promised to give Him. ²⁷There at the Lord's place of worship, have the priest burn your sacrifices on the altar, both the meat and the blood, but the meat from your other sacrifices whose blood the priest will pour out beside the altar will be yours. ²⁸Follow the instructions that I've given you and all will go well with you, your children and your grandchildren, because in the eyes of the Lord you'll be doing what you know is right.

Warning Against False Gods

²⁹As you cross Jordan and enter the land the Lord promised to give you, He will drive out the nations ahead of you. Then you can settle down and make the land your own. ³⁰After you're settled, be sure that you don't start asking about the local gods who supposedly made these nations great, or you'll end up worshipping them. ³¹You are not to worship the Lord your God in the same way that these nations worship their gods, because their way of worship is disgusting and wicked. They not only do strange

things, but even sacrifice their newborn sons and daughters to their idols. This is satanic and not from the God of Israel.

³²“So be careful to do what I have asked you to do. Don’t add to what I have said or take anything away from it.”

False Prophets and False Worship

13 “Now let me warn you about idol worship. If someone claims to be a prophet of the Lord and tells you that the Lord has spoken to him in a vision or dream, then performs a miracle to confirm his message, ²and he makes a prediction which comes true, but he also tells you to include other gods in your worship, ³you are not to listen to him. The Lord your God has let this happen to test your loyalty and obedience and will let you see for yourselves whether or not you love Him as much as you say you do. ⁴Be loyal to the Lord your God and stay with Him. Don’t share your love for Him with any other god, or for that matter, with anything else. Our God is the only One to hold to. Listen to Him, follow Him, serve Him and keep His commandments. Don’t listen to anyone else. ⁵And that self-appointed prophet who claims to have visions and dreams from the Lord is to be put to death because he will be a thorn in your side the rest of his days. He will turn you against the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt and out of slavery. You are to put him to death to rid yourselves of his influence.

⁶“Even if your own brother, your son or daughter, the wife you love or your close friend secretly encourages you to worship other gods, whether its a god you’ve heard of or a new, strange god, ⁷and your family members want you to join them in worshipping gods that the nations around you are worshipping, ⁸don’t give in to them or listen to them. Don’t be tempted to cover up what they’re doing. ⁹Those who entice you are to be put to death for the same reason a false prophet is to be put to death, so their influence will not spread through your

ranks like a plague. The witnesses against him are to lead out in the act of stoning, followed by the people. ¹⁰False prophets like this are to be put to death by stoning because they turn your hearts away from the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt and set you free. ¹¹When you do this, people throughout your country will hear about it and it will keep others from getting the idea to include false gods in their worship. After that, no one will suggest that again.

¹²“If you hear about a city within your own borders ¹³where evil men have moved in and taught the people to worship strange gods, ¹⁴you are not to go on a rumor, but thoroughly investigate it. If it’s true and it has been proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that the town is full of such wickedness, ¹⁵then you are to take your swords, go to that town and put to death all those who live there, including their herds and flocks, so that nothing will be left to remind you of their worship. ¹⁶Take everything these people had, bring it to the city square, pile it up, set it on fire and burn it up as you would a whole burnt offering. Then set the city itself on fire. It is never to be rebuilt, and its ruins are to serve as a perpetual reminder of what has happened. ¹⁷You are not to take one thing out of that city, not even a gift for your family or a souvenir for yourselves. If you obey the Lord in this, He will continue to bless you and be merciful to you. He will make you into a great nation just as He promised your ancestors He would. ¹⁸If you love Him and keep His commandments and laws as I’ve given them to you and do what is right, He’ll continue to bless you.”

Mourning

14 “Remember that you are the children of God. So don’t show grief over the loss of one of your loved ones as the nations around you do by cutting your bodies or by shaving the sides of your heads. ²You belong to the Lord and are set apart to be His very own. Out of

all the people of the world, He has chosen you to be His treasured possession.

Clean and Unclean Meat

³“Don’t eat any detestable things. ⁴You may eat the meat of cattle, sheep, goats, ⁵deer, gazelle, antelope and mountain goats, just to name a few. ⁶You may eat the meat of any animal that has a divided hoof and chews the cud. ⁷But don’t eat the meat of those animals whose hooves are not divided and who don’t chew the cud, such as the camel, the rabbit or the rock badger. ⁸This includes pigs. They, too, are unclean to you because even though they have split hooves, they don’t chew the cud. So you are not to eat their meat, nor are you to touch their dead bodies. They are unclean to you.

⁹“You may eat all kinds of fish as long as they have fins and scales. ¹⁰They must have both fins and scales. If they don’t, you are not to eat them.

¹¹“You may eat any kind of fowl as long as it is clean. ¹²Some of those you are not to eat are: eagles, vultures, ¹³falcons, buzzards, ¹⁴crows, ravens, ¹⁵hawks, sea gulls, ¹⁶owls, ostriches, ¹⁷pelicans, ospreys, ¹⁸storks, herons and bats. ¹⁹All flying insects that swarm are unclean to you. Don’t eat them. ²⁰The flying creatures that are clean, you may eat. I listed them for you before.

²¹“Don’t eat the meat of animals that die a natural death, because you don’t know what was wrong with them or why they died. The foreigners who live among you might eat such meat, but you can’t. If one of your cattle or an animal from your flock dies, and the foreigners who live among you want to buy it, you may sell it to them. But you belong to the Lord and are not to eat the meat of any animal that dies a natural death. You are not to kill a young sheep or goat for food, then cook its meat in its own mother’s milk. It’s a demonic ritual, so you are not to do it.

Tithing

²²“Remember that in addition to the Lord’s tithe you are to set aside for yourselves a tenth of all that your fields produce. This second tithe is to be used for the cost of your attendance and religious activities at the festivals of the Lord. ²³When the time comes for these festivals, go to the place of worship that the Lord has chosen for Himself and praise Him for what He has done for you. Be happy in His presence as you eat from your tenth of the grain, grapes, olives and meat of the firstborn animals from your flocks and herds. If you do this, you will learn to love and respect the Lord your God and appreciate what He has done for you.

²⁴“If you live too far from the place of worship that the Lord has chosen for Himself, and you can’t take along a second tithe of all the animals and goods the Lord has blessed you with, ²⁵then sell them, take the money and go to the place of worship the Lord has chosen for Himself. ²⁶When you get there, buy what you want to eat and drink, whether it’s beef, lamb, sweet wine, or anything else that the Lord approves. Take your family and sit down with them to eat and drink with your heart full of gratitude for what the Lord has done for you. Enjoy yourselves and fellowship with your brothers and sisters from other parts of the country and be happy in the presence of the Lord your God. ²⁷Don’t forget that the Levites who live in your cities didn’t get an inheritance like you did.

²⁸“Every third year take a third tithe and set it aside for those in need. Store this tithe in your cities and towns to feed the poor and those who have no land. ²⁹This way the Levites, who were given no inheritance, and the aliens, orphans and widows who live in your cities and towns can come with you and also have a sacred feast and rejoice before the Lord. If you do this, the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do.”

Debts Canceled

15 “The seventh year there will be no harvesting, because the land must also keep a Sabbath. This will be the year when you are to cancel all the debts of those who owe you something, whether it’s money or anything else. ²Everyone who has loaned money to a fellow Israelite is to cancel the debt owed him. He is not to force his fellow Israelite to pay because this is the year that the Lord has chosen to cancel what His people owe. ³You can demand payment from foreigners, but you are not to demand payment from your brother. ⁴There is no need for anyone to stay poor. The Lord has blessed you and brought you into a rich land and given each of you an inheritance that is yours forever. ⁵Everything will go well with you as long as you obey the Lord your God and keep His commandments and laws as I have given them to you. ⁶The Lord will not only bless each of you individually, but He will bless you as a nation. You will lend money to other nations but will not have to borrow from them. This way you’ll be able to have a good influence on other nations, but none of them will rule over you or control your economy.

Generosity

⁷“If there is a poor Israelite living in your home town, no matter what tribe he’s from, if he comes to you for help, don’t be so self-centered as to refuse to help him. ⁸Open your hand wide and be generous and lend him whatever he needs to get on his feet. ⁹Don’t tell yourself that it’s too close to the seventh year to loan him money because that’s when all his debts will be canceled, and refuse to help him. Such selfish thinking is evil in the sight of the Lord. When that man prays to the Lord and asks for help, the Lord will hear him and will hold you responsible for not helping your fellow Israelite. ¹⁰So lend the man what he needs, and do so willingly and gener-

ously, not grudgingly. Then the Lord will bless you in everything you do. ¹¹However, there will always be some in the country who are poor. Unexpected things happen, so be kind and help them just as you would want them to help you if things went badly for you.

Bond Servants

¹²“If a fellow Israelite, whether a man or a woman, offers to sell himself to you as a slave, and you buy him, if he faithfully serves you for six years, the seventh year you are to let him go free. ¹³When you let him go, don’t send him away empty-handed. ¹⁴Give him generously from your grain, your grapes and your flocks and herds that the Lord has given to you. ¹⁵Never forget that you were once slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God set you free and took care of your needs. So you are to be as generous to your fellow Israelites as the Lord was to you. ¹⁶If your Israelite slave says to you, ‘I like working for you and want to stay,’ and he says so because he loves you and your family and is happy, then keep him. ¹⁷Stand him by the doorpost of your house, hold his ear against the post and pierce his ear lobe. He now belongs to you and your family for the rest of his life. This is to be the same for both men and women. ¹⁸Now don’t feel bad about having to let a slave go free at the beginning of the seventh year if he chooses to do so, because he has served you faithfully for six years at much less than it would have cost you to hire someone else to do the work. Be kind and generous with him as you let him go and the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do.

Firstborn Animals

¹⁹“Set aside every firstborn male from your herds and flocks for the Lord. Don’t use such firstborn of your oxen for work and don’t shear the firstborn of your sheep. ²⁰You and your family are to eat their meat as a sacred meal before the

Lord. You are to do this at the place the Lord has chosen. ²¹The animals that you bring are to be without defects. They are not to be lame, blind or have any other physical deformities. ²²If the place of worship is too far from you, you may slaughter the animals at home and invite the Levites, the aliens, the orphans and the widows to eat the sacred meal with you. You may slaughter and eat the meat of these animals, whether you've been ritually purified by a priest or not, just as you would eat the meat of a deer or a gazelle you had killed. ²³But you are not to eat meat with blood in it. You are to drain the blood out on the ground."

The Passover

16 "You are to keep the Passover of the Lord in the month of Abib, the first month of your religious year, because it was in that month that the Lord brought you out of the land of Egypt at night. ²That is the month in which you are to observe the Passover and go to the place that the Lord your God has chosen and there let the priest sacrifice the animal that you have brought. ³Do not eat bread made with yeast at the Passover meal or during the Festival of Unleavened Bread that is to follow. You are to do this as long as you live to remind yourselves that when you left Egypt you left in a hurry and had to have bread that wouldn't spoil. ⁴During the seven days there is to be no leavened bread anywhere in all the land. The Passover lamb is to be killed and eaten that first night. Any meat left over is to be destroyed; it is not to be kept until the next morning.

⁵"You are not to sacrifice the Passover lamb in any of your cities or anywhere else in the land. ⁶You are to offer it only in the place where the Lord will choose to be worshiped and do it at sunset, which is the time you left Egypt. ⁷Roast the lamb and eat the Passover meal only in the place the Lord your God will choose. The next morning you are to re-

turn to your homes. ⁸For the next six days you are to eat only unleavened bread. On the seventh day you are to come together to worship the Lord your God. You are to do no regular work on that day, no matter what day of the week it falls on.

The Festival of Weeks

⁹"Also, from the time you begin to harvest the grain, count off seven weeks, ¹⁰then hold the Festival of Weeks (also called the Harvest Festival and later called Pentecost). Give thanks to the Lord for what He has done for you by bringing Him an offering in proportion to how much He has blessed you. ¹¹Then rejoice before the Lord your God, you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites from your cities, the aliens who live among you and the widows and orphans. Do this in the place the Lord will choose to put His name. ¹²Never forget that you were once slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God delivered you from slavery and set you free. So love the Lord your God and faithfully keep His commandments and His laws.

The Festival of Tabernacles

¹³"After you have threshed all the grain and pressed all the grapes that you have harvested, you are to keep the Festival of Tabernacles (also called the Festival of Shelters or Booths) for one whole week. ¹⁴Then you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites, the aliens who live among you and the widows and orphans are all to enjoy themselves. ¹⁵For seven days you are to keep this festival to the Lord in the place that He will choose. Remember, it is the Lord who has blessed you and given you an abundant harvest, so be happy in His love and He will continue to bless you.

¹⁶"Three times a year all your men are to come before the Lord to worship Him in the place that He will choose. They are

to come for the Passover with its Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Harvest Festival and the Festival of Tabernacles. No one should come to these festivals empty-handed. ¹⁷Each man is to bring a gift in proportion to how much the Lord has blessed him.

Justice

¹⁸You also need to appoint judges and other officials for each of your tribes to administer the affairs in your cities and towns and to judge the cases of the people equitably. ¹⁹You are not to pressure these men to judge in your favor by trying to bribe them. If you do this, it will blind their eyes and they will twist the words of those who are right and end up giving an unjust verdict. ²⁰The law must be administered honorably and justly; only then can the Lord bless you and the land He has given you.

²¹“Never plant a tree or place a wooden idol in honor of a fertility god or goddess next to an altar you set up for the Lord. ²²And do not set up a sacred stone pillar or a sculptured idol of a fertility god next to that altar. Such things are detestable to Him.”

17“Don’t ever bring to the Lord an ox or a sheep that is defective, for this would be an insult to the Lord and is totally unacceptable.

²Now if you hear that someone in one of your cities has violated the covenant you made with the Lord to love Him and Him alone, ³and you’re told that he worships other gods in addition to the Lord or he worships things in the heavens such as the sun, moon and stars which the Lord has commanded not to do, ⁴carefully investigate it. If you find that it’s true, a terrible thing has happened in Israel. It’s an abomination to the Lord. ⁵You are to take that man or woman outside the city gate and stone that person to death. ⁶But this should not be done on the testimony of just one witness, but on the testimony of at least two or three witnesses. ⁷These witnesses are to throw

the first stones, followed by the people from the convicted person’s hometown. This is the only way you’ll be able to stop this kind of evil from taking root among you. Now if you thoroughly investigate the matter and find that the witnesses who told you about it have falsely accused the person, they are to be stoned to death.

⁸If a case comes to your local judges that’s too hard for them to decide, such as who caused bodily harm to whom, or who violated whose property rights, or whether a person was killed by someone intentionally or accidentally, take the case to the Lord at His chosen dwelling place. ⁹Go to the priests who are working that day and the judge appointed to hear your case. Let them sit as a higher court and decide the case for you. ¹⁰Then you are to accept the decision of this higher court, whether you agree with it or not. Don’t go contrary to the decision of this court or you’ll bring confusion into your land. Do whatever the court decides. ¹¹Accept its decision as the law of the land. Don’t try to get around it by favoring either one side or the other, but do exactly as they say. ¹²Anyone who shows contempt for any decision handed down by the higher court, made up of at least one priest who is ministering before me at the Sanctuary and the appointed judge, that person is to be stoned to death. This is the only way you’ll be able to have an orderly society. ¹³People will hear about what happened and will decide to keep the law and not show open contempt for the decision that was handed down.

Checks and Balances to Guide Kings

¹⁴“When you come into the land the Lord your God has given you and settle down, and you want to have a king over you as other nations have, be sure to first check with the Lord. ¹⁵If He agrees for you to have a king, then ask the Lord’s approval when you choose someone. Whoever is chosen must be one of your own, a fellow Israelite, not a for-

eigner who lives with you. ¹⁶You are to establish checks and balances to make sure your king does things right, for he is a model for the people. He is not to acquire a large number of battle horses for a private army. He is not to send people to Egypt to fetch horses, because no Israelite is ever to be sent back there, no matter what the reason. ¹⁷You are not to let him follow the polygamous practices of other kings nor are you to allow him to make political alliances with them by marrying the women they offer you. Any king who does this will lose his hold on the Lord. He is not to selfishly fill his treasury with silver and gold taken from the people by excessive taxation.

¹⁸When he becomes king he is to write out for himself a copy of the laws that the Lord has given you. ¹⁹He is to study these laws all the days of his life so that he'll remain close to the Lord and do everything we've been told. ²⁰The king is not to think that he is better than anyone else, nor that he is above the law. Then he and his descendants will rule Israel for a long time to come."

No Land Given to the Priests and Levites

18 "As you know, the priests are chosen from the tribe of Levi. They and that entire tribe are to receive no share of the land that will be given to the other tribes. They are to live off the offerings and sacrifices that you bring to the Lord. ²They are to be given no land as an inheritance to support themselves and their families because the Lord is their inheritance. ³In addition to the priests' regular allotment from the offerings, they are to be given the meat from the shoulder, the two cheeks and some of the inside of every sheep and bull that you bring to the Lord. ⁴They are to be given the firstfruits of your grain, your grapes, your olive oil and a portion of the first wool that you shear from your sheep. ⁵The Lord has chosen them and their descendants from all the tribes in Israel to stand before the Lord and to minister to Him.

⁶"Any Levite, no matter where he lives in Israel, has the right to come to the place that the Lord will choose for Himself. He can come whenever he wishes. ⁷He has the right to minister before the Lord just like the other Levites who live nearby. ⁸He is to do his share of the work and receive an equal portion of the offerings and sacrifices even though he might have other income, such as receiving money from a house or from the sale of family possessions.

Warning Against Wicked Customs

⁹"When you cross Jordan and enter the land the Lord your God has given you, you are not to adopt the disgusting habits of the people now living there. ¹⁰You are not to get involved in magic, witchcraft, sorcery, divination, casting spells on people, interpreting signs, making your little ones walk through a bed of burning coals or sacrificing your infants to some local god. ¹¹You are not to consult spirit guides or try to communicate with your dead relatives, or with someone who supposedly lived a long time ago to get some message or spiritual insight from them. ¹²The Lord your God hates this kind of thing because of what it does to people. These are the demonic practices that will cause the Lord to force these people out of the land and give their land to you. ¹³Stay away from these things. Be totally loyal to the Lord your God. ¹⁴The people now living in the land are constantly going to witches and to those who channel demonic messages. You can see what this has done to them. So stay away from this sort of thing.

A New Prophet

¹⁵"The time will come when the Lord your God will send you a Prophet who's somewhat like me and yet totally different. He will grow up among you and be one of you. He's the One you will need to listen to. ¹⁶This is what you asked the Lord for when you stood at the foot of Mount Sinai and begged Him not to speak to you again from the midst of the fire be-

cause you were afraid that if He did, you would die. ¹⁷You asked Him for a go-between, and the Lord told me that what you said was good and the time would come when He would send you Someone. ¹⁸He said to me, 'I will send them a special Prophet. He will grow up among them and speak to them in my place. I will put my words in His mouth and He will speak what I tell Him to say. He will make plain to my people what I expect of them. ¹⁹If anyone does not listen to what He says and does not obey Him, I will call that person to account. ²⁰If anyone presumes to take that Prophet's place or dares to say that he, too, is a prophet speaking for the Lord when I have not sent him, or if he speaks in the name of some local god or by his own authority, he is to be put to death.'

²¹"You might ask how you'll be able to tell whether someone like that is speaking for himself or whether he's a true prophet and is speaking for the Lord. ²²If a man or woman who claims to be a prophet predicts something in the name of the Lord, and whatever he or she said does not happen, then that message was not from the Lord. Whatever that person said was his or her own idea. You are not to be afraid of what such people say, neither are you to give them a prophet's respect."

Cities of Refuge

19 "After the Lord your God has driven out the nations and given you the land He promised to give you, and you have settled into their houses and cities, ²then pick out three cities spread an equal distance throughout the land. ³Build roads to them so that a man who kills someone can quickly reach one of these cities and be safe from the hasty revenge of the dead person's relatives.

⁴"If a man kills someone without malice or forethought and runs to one of these cities of refuge to save his life, he is to be given the full protection of the law. ⁵For example, if two men were to go into the forest to cut wood, and while cutting

down a tree, one man swung his ax and the head flew off and hit the other man and killed him, the man who did it can run to one of these cities and be safe. ⁶That's why I'm asking you to set aside three cities of refuge, because if you set aside only one such city it might take the man too long to get there. He might not make it before one of the dead man's relatives overtook him and killed him in his thirst for revenge even though the man is innocent.

⁷"So three cities are what you need, spread an equal distance throughout the land with good roads going to each of them. The tribes on this side of Jordan will also have three cities of refuge like this. ⁸When the Lord enlarges your borders as He promised your forefathers He would do, ⁹then you are to pick out three more cities and set them aside for the same reason—because you love the Lord your God and are walking in His ways. ¹⁰These cities of refuge are necessary so people won't take the law into their own hands, and you won't be held guilty for letting innocent people be killed.

¹¹"If a man hates his neighbor and waits for a chance to kill him and does so in cold blood, then quickly makes his way to one of these cities for protection, ¹²the leaders of his own city are to send for him to stand trial. After they bring him back and investigate the matter and find out that what he did was not an accident, they are to hand him over to the dead man's relatives for stoning. ¹³He is to be given no mercy but will give his life for the life of the one he killed. This is the only way you'll be able to maintain law and order in the land and protect innocent people.

Property Lines

¹⁴"Don't let anyone get by with moving a property line. Once the land has been divided and given to each family according to their inheritance, the property lines are to stay that way, because the land is the people's security.

The Testimony of Witnesses

¹⁵“One witness is not enough to convict a man of a crime or sin. You need to have a minimum of two or three witnesses who testify that he is guilty. ¹⁶If a witness lies by falsely accusing him of a crime, ¹⁷he and the one he’s accusing are to see the judge or the priest on duty. The one chosen to hear the case is not to take the side of the accuser but the side of the accused. ¹⁸The judge is to thoroughly investigate the case and if the accuser is found to be a liar, having brought false witness against the man, ¹⁹he is to receive the sentence for the crime or offense he has accused his neighbor of, even if it means death by stoning. This is the only way you’ll be able to keep this evil out of the courts. ²⁰Word will get around and people will be afraid to falsely accuse anyone, and this kind of wickedness will soon stop. ²¹In cases like these you are to show no pity. The law is a law of equality, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand and a foot for a foot.”

Rules of War

20 “When you go to war against your enemies and the attacking army is greater than yours, even though the enemy troops come at you with horses and chariots, don’t be afraid of them because the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt will fight for you. ²Before you go to battle, a priest is to come out and pray for the troops and say to them, ³Men of Israel, today you’re going into battle to meet your enemies. Don’t lose courage and don’t panic, ⁴because the Lord your God will go with you. He will fight for you and give you victory.’

⁵“After that, your officers are to speak to the men and say, ‘Is there any man here who has just finished building a new house and hasn’t dedicated it to the Lord or enjoyed living in it? He may die in battle. He needs to go back home and dedicate it lest someone else enjoys living in it. ⁶Is there any man here who has

planted a vineyard and not tasted its fruit? He may die in battle. He needs to go back home lest someone else enjoys its fruit. ⁷Is there any man here who’s engaged to be married? He may die in battle. He needs to go back home and get married before someone else takes her. ⁸Is there any man here who’s afraid? He needs to go back home. He’ll only discourage those around him and lower the morale of his whole unit.’ ⁹Then after the ranks of your troops have thinned out, the officers are to pick leaders for each of the units.

¹⁰“When you surround a city, you are first to offer them peace and give the people a chance to surrender. ¹¹If they accept your offer and open their gates, you are to spare their lives, but they are to be your servants and work for you. ¹²But if they refuse your offer of peace and decide to fight, you are to surround the city and cut off all traffic going in and out. ¹³When the Lord finally gives the city into your hands and lets you take it, you are to put all fighting men to the sword. Don’t let any of them live, or they will rally and in their idolatry again fight against you. ¹⁴You are not to harm the women and children, the animals, or anything else in the city, but you may take and enjoy whatever you want as the spoils of war. It is a city which the Lord your God has given you.

¹⁵“That is what you are to do to all distant cities, but you are not to do it to those cities that are in the land the Lord your God has given you as an inheritance. ¹⁶When you capture those cities, you are to destroy every living thing in them. No one is to be kept alive, and nothing of a religious nature is to be left standing to tempt you to worship other gods. ¹⁷You are to make no difference between Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. You are to treat them all alike. ¹⁸If you don’t destroy these people, they will turn your hearts away from the Lord your God, and you will end up worshipping their gods and doing the

most disgusting things imaginable.

¹⁹“When you surround a city in the land to which you are going and the siege is taking a long time, don’t cut down the fruit trees and use them for devices to attack the city walls. The fruit trees are not your enemies; they’re there to feed you. ²⁰If you need to, cut down other trees and use them for your siege-works, not the fruit trees.”

An Unsolved Murder

21“Now suppose you find a man’s body lying in a field in the land the Lord your God has given you, and you don’t know who killed him. ²Your judges are to go out and measure the distance from where his body was found to the surrounding cities. ³Then the officials of the nearest city are to take a young heifer that has never been harnessed to work in the field, ⁴and lead the young heifer to a stream in an uncultivated valley and there quickly break its neck. ⁵The priests are to go with you to observe the proceedings, because the Lord wants them to be there, not only to pray for the people but also to be involved in settling cases of violence. Their judgment on such cases is to be final. ⁶Then the city officials from the nearest town to where the body was found are to wash their hands over the young heifer whose neck was just broken, ⁷and say, ‘Lord, we are innocent of this man’s blood. We did not kill him and we don’t know who did. ⁸Accept this offering from us, O Lord, and do not hold us or our city responsible for this crime.’ When your city officials do this you will be forgiven and Israel will remain innocent. ⁹Do everything the Lord has told you to do for deterring crime and handling unsolved cases, and you will not be held guilty for killing innocent people.

Women Prisoners of War

¹⁰“When you go to war, the Lord will help you defeat and capture your enemies. ¹¹You may see a beautiful woman among them and become attracted to

her and want to marry her. ¹²Ask her to be your wife, and if she agrees, you are to bring her to your house. Then she is to shave off her hair and cut her nails. ¹³She is to throw away the clothes she wore before and put on the clothes of an Israelite. She may mourn for her people and her father’s house for one month, and after that, you may marry her. ¹⁴If after you marry her, neither of you are happy, you may let her return to her people, or she may stay in Israel should she choose to do so. But you are not to sell her to another man or keep her as your slave because you have taken away the honor of her virginity.

Inheritance Rights

¹⁵“Suppose a man has had two wives, both of whom gave birth to sons, but the firstborn was not the son of his favorite wife. ¹⁶When it comes time for the man to make out his will, he is to give the rights of the firstborn to the oldest son, even though he belongs to the wife he favors least. ¹⁷He is to give him all the rights and privileges of the firstborn, which is a double share of everything he has, because he is the firstfruit of his father’s manhood and is to be honored as such.

A Rebellious Son

¹⁸“If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who refuses to listen to him even after he disciplines him, ¹⁹both the father and mother are to take him before the city fathers and the judge in office to stand trial for his behavior. ²⁰The parents are to tell the judge just how things are and say to him, ‘Our son is stubborn and rebellious. He no longer listens to us and is in a continual state of drunkenness, and he’ll do anything to support his habit.’ ²¹The judge should thoroughly investigate the matter, and if he finds the parents’ story to be true, he is to pronounce the son guilty and order him to be stoned to death. This is the only way you will be able to put a stop to this sort

of thing. Everyone will hear about it and will make sure they don't end up like this young man did.

Death by Hanging

²²"If a man has been convicted of a crime and the judge sentences him to death by hanging, ²³do not leave his body hanging overnight. Take it down and bury it that very day, or you will pollute the land which the Lord your God has given you for your inheritance. Not only is it an awful sight, but it's also symbolic of a man cursed of God. You are not to glory in a man's body hanging from a tree."

22 "If you see your brother's ox running loose or his sheep going astray, you are not to ignore it, but take it back to him. ²If the owner lives some distance away and it's hard for you to take the animal all the way back to him, or maybe you don't even know who the owner is, then take the animal home and feed it, and when the owner comes looking for it, then give it back to him. ³Do the same thing if you find a donkey or someone's coat or anything else that might belong to your brother. Give it back to him. Don't pretend you didn't see it. ⁴If you notice that an ox or a donkey has fallen in the street and your brother needs help getting his animal back up on its feet, don't ignore it, but help it get up.

⁵"A woman should not wear men's clothes to look like a man, nor should a man wear women's clothes to look like a woman. The pagans do this for immoral purposes and it blurs the distinctiveness between men and women. Such practice is abhorrent to the Lord and an insult to the way He created us.

⁶"If you're walking along and see a mother bird sitting on her nest beside the road or in a branch of a tree, do not hurt her or try to catch her. ⁷You may take her young, but do not touch the mother; let her go free. Then the Lord will bless

you with a long and prosperous life.

⁸"When you build a house, put a railing around its flat roof so that when people go up to dry grain or sleep in the evening breeze, they won't accidentally fall off and get killed, for which you would be held responsible.

⁹"Don't plant a crop of any kind in the same field with your grapevines. If you do, the grapes and the crop must not be sold but given to the Sanctuary. ¹⁰When you plow your field, don't hitch up a donkey with an ox because of their unequal strength. ¹¹Don't wear clothes of wool and linen woven together, in order to keep the distinction of value between animals and plants.

¹²"You are to sew tassels on the four corners of your cloaks to remind yourselves that you are a distinct people.

Virginity

¹³"If a man gets married and later decides he doesn't want the woman he's married to, ¹⁴and he tries to ruin her standing in the community by telling people that she was not a virgin as he had been told, ¹⁵then the parents of the girl are to request a meeting with the city fathers and the judge in office. They are to bring the blood-spotted wedding cloth as proof of their daughter's virginity.

¹⁶The father is to say to them, 'I gave this man my daughter as a virgin and now he's circulating these lies about her because he doesn't want her anymore. ¹⁷He's telling people that she wasn't a virgin when he married her, which isn't true! But here is the proof of her virginity!' Then the judge and the city fathers are to examine the wedding cloth, ¹⁸and after they're satisfied and have accepted the father's evidence, they are to order the man to be publicly whipped. ¹⁹They are to fine him a hundred pieces of silver and give the money to the girl's father, because the man has publicly disgraced an Israelite woman. She must continue to be the man's wife as long as they both live. He is not to divorce her.

²⁰“On the other hand, if the charges against the man’s wife are true and there is no evidence of her virginity, ²¹she is to be taken back to her father’s house and stoned to death in her parents’ front yard. She has lied to the judge, to the priests and to her husband and has disgraced her family, her parents and all the women in Israel by having intercourse before she was married. This is the only way to stop this kind of wickedness.

²²“If a man has had sex with another man’s wife and they are discovered, both the man and the woman are to be stoned to death to stop this kind of wickedness.

²³“If a man in the city meets an engaged girl who is a virgin and they end up having sex, ²⁴when this is verified, they both are to be taken out of town and stoned to death. She’s guilty because it happened in the city where people could have heard her cry for help. He’s guilty because she was engaged to be another man’s wife. This is the only way to stop such wickedness.

²⁵“If a man has sex with an engaged girl out in the country and no one was there to hear her cry out, then only the man is to be stoned to death because there’s no way to prove whether she was willing or not. ²⁶You are to do nothing to the girl because there’s no evidence against her. Her case is the same as that of an innocent victim who cries for help before being killed and no one is around to hear. ²⁷So the girl is innocent because when the man found her in the field she might have cried out for help but there was no one there to hear her.

²⁸“If a man forces himself on a girl who is still a virgin, but not yet engaged to be married, and he’s found out, ²⁹he is to pay the girl’s father fifty pieces of silver and then marry the girl. She is to be his wife as long as he lives. He has no right to divorce her.

³⁰“No man is to disgrace his dead father by marrying his stepmother.”

Excluded From the Congregation

23 “No one who has decided to be castrated or to have his sex organs mutilated to show his devotion to the Lord as some pagans do for their god should be allowed to enter the Sanctuary courtyard.

²“No one born of sexual relations with pagans, nor any of his descendants for ten generations, is to come into the Sanctuary courtyard.

³“No Ammonites or Moabites are to enter the Sanctuary courtyard with their sacrifices for ten generations, because they are descendants of Lot’s daughters ⁴and refused to give you bread and water when you came out of Egypt on your way to the Promised Land. They conspired against you and even hired Balaam, from the city of Pethor in Mesopotamia, to curse you. ⁵But the Lord didn’t allow him to curse you. Instead He caused Balaam to bless you because He loves you. ⁶So, as long as you live, don’t help these two nations in any way by making trade agreements with them.

⁷“Don’t turn your back on an Edomite, because he is a descendant of Esau, Jacob’s brother and your relative. Don’t turn your back on an Egyptian, because his ancestors fed you when your father Jacob went down to Egypt for food and met Joseph there. ⁸After the third generation, an Edomite or an Egyptian who is circumcised and living among you may come into the Sanctuary courtyard with his sacrifice and worship the Lord.

Cleanliness

⁹“When you are facing your enemies in war, stay away from anything that will make you ritually unclean.

¹⁰“If during the night one of your men has an emission and spills his seed, when he gets up in the morning he is to leave the camp and stay away until evening. ¹¹He is to wash himself and at sunset he can return to the camp.

¹²“Select a place outside the camp where the troops can relieve themselves.

¹³Each man is to carry a sharp instrument with him so he can dig a small hole when he needs to relieve himself, and when he's through, he should cover it up. ¹⁴The reason for this is that the Lord your God is living among you. Your camp must be holy. There should be nothing unclean among you or He will turn from you.

Additional Laws

¹⁵"If a slave has run away from his owner and comes to you for protection, do not return him to his master. ¹⁶Let him stay with you or live in any city in Israel he chooses. Treat him as one of the family.

¹⁷"No Israelite woman is to serve in a pagan temple as a ritual prostitute regardless of the wages she's offered. The same applies to a man. To sell your body is a terrible thing to do. It is an abomination to the Lord. ¹⁸Do not accept offerings from the earnings of a prostitute, whether a man or a woman, even to fulfill a vow made to the Lord. All such offerings are an abomination.

¹⁹"Don't charge a fellow Israelite interest on the money you loan him, or on the value of food you give him or on anything else that people charge interest on. ²⁰You can charge a stranger interest, but not a fellow Israelite. Then the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do in the land you're about to enter and possess.

²¹"If you vow to give something to the Lord, don't put off giving it. The Lord takes you at your word and expects it from you. If you don't pay it, you'll be guilty of stealing from Him. ²²When you want to give something to the Lord, you don't need to confirm it with a vow. This way, if you find you can't give what you had in mind, you're not guilty of stealing from Him. ²³But whenever you vow to do something for the Lord or to give Him something, you are to keep your word, because no one forced you to make the vow. You made it of your own free will.

²⁴"If you're hungry when passing through your neighbor's vineyard, you

may eat all the grapes you want, but do not carry any home with you. ²⁵When passing through your neighbor's wheat field, you may pick the kernels and eat them to satisfy your hunger, but you are not to cut any of the grain with a sickle and take it home."

Divorce

24"If a man marries and learns that his wife publicly dishonored him because of her indecent behavior, and he decides that he no longer wants her to be his wife, he is to fill out the necessary divorce papers and send her from his house. ²Suppose that after he divorces her, she marries someone else. ³Then suppose the same thing happens again. Her second husband discovers she has publicly dishonored him because of her indecent behavior. He is to fill out the necessary divorce papers and send her away. ⁴The first husband is not to take her back and remarry her. This is like exchanging wives and is an abomination to the Lord. Do not bring such sin into the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

More Laws

⁵"If a man has recently married, he is not to be called to go to war or to have any other duty placed on him. He is to be exempt for one whole year. He is to stay home and make his new wife happy.

⁶"When you loan someone something, don't accept as security the two millstones that he uses to grind his grain—not even one millstone—because he needs them to grind his wheat so he can feed his family.

⁷"If anyone kidnaps a fellow Israelite, then sells him, or keeps him as his slave, the kidnapper is to be put to death. This is the only way you'll be able to stop this kind of wickedness.

⁸"If you break out with a skin disease be sure to do exactly what the priests tell you to do. I've passed on to them the instructions of the Lord. ⁹Remember what happened to my sister Miriam after we

left Egypt? She, too, had to follow the instructions of the Lord before she could come back into the camp.

¹⁰“When your neighbor asks you for a loan and you agree to help him, don’t insist that he allow you into his house to pick out something as security for your loan. ¹¹Wait outside his house and let him pick what to give you as security. ¹²If the man is very poor and offers you his only blanket for security, and you take it, do not keep it overnight. ¹³Give it back to him that evening because he needs it to sleep with. He’ll thank you for your kindness and be forever grateful for what you have done for him, and the Lord your God will be pleased.

¹⁴“Don’t take advantage of an employee who is poor and needs to work, whether a fellow Israelite or a foreigner living in your midst. ¹⁵Pay him an honest day’s wage and give him his pay at the end of that day before he leaves for home. His family needs the money to buy bread. Otherwise they’ll weep before the Lord and you’ll be guilty of stealing from someone who’s poor, which is a terrible sin.

¹⁶“Parents are not to be put to death for a crime committed by their children, nor are children to be put to death for a crime committed by their parents. Each person is to die for his or her own sin.

¹⁷“Do not deprive aliens and orphans of their legal rights. Don’t take the last thing a widow has as security for a loan. ¹⁸Don’t forget that you were once slaves in Egypt, and you didn’t like the way you were treated. The Lord was kind to you and delivered you. That’s what He’s asking you to do. Be kind to others and help them.

¹⁹“When you harvest your crops and by mistake leave a bundle of wheat in the field, don’t go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the orphan and the widow. Then the Lord your God will bless you in all that you do. ²⁰When you knock the olives off your trees, don’t go around and do it a second time. Leave what you didn’t get the first time for the alien, the orphan and the widow. ²¹When you har-

vest your grapes, don’t go over the vines a second time. Leave the grapes you didn’t pick for the alien, the orphan and the widow. ²²Don’t forget that you were once slaves in Egypt and how it felt when you didn’t have enough to eat. The Lord doesn’t want anyone to go hungry. That’s why He’s asking you to do this.”

25 “Suppose two Israelites have a dispute about something and can’t settle it between themselves. They are to go to court and let the judge decide the case. ²If one of them is found guilty and is sentenced to be whipped, he is to lie face down and be whipped in the presence of the judge. The number of lashes is to match the crime. ³Never is a man to be sentenced to receive more than forty lashes. If he’s given more lashes than he deserves, it would disgrace your brother.

⁴“Do not muzzle an ox when you’re using him to thresh out your grain. He has a right to eat while he’s working.

Duty to a Dead Brother

⁵“If two brothers own property jointly and live there, and one of them dies and leaves no male heir, his widow is not to marry a stranger outside the family. Her husband’s unmarried brother or relative shall marry her, raise up an heir and manage her share of the property to keep it in the family. ⁶The first son she has is to inherit her dead husband’s share of the property. This way his name will not be forgotten. ⁷If the brother-in-law does not want to marry his brother’s wife and provide her with a male heir, she is to go to court and stand before the city fathers and the judge and say to them, ‘My brother-in-law refuses to assume the responsibility for my husband’s property to preserve his name in Israel.’ ⁸Then the judge is to order him to appear in court and the city fathers are to talk to him. If he insists on not marrying his brother’s widow, ⁹she is to pull off one of his sandals in the presence of the judge and the

city fathers to humble him. Then she is to spit on the ground before his face and say, 'This is what the man deserves who refuses to take care of his brother's share of the property to preserve his name among the families in Israel.' ¹⁰The family of that man will afterward be known as The Family of the Man Whose Sandal Was Pulled Off, and his name will be dishonored throughout Israel.

Other Laws

¹¹"Now if two men are wrestling with each other and the wife of one reaches out and violently takes hold of the other man's genitals so as to permanently injure him, ¹²she is to be taken to the judge and have her hand cut off. You are to show her no mercy because the man has lost his ability to father any more children.

¹³"Don't use two sets of weights for your scales when you do business, a somewhat lighter one for selling and a little heavier one when you weigh out what you're buying. ¹⁴Don't use two different sets of weights and measures at home for any transactions you might have there. It's still dishonest. ¹⁵You are to use accurate weights and measures, for then the Lord your God can bless you and you will live a long and happy life in the land He is to give you. ¹⁶The Lord is not pleased when you cheat people. He hates dishonesty no matter what kind it is.

Destroy the Amalekites

¹⁷"Don't forget what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. ¹⁸When you were tired and worn out, their armies attacked you from the rear and killed all those lagging behind, no matter what their age or who they were. They had no respect for anyone, nor did they have respect for your God. ¹⁹So when you settle in the land the Lord your God has promised to give you, be sure to destroy them. Don't forget to do this!"

Firstfruits and Tithes

26 "When you have taken possession of the land the Lord your God has promised to give you and have settled down, ²then take a small sample of your crops that ripen first and put them all in a basket. They are the firstfruits of your harvest, a sample of what the land has produced for you. Then take them to the place the Lord your God will choose for Himself as His place of worship. ³Go to the priest and say, 'I acknowledge before the Lord our God that He has given us the land that He promised to our ancestors.'

⁴"As the priest takes the basket of firstfruits from you and waves it before the altar of the Lord, ⁵you are to say, 'Our ancestors were wandering shepherds who came from Mesopotamia and went down to Egypt for food. There were only a few of them but they multiplied and grew so numerous that they became a nation. ⁶That's when the Egyptians began to treat us harshly. They made us their slaves and assigned us to a life of hard labor. ⁷We cried to the Lord God of our fathers and the Lord heard our prayers, saw our misery and delivered us from hard labor and oppression. ⁸By His great power and His outstretched arm He worked mighty miracles, and with great signs and wonders He delivered us from slavery. ⁹He brought us out of Egypt to the land He promised our ancestors, a land rich and fertile, overflowing with an abundance of good food. ¹⁰So now, Lord, I bring to you a sample of the firstfruits of the land that you have given us.' This will commemorate our deliverance from Egypt and the saving of our firstborn. After that, the priest is to set your basket in front of the altar of the Lord and you are to bow down and worship Him. ¹¹Then rejoice and be grateful to the Lord your God for all He has done for you and your family. Share your blessings with the Levites, the orphans, the widows and the aliens who live among you so they, too, can rejoice in the Lord.

¹²"Every third year set aside an extra tithe of produce to be used for the local

poor and for the Levites, aliens, orphans and widows who live in your cities. This way they won't have to go hungry and there will be enough for them to also enjoy the festivals of the Lord with you. ¹³When you set aside this additional tithe say, 'Lord, I have not held back any part of the tithe that is yours or kept it in my house. I have given this additional tithe of the third year to feed the local poor, the Levites, aliens, orphans and widows as you have asked me to do. I have not forgotten that all the tithes are yours, the regular tithe and this special tithe, just as you said. ¹⁴I have not eaten from it nor have I touched it when I was ritually unclean, neither have I used any of it for myself or for burying the dead. I have honored it as your tithe according to your commandment. ¹⁵Look down from your holy dwelling in the heavens and bless your people. Continue to bless this rich and fertile land, the very land you promised to give to our ancestors.'

A Special People

¹⁶"The Lord your God wants to make sure that you keep His commandments and His laws because He loves you. So obey them with your whole being, your heart and soul and mind. ¹⁷You've accepted the covenant of the Lord your God and openly promised to obey Him and to keep His commandments, His ordinances and His laws. ¹⁸The Lord God has said to all the world that you are His people, a treasured possession, chosen by Him to keep His commandments. ¹⁹He has promised to make you greater in every way than any other nation. You are to be a holy people, set apart to be His very own."

The Law Written on a Pillar of Stone

27 Then Moses and the leaders of Israel called the people together and Moses gave them some of his final instructions, saying, "Keep all the laws that I have explained to you these last few days. ²Soon you will cross the

Jordan River and set foot on the land the Lord has promised to give you. On that day, set up a pillar and cover it with plaster made from lime which will harden. ³Write on it the Ten Commandments and a reminder of all the words of this law. Then settle in that fertile land the Lord promised your ancestors. ⁴As I've said, set up the pillar on Mount Ebal and cover it with plaster. ⁵Beside it, build an altar for the Lord your God with unhewn stones. Do not use any iron tools to make the stones fit. ⁶After you have built this altar, then bring your burnt offerings to the Lord and sacrifice them there. ⁷Also offer peace offerings and thank offerings on it. Then sit down and eat together and rejoice in the Lord and be grateful for what He has done for you. ⁸When you have finished your sacrifices, then write on the plastered pillar the laws and judgments of your God."

⁹As Moses spoke to the people, the priests stood at various points in the crowd to pass on what he said. He continued, "Be quiet and listen carefully. You are God's special people. As you enter the Promised Land, He wants to remind you of the covenant He made with you. ¹⁰Obey the Lord your God and keep His commandments and His laws that I have given you these last few days.

Blessings and Curses

¹¹"Now let me tell you what else to do. ¹²When you cross Jordan, the following tribes descended from Leah and Rachel are to stand on the fruitful slopes of Mount Gerizim and affirm the blessings of the Lord. They are: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin. ¹³The following tribes descended from Leah, Zilpah and Bilhah: Reuben, Zebulun, Gad, Asher, Dan and Naphtali are to stand on the barren slopes of Ebal and affirm the curses of sin. ¹⁴Joshua and the priests with the Ark of the Covenant are to stand in the valley below. At the sound of the trumpet the Levites are to read with a loud voice the blessings and

curses that I have given to Joshua. The acoustics of the valley will make it possible for all to hear. Then the two sets of tribes are to affirm each blessing and curse as it is read by shouting 'Amen!'

¹⁵"These are the curses of sin that I will give Joshua to read: 'Cursed is the man who makes a god for himself out of wood, stone or metal and then worships it, for such a thing is abhorrent to the Lord.

¹⁶"Cursed is the man who dishonors his father or his mother.

¹⁷"Cursed is the man who moves his neighbor's property line.

¹⁸"Cursed is the man who plays a trick on a blind man and leads him in the wrong direction.

¹⁹"Cursed is the man who deprives aliens, orphans and widows of their rights.

²⁰"Cursed is the man who goes to bed with his stepmother, for by doing so, he has dishonored his own family.

²¹"Cursed is the man who has sex with an animal.

²²"Cursed is the man who goes to bed with his sister or half-sister.

²³"Cursed is the man who goes to bed with his mother-in-law.

²⁴"Cursed is the man who secretly kills someone and runs from the scene of the crime.

²⁵"Cursed is the man who accepts money for killing someone.

²⁶"Cursed is the man who refuses to obey all the words of this law.' After every curse, all the people are to shout, 'Amen!'"

Blessings on Obedience

28 Moses continued, "If you obey the Lord your God and keep His laws that I have given you these last few days, the Lord will bless you and make you greater than any other nation on earth. ²Here are the blessings that will come to you if you obey the Lord your God:

³"He will bless you in the city and in the country. ⁴The Lord will bless you with healthy children and many descendants, and your herds and flocks will

overflow with calves and lambs. ⁵The Lord will bless your vineyards and fields, and your baskets, kneading bowls and store rooms will be full. ⁶The Lord will bless you in your travels.

⁷"The Lord will protect you from your enemies. If they attack you from one direction, He will scatter them and they will run in many directions. ⁸The Lord will bless your work and fill your barns. He will bless you in everything you do. He will bless the land of Israel. ⁹The Lord will bless you and make Israel into a holy nation as He promised He would, provided you keep His commandments and walk in His ways. ¹⁰The nations of the earth will notice how blessed you are. They will acknowledge that you are God's own people and will be afraid to do anything to harm you. ¹¹The Lord will bless your land with prosperity. You will have large families, much livestock and rich harvests just as He promised. ¹²The Lord will open the windows of heaven for you and send you just the right amount of rain to sprout your seeds and ripen your harvest. He will bless the work of your hands so that you will be able to lend to many nations without having to borrow from them. ¹³The Lord will bless you so that you will become the leading nation in the world, if you pay attention to what He has said and faithfully keep the commandments and laws that He has given you. ¹⁴The Lord will bless you if you don't turn to the right or to the left and worship gods of your own making.

Curses on Disobedience

¹⁵"If you disobey the Lord and ignore the commandments and laws that He has given which I have passed on to you, then the following curses will come upon you: ¹⁶You will be cursed in the city and in the country. ¹⁷Your vineyards and your fields will be cursed. ¹⁸Your families, your cattle and your sheep will feel the curse. ¹⁹You will be cursed in your travels no matter where you go.

²⁰"You will be cursed with disasters

and confusion in everything you do until your country is brought to ruin, because of the wicked thing you have done in leaving the Lord. ²¹You will be cursed with diseases of all kinds until you are weak and driven out of the land. ²²You will be cursed with sickness, fever, infections, scorching heat, drought, blight and mildew until your nation disintegrates. ²³The sky over your head will seem to be made of bronze, and the ground under your feet will feel like iron. ²⁴Your soil will turn into powder, and dust storms and sand storms will bring your country to ruin.

²⁵Your enemies will attack you, and when you unite and counterattack in one direction, they will scatter you in many directions. You will be hated by all nations. You will become an object of fear because of the curses that have come upon you. ²⁶The bodies of your troops will be a vulture's paradise; wild animals will have a feast, and no one will be there to scare them off. ²⁷Your bodies will be full of tumors, boils and sores like the Egyptians had, and you will have the itch and will find no cure. ²⁸You will suffer from blindness, madness and lack of a sound mind. ²⁹You will be so confused over things that you'll grope like a blind man trying to find which way to go. You will be mugged and robbed, and no one will care. ³⁰You will ask a girl to marry you, but someone else will come, snatch her from you and rape her. You will build a house, and when you finish it, someone else will move in. You will plant a vineyard but never taste its grapes. ³¹Your cattle will be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will get none of the meat. Your donkeys will be taken from you, and you'll never see them again. Your sheep will be taken away by your enemies, and you won't be able to do a thing about it.

³²Your sons and daughters will be carried away to other countries. Every day you'll wait for them to return home, but you'll never see them again.

³³Nations that do not yet exist and those you have never even heard of will invade your land, eat your crops and give you nothing but oppression. ³⁴These conditions will drive you out of your mind. ³⁵Your knees and legs will break out with boils and sores from the soles of your feet to the tops of your heads.

³⁶The Lord will allow your enemies to come and take away your king and you to a foreign land that neither you nor your fathers have known. There you will call on gods made of wood and stone who can't hear, talk or help you. ³⁷The Lord will scatter you among the nations and they will hate you. They will be shocked at what has happened to you and will ridicule you. ³⁸You will sow a large crop, but the locusts will eat it. ³⁹You will plant a vineyard, but worms will destroy your vines. ⁴⁰You will have olive trees but you will not have olive oil because the olives will drop off before they're ripe. ⁴¹You will have large families, but your children will be taken away from you to other countries. ⁴²Insects will destroy your trees and crops.

⁴³The aliens who live among you will succeed where you fail. They will become more and more influential and you will become less and less important, even in your own country. ⁴⁴They will be the ones who will loan you money, not the other way around. They will be the head and you will be the tail. ⁴⁵All of these curses will come upon you. Foreign armies will invade your country and fight against you until some of your tribes disappear. This will happen to you because you didn't listen to the Lord your God and live by the laws He gave you. ⁴⁶These curses that will come upon you will be a sign to you and your descendants forever that the Lord was displeased with you.

⁴⁷This will happen to you because you didn't serve the Lord with gladness of heart and were not grateful for what He has done for you. ⁴⁸So the Lord will let your enemies come against you and take

you captive. You will be hungry, thirsty, miserable, poor and half-naked, and they won't care. Your servitude will be like an iron collar around your neck and you will work until you're destroyed. ⁴⁹The Lord will bring a nation against you from another land. It will swoop down on you like an eagle. It will be a nation whose language you don't understand. ⁵⁰It will be a fierce nation and will have no pity on the young or the old. ⁵¹It will slaughter your cattle and destroy your crops. You will be left without grain, grapes, oil, calves or lambs. ⁵²It will attack every city and town in the land, and the fortified walls you trusted in will all come down.

⁵³During the siege of your protected cities you will suffer so much hunger that you will even cook and eat your newborn. ⁵⁴The most refined gentleman among you will be so desperate for food that he will eat his own offspring and will fight rather than share his food with his brother, his wife or his remaining children. ⁵⁵He will not share his roasted infant with them even if they starve to death. That's how terrible the suffering will be during the siege and how insensitive your men will become. ⁵⁶The most gentle and kind woman among you, who wouldn't think of setting her bare feet on the ground, will act the same way. She will not share any of her food with her husband or her children. ⁵⁷She will hide her newborn, secretly roast it and eat it, including its afterbirth. She will not share it with her husband or the last of her children, even if they starve to death. That's how terrible the suffering will be during the siege.

⁵⁸So if you choose not to serve the Lord by keeping all the words of the law written in this book and you no longer respect His glorious and awesome name or what He has said, ⁵⁹He will discipline you and your descendants with incurable diseases and epidemics that cannot be stopped until they have run their course. ⁶⁰He will discipline you with all the dreadful diseases of Egypt, and you

won't recover from them. ⁶¹The Lord will permit terrible illnesses to come upon you, some of which I haven't even written down in this book. He will do this until you feel completely helpless. ⁶²Though there are so many of you that you're as difficult to number as the stars, relatively few of you will survive because you refused to listen. ⁶³Just as the Lord prospered you and made you great, so He will humble you and bring you to ruin. He will uproot you from the very land He is giving you. ⁶⁴The Lord will scatter you among the nations from one end of the earth to the other. There you will serve gods made out of wood and stone which your fathers never even heard of. ⁶⁵You will find no peace wherever you live. Your life will be filled with worry, hopelessness and despair. ⁶⁶You will live in fear and never be sure of your life, day or night. ⁶⁷The terror you see on every hand will fill you with fear. In the morning you will long for the evening and in the evening you will long for morning. ⁶⁸The Lord will allow you to be taken to Egypt in ships, even though He never wanted you to go back there again. They will offer you and your sons and daughters for sale as slaves, but no one will want to buy you."

The Covenant Renewed

29 What follows are the terms of the covenant that the Lord made with the children of Israel through Moses in the land of Moab just before they crossed the Jordan River to go into the Promised Land. These are in addition to the terms that were previously given to their fathers at Sinai.

²Moses called all the people together and said to them: "When you left Egypt with your parents, you saw what the Lord did to Pharaoh, to his officials and to the land of Egypt. ³With your own eyes you saw the plagues, the miracles and all the other unbelievable things the Lord did to make you a free people. ⁴But now, forty years later, you still don't under-

stand the meaning of all this. You see and hear but it doesn't seem to get through to you what this is all about.

⁵During these past forty years that we spent camping in various places in the wilderness, your clothes and your sandals have never worn out. ⁶You ate no bread except the manna God provided. You drank no wine or strong drink. Yet you got along fine because the Lord took care of you. ⁷When we finally got here, Sihon, the king of the Amorites from Heshbon, attacked us and then Og, the king of Bashan, but with the Lord on our side, we defeated them both. ⁸We took possession of their land and gave it to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh. ⁹So continue to live by the terms of the Lord's covenant and He will continue to bless you and be with you in everything you do.

¹⁰Today we are all standing in the presence of God. Your leaders, judges, tribal officials, elders, heads of extended families, ¹¹wives, children and the foreigners who chop your wood and carry your water are all here. ¹²We are here to recommit ourselves to the Lord and accept the terms of His covenant which He made with us at Sinai. He is making this agreement with us today and confirming it with an oath. ¹³This is what the Lord did when He spoke to our forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and promised to be their God and confirmed it with an oath. ¹⁴You are not the only ones with whom the Lord is making this covenant. ¹⁵He is making it also with your descendants and any others who are willing to obey Him, though they are not standing here with us today.

¹⁶You remember what life was like in Egypt and what it was like to go through the wilderness and the unfriendly nations. ¹⁷You hated their grotesque idols made of wood, stone, silver or gold, standing there as lifeless figures of man's imagination. ¹⁸So make sure that no man, woman, family or tribe serves any of the gods of other nations. Once this sort of

thing gets started it will root itself in your consciousness and act like a poison in your system that will kill your love for the Lord. ¹⁹When a person recommits himself to the Lord and takes this covenant oath, let him not think that he is now secure in the Lord and can do whatever he wants and nothing can touch him. That would be wrong, because it would hurt everyone, good and bad alike, and would destroy you as a people.

²⁰The Lord cannot overlook and forgive those who do things their way and then think they are still God's people. He will discipline them, and all the curses written in this book will come upon them and on their descendants until their family's name disappears and is forgotten. ²¹The Lord will single them out from the rest of the tribe so the people can see that the curses written in this book will come on the whole tribe if they do the same thing. ²²Your children and grandchildren, as well as the foreigners who pass through your country, will see the results of your sin and that the Lord did not spare you, even though you are His people. ²³Your country will turn into a wasteland—nothing will grow. There will be areas in your country like the salty and sulfurous areas around Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim after these cities were destroyed by the Lord. ²⁴The nations around you will say, 'Why did the Lord do this to His own people? Why did He let this happen to this rich, fertile land? There must be a reason for all of this!' ²⁵They will answer their own question and say to themselves, 'It's because the people forsook their God and broke the covenant He made with them to love Him with all their hearts and souls and minds. These were the terms He first made with them when He brought them out of Egypt. ²⁶But they did not obey Him and went ahead and did as they pleased. They worshiped all kinds of gods which the Lord never allowed. ²⁷That's why He brought on the land all these curses which are written

for them in the book. ²⁸The Lord was very displeased with them and uprooted His own people from the land. He let them be conquered and carried away where they are today.'

²⁹"There are things which the Lord has not revealed to us, but there are things which the Lord has made very plain. He gave them to us, and they are for us and our children and grandchildren. They are part of our heritage forever."

Circumcision of the Heart

30 Moses continued, "The blessings and curses I just told you about will come on you, depending on whether you serve the Lord your God or gods of your own making. When the curses come on you and you're scattered among the nations, don't forget that it was your own disobedience that brought it all about. ²But if you and your children turn to the Lord with all your hearts and obey Him, ³then the Lord will hear and have compassion on you and will bring you back home. He will gather you from all the nations to which you were taken and give you your inheritance. ⁴Even if you live in the ends of the earth, the Lord knows where you are, and He'll bring you home again. ⁵He'll bring you back to the same land that belonged to your ancestors. He'll make you even more prosperous and numerous than they were. ⁶Then the Lord will make your consciences tender and will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your children. He will help each one of you to love Him with all your heart and soul and mind. He will also help you keep His commandments, because He loves you and wants you to live and not die. ⁷The Lord will let all these curses fall on those who hate you and persecute you.

⁸"So turn to Him wholeheartedly and keep His commandments and His laws that I have given you. ⁹Then the Lord will prosper you in all that you do. He will bless you with large families and much cattle. Your fields will overflow with

abundant harvests. The Lord will enjoy blessing you just as He enjoyed blessing your ancestors. ¹⁰But His blessings will be dependent on your obedience, on your keeping His commandments and laws that are written in this book and on your loving the Lord your God with all your heart.

The Choice Between Life and Death

¹¹"What the Lord is asking you to do isn't hard. He's not asking you to do something impossible. That's not like God. ¹²He's not asking you to send someone up to heaven to get the answer about what to do and then come back and share it with you. ¹³The answer is not across the ocean. You don't have to send someone over there to find out what to do. ¹⁴No, all that you need to know is right here. I've told you what is required and written it down in a book for you. You've heard it and taken it to heart. So now do it.

¹⁵"You have a choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. It's up to you. ¹⁶If you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and keep His commandments, He will bless you, and you will live and prosper in the land that He has given you. ¹⁷If you forsake the Lord and turn against Him and give your love to other things and to other gods and don't keep His commandments, ¹⁸then you won't stay very long in the land the Lord is giving you. You'll be overrun by your enemies who will kill you, and you'll die in your sins. ¹⁹Today I'm calling heaven and earth as my witnesses that I have given you a choice between life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life, so that you and your families may be blessed and live. ²⁰Give yourselves to the Lord your God and to Him alone. Listen to Him. Hold on to Him and don't let go, because the Lord is your life and He's the only One who can bless you and make you truly happy. He'll give you many prosperous years in the land He promised your forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Joshua the New Leader

31 Then Moses said, "I am now a hundred and twenty years old and am not able to be your leader anymore. ²Besides, the Lord told me that I am not to cross Jordan and go into the land of Canaan with you. ³But He will go with you. He will go ahead of you and drive out the nations living there and give the land to you. Joshua will take my place. The Lord has chosen him to be your new leader. ⁴The Lord will fight for you and do to these nations the same thing He did to Sihon and Og. They were the kings of the Amorites, whose countries we took. ⁵The Lord will give these nations into your hand. Just do as I have told you. ⁶Be strong and of good courage and exercise your faith in the Lord. Don't be afraid of these people. The Lord is with you. He won't forsake you."

⁷Then Moses called Joshua and asked him to stand next to him in front of all the people. Moses said to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous. The Lord has chosen you to lead these people into the land which He promised our forefathers. You need to go in and possess the land, then divide it among the tribes and give it to them for their inheritance. ⁸The Lord will go with you. He will not forsake you. Don't be afraid or become discouraged."

God's Law to Be Read Aloud

⁹Then Moses wrote all the laws he had given to the people and the things he told them in a book. In the presence of the leaders of Israel, he gave this book to the Levites in charge of the Ark of the Covenant. ¹⁰He said to them, "At the end of every seven years, in the Sabbatical year when all the debts are canceled, read these things to the people during the Festival of Shelters. ¹¹When they come to worship the Lord in the place that He will choose for Himself, call them together and read this to them because many of them can't read and fewer still can write. I don't want them to forget what I have said. ¹²You are to call everyone together,

men, women, children and foreigners living among you. Everyone needs to hear what the Lord has to say so they know what to do. ¹³Some will never have heard the law read to them. They must hear it so they will respect the Lord and learn to love Him with all their hearts. They need to know that they are part of God's people and are living in the land that the Lord has given them."

The Lord's Final Instructions to Moses

¹⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, "The time has come. You have only a few more days to live. Call Joshua, then come with him to the Sanctuary that I may commission him." ¹⁵So Moses called Joshua, and together they stood before the Lord at the entrance of the Sanctuary where the Lord appeared in the pillar of cloud.

¹⁶He said to Moses, "Listen carefully. You're about to sleep with your forefathers. Only a few generations from now the people will forget all about the covenant I made with them. They'll give their love to other gods in the land where they're going. ¹⁷When they do this, I will have to withdraw my protection from them and leave them at the mercy of their enemies. Many terrible things will happen to them, and they'll say to themselves, 'All these disasters and sicknesses have come on us because we have turned against the Lord our God, so He's not with us any more.' ¹⁸I will not help them because their repentance will not be genuine. They'll be sorrowful because of what's happened to them, not because they've been disobedient and brought me pain.

¹⁹"I want you to write down a song and teach it to the people before you die so these things will be on their tongues and in their minds as a witness for me against them. ²⁰Because after I bring them into this rich and fertile land that I promised on oath to their forefathers and they've settled down, become successful and have plenty to eat, they will turn to other gods. They will forget all about the

covenant I made with them and will turn against me. ²¹When tragedy strikes, this song will remind them of what I said. They and their children will sing this song no matter where they live. I know what they're going to do even before I bring them into the land I'm giving them." ²²So Moses wrote down the song the Lord gave him and taught it to the children of Israel as the Lord had told him to.

²³Then the Lord said to Joshua, the son of Nun, "Be strong and of good courage because you'll be leading the Israelites into the land I promised them and I'll go with you."

²⁴When Moses had finished writing everything in a book, including the laws he had given the people and the song, ²⁵he gave it to the Levites, who were in charge of carrying the Ark, and said, ²⁶"Take this book and put it beside the Ark of the Covenant. Keep it there as a witness for the Lord against the people. ²⁷I know how stubborn and rebellious they are and how determined they can be once they make up their minds to do things their way. If they rebelled against the Lord when I was still with them, how much more will they turn against Him when I'm gone?"

²⁸"Call together the tribal leaders and all the other officials in Israel so I can tell them about these things one last time. I will call heaven and earth as my witness that I am against anything that will take the people away from God. ²⁹I know that after I'm gone the people will turn against the Lord and ignore His laws. They'll corrupt themselves with other gods and do evil in the sight of the Lord. They'll bring on themselves all kinds of disasters because they'll do the very things they were told not to do."

³⁰Then Moses talked with the tribal leaders and the other officials in Israel one last time. When he had finished, he called the people together and read the words of the song the Lord had told him to write:

The Song of Moses

32"Listen, O heavens, and I will speak. Listen, O earth, to what I have to say. ²My words will fall like drops of needed rain and will cover you like the morning dew. They will be like showers of rain on young grass and like gentle rain on new plants. ³I will proclaim the name of the Lord. I will praise the greatness of our God.

⁴"He is our Rock. Perfect and just are His ways. Our God is faithful and true. He does no wrong. He does only what is just and right. ⁵But His people acted corruptly toward Him. They are unworthy to be called by His name. Their human nature is warped and twisted. They do things to their own shame. ⁶Is this the way the people of the Lord should repay their God? How foolish can they be to ignore His goodness? Is He not their Father and their Creator? ⁷Remember the past. Think about the people who lived long ago. Ask your father and mother—they will tell you. Ask the elders—they will explain things to you. ⁸Long ago, the Lord divided up the human race and decided where the people should live. He counted the Israelites and determined their tribal boundaries according to the number in each tribe. ⁹The Lord's portion is His people. The descendants of Jacob are His heritage.

¹⁰"He found them abandoned and alone in Egypt. He delivered and guided them through a desolate and windswept wilderness. He watched over His people and took care of them. They were precious to Him. ¹¹As an eagle teaches her young to fly by stirring up her nest and fluttering over her young, then swooping down to catch them on her outspread wings, carrying them aloft, ¹²so the Lord God has done for them. He needed no other gods to help Him. ¹³He led them into the highlands and fed them with the fruit of the field. He fed them with honey from the rocks and supplied them with olive oil from trees in the flinty crags. ¹⁴He fed them with milk and curds from

the herds and gave them fattened lambs and goats with magnificent rams from Bashan. He gave them the finest wheat and the choicest grapes.

¹⁵“When the Lord’s people grew rich, they became rebellious. They grew fat from overeating and turned against their God. They rejected the One who wanted to save them. ¹⁶They displeased Him greatly with their sexual orgies as they worshiped other gods. He longed for their hearts as He saw them loving strange gods. ¹⁷They offered child sacrifices to demons and worshiped gods their fathers had never heard of. ¹⁸They turned against their God, the changeless Rock of their salvation. They forgot about the God who gave them life.

¹⁹“The Lord saw all this and turned away from them. He could no longer treat them as loyal sons and daughters. ²⁰The Lord said, ‘I will hide my face from them and let them see what their end will be. They are a stubborn lot, an ungrateful and untrustworthy people. ²¹They have provoked me by worshiping worthless idols and by their unrighteous acts. Now I will provoke them to jealousy by pouring my blessings on people who don’t even know me. In this way I will make my people once again long for my love. ²²The time will come when my anger against sin will become a consuming fire. It will burn up everything in its path. It will reach into the grave and burn up the dead. It will destroy the harvest of the earth and set the foundations of the mountains on fire.

²³“I will discipline my people. I will send them arrows of disaster, ²⁴devastating famine, incurable disease and deadly pestilence. I will send wild animals against my people in the field and poisonous snakes that will attack and kill. ²⁵War will come into their streets and their children will be pierced by the sword. Terror will reign in their homes. Their sons and daughters will be slaughtered; their infants and elderly will not be spared. ²⁶ I could destroy them from the

face of the earth and blot out the memory of them from under heaven, ²⁷but that would please their enemies and they would think they had done it when I was the One who allowed it to happen.’

²⁸“Israel has listened to bad counsel. They have no understanding of what is truth. ²⁹If only they were wise they would understand and see the end result of what they’re doing. ³⁰Can one man chase a thousand or two men send ten thousand running? Their enemies will be able to do this to them because the Lord, the Rock of their salvation, is no longer on their side. ³¹The rock of their enemies is not like their Rock. Even their enemies admit that the Rock of Israel cannot be defeated. ³²Israel’s enemies are as corrupt as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. They are like grapes full of poison and clusters of grapes filled with bitterness. ³³Their wine is like the venom of a serpent, the deadly poison of a cobra.

³⁴“The Lord will not forget what Israel’s enemies have done to His people. He will keep His weapons in reserve until the day comes for Him to use them. ³⁵The Lord said, ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay. In due time the feet of Israel’s enemies will slip. Their day of trouble will come. Their doom is sure.’ ³⁶The Lord is the judge who defends His people. He will have compassion on those who love and serve Him. He knows the limits of their strength. He sees how helpless they are. He will rescue them wherever they are, whether they are free or still in captivity. ³⁷He will say to His people, ‘Where are the gods that you worshiped? Where is the rock in whom you trusted? ³⁸Where are those gods to whom you gave your best lambs and your best grapes? Where are those gods to whom you sacrificed your infants? Let them come and help you! Let them rescue you!’

³⁹“‘Can’t you see that there is no living god beside me? I am the only One! I can give life or I can take it away. I can wound, or I can heal, and no one can stop

me. ⁴⁰I will lift up my hand to heaven and swear by myself, since I am the only One who never dies. ⁴¹I will sharpen my sword and see to it that justice is done. I will confront my enemies and repay all those who fought against me. ⁴²My arrows will drink their blood. My sword will devour their flesh. I will spare no one who fights against me. I will spare neither captain nor captive.'

⁴³"Therefore, let all the angels in heaven rejoice with God's people. Let all those in heaven and earth bow down and worship the Lord. The Lord will vanquish His enemies and forgive the sins of His people. He forgives all who love Him."

⁴⁴This was the song that Moses spoke to the children of Israel as Joshua, the son of Nun, stood at his side. ⁴⁵When Moses finished reciting these words, he said to the people, ⁴⁶"Take all these things to heart and don't forget them. Listen to what I have told you and repeat them to your children and grandchildren so they, too, can keep all the words of these teachings. ⁴⁷These are not just idle words that I have given you these last few days. They're your very life. You are to live by them, and only then will you be allowed to remain in the land that the Lord is giving you."

Time for Moses to Die

⁴⁸That same day the Lord said to Moses, ⁴⁹"Go up the Abarim Mountains in the land of Moab and climb to the top of Mount Nebo on the side toward Jericho. There you can get a good look at the land of Canaan, the land that I am about to give to the children of Israel. ⁵⁰I will not only give you a view of the whole land, but because of your faith you will also see the future of my people until the end of time. In vision you will see the earth made new, the New Canaan, which will be the eternal home of my people. Then I will lay you to rest and you will sleep with your forefathers as Aaron does on top of Mount Hor. ⁵¹It was not in my plan to do this. But both of you dis-

obeyed me in front of all the people at the waters of Meribah, near Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, when you took to yourselves the credit of leadership and of bringing water out of the rock instead of directing the people's attention to me. To overlook this would make them question my leadership and doubt that I mean what I say. ⁵²That's why I can only let you see Canaan from a distance. I will not let you go with the children of Israel into the land that I promised to give them."

Moses' Final Blessing

33 Then Moses, that man of God, blessed the children of Israel one last time. He began by recalling his experience with the Lord on the mountain.

²He said, "The Lord came to Mount Sinai and His glory shone all the way to Mount Paran and over the land of Edom like the brilliant morning sun. Ten thousand angels were at His right hand and a flaming fire surrounded Him. ³The Lord truly loves and guards His people. He watches over His own and holds them in His hand so no one can take them from Him. They bow at His feet and obey Him because they love Him. ⁴He gave His law to the children of Jacob through me, His servant. What is written down now belongs to you and to your children forever. ⁵The Lord proclaimed Himself King of Israel in the presence of all the leaders and the people."

⁶Then Moses prayed for the tribe of Reuben, "Lord, let the tribe of Reuben live and not die out, even though they are few in number."

⁷For the tribe of Judah which had absorbed the Simeonites, he prayed, "Lord, hear the cry of Judah. Help them to fight against their enemies."

⁸For the tribe of Levi, he prayed, "Lord, speak through Levi by the Urim and Thummim. You tested his loyalty at Sinai and confronted him at the water of Meribah. ⁹Levi showed greater love for you than he did for his own father and mother. He did not honor his brothers or

his own family above you. He watched over your word and was faithful to your covenant. ¹⁰His descendants teach your people to keep the commandments and to obey your laws. They offer sacrifices on your altar, minister in your presence and offer incense before you as they pray for the people. ¹¹Bless them abundantly and give them skill to carry on your work. Strengthen their hands and help their influence to grow for your glory. Strike down those who rise up against them until they never rise again.”

¹²For the tribe of Benjamin, he prayed, “Lord, this is the son of Jacob whom he particularly loved. He’s the one you carried on your shoulders. Protect this tribe and watch over them.”

¹³For the descendants of Joseph, he prayed, “Lord, bless their land. Give abundant rain for their crops and springs to water their land. ¹⁴Let the sun ripen their fruit and give them the richest harvest the land can yield. ¹⁵Cover their hills with the choicest vineyards and may the sides of the mountains be fruitful. ¹⁶Fill their land with all that is good. May the blessings of the One who spoke from the burning bush be with them. Joseph was ill-treated by his brothers and yet he was a prince among them. ¹⁷He had the strength of a young bull and the horns of an ox born in the wild. The strength of his two horns are seen in the power of his two sons, the ten thousands of Ephraim and the thousands of Manasseh. These two tribes are not afraid to confront any people.”

¹⁸For the tribes of Zebulun and Issachar, he prayed, “Lord, bless them both. Bless their business as they trade on the sea or on the land, as they go out and as they come in. ¹⁹They graciously invite people to their mountain homes and offer sacrifices of righteousness. They get their wealth from the sea and from the treasures hidden in the earth.”

²⁰For the tribe of Gad, he prayed, “Lord, enlarge the territory of this tribe which so willingly fought to help their

brothers obtain their land. Like lions, they crouched and attacked, tearing at arm or head. ²¹They selected the best land this side of Jordan they could find, but they were faithful in keeping their word and obeying your commands.”

²²For the tribe of Dan, he prayed, “Lord, bless them. They are like young lions that hide in the bushes of Bashan and jump on anyone going by. They need your guidance.”

²³For the tribe of Naphtali, he prayed, “Lord, you have richly blessed them. Your favor rests on them already. Their land reaches south all the way to the Lake of Galilee.”

²⁴And for the tribe of Asher, he prayed, “Lord, of all the sons, Asher has been most blessed. Help his brothers not to be jealous of him. Bless his land and make it rich with olive trees. ²⁵Watch over his people and protect them as iron and bronze gates protect a city. May they feel secure because of your presence. As their days, so shall their strength be.”

²⁶Then Moses said, “There is no God like the God of Israel, who rides through the heavens in majesty and yet comes to aid us when we need Him. ²⁷The eternal God is your dwelling place, and His everlasting arms will hold you up forever. He will drive out your enemies before you and destroy them. ²⁸Because of Him, Jacob’s sons will live in peace. They will be secure in His presence. Their land will be full of grain and grapes, and every morning the ground will be watered with dew. ²⁹O Israel, how blessed you are! There is no other nation like you, a people saved by the Lord. He is your shield and your defense. He is your glorious sword. He will help you defeat your enemies. You will overrun their high places until they plead for mercy.”

The Death of Moses

34 After Moses had blessed Israel, he climbed silently and alone to the top of Mount Nebo in the plains of Moab just east of Jericho and Jordan, where he

could look out over the land of Canaan. The Lord strengthened his eyes so he could see the whole country from the land of Gilead to the northernmost city of Dan. ²He could see all of Naphtali and the territories of Ephraim and Manasseh as far west as the Mediterranean Sea. ³He could see all of Judah, the Jordan Valley, the beautiful plain of Jericho, the city of Palms and the land south of the Dead Sea.

⁴Then the Lord said to him, "This is the land I promised by an oath to give to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I have let you see it, but you may not go in." ⁵So Moses, the servant of God, died in the land of Moab on top of Mount Nebo as the Lord had told him he would. ⁶The angels of the Lord buried him on top of the mountain in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor. But no one knows where his grave is, because soon after he was buried the Lord came down and

raised him from the dead and took him to heaven. ⁷Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyesight was still good, and he was still strong. ⁸The children of Israel mourned for Moses for thirty days while they were in the plains of Moab before they crossed Jordan to go into the Promised Land.

⁹Joshua, the son of Nun, took Moses' place and was filled with the Spirit and much wisdom. Moses had laid his hands on him as his successor, and the people accepted Joshua's leadership and obeyed him, doing whatever the Lord asked them to do. ¹⁰But there has never been a leader and prophet like Moses to whom the Lord spoke personally. ¹¹No one ever performed such miracles and wonders as Moses did when the Lord sent him against the king of Egypt, his officials and his land. ¹²No other prophet has ever been able to do such awesome deeds as Moses did in the sight of Israel.

JOSHUA

Joshua's Commission

1 After the death of Moses, the Lord said to Joshua, the son of Nun, ²“My servant Moses is dead. Now I want you to take the children of Israel across the Jordan River into the land that I promised them. ³I told Moses I would give the Israelites the land that I promised to their forefathers. Whatever land the people set their feet on will be theirs. ⁴The borders will reach from the wilderness in the south to the Lebanese mountains in the north, from the Euphrates River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵No one will be able to stand up against you in battle all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never fail you or forsake you. ⁶Be strong and courageous, because I will be right beside you. Now is the time to lead the children of Israel into the land that I promised to give them. ⁷Be strong and courageous. Listen to me and keep my commandments and laws that Moses gave you. Don't turn to the left or to the right, and I will help you to succeed in whatever you do. ⁸Don't forget to read and meditate on the book of the law that Moses wrote. Keep reading it morning and night so you don't forget what I want you to do. If you keep your eyes on me and desire me with all your heart, I will be right beside you and will bless you with success. ⁹What have I told you to do? I have told you to be strong and full of courage. Don't be afraid. Don't become discouraged or give up, because you don't have to do all this alone. The Lord your God will be with you every step of the way.”

Preparing to Cross Jordan

¹⁰Then Joshua called for the officers of the people and said to them, ¹¹“Go through the camp and tell the children of Israel to pack up. Tell them to get everything ready to go because in three days

we will cross Jordan and enter the Promised Land.”

¹²Joshua spoke to the leaders of the tribes of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh and said, ¹³“Remember what Moses, the servant of the Lord, told you? He said, ‘The Lord your God will give you a place of your own, a place where you can rest.’ ¹⁴The Lord has kept His promise and given you this land east of the Jordan River. Your families and your animals may stay here, but your fighting men must arm themselves and cross the Jordan to help your brothers take the land over there. ¹⁵You are to fight alongside your brothers until they take possession of their inheritance and settle down in peace; then you can come back to your families and to the land the Lord has allowed you to have this side of Jordan.”

¹⁶The leaders answered Joshua, “Whatever you ask, we will do. ¹⁷We will be just as faithful to you as we were to Moses. The Lord our God will be with you as He was with him. ¹⁸Anyone from our tribes caught disobeying your commands or questioning your leadership will be put to death. So be strong and courageous as you lead us into the Promised Land.”

Rahab and the Spies

2 Then Joshua decided to send two spies from the meadow of acacia called Shittim, where Israel was camped, across Jordan to explore the land of Canaan and to check out the defenses of the city of Jericho. The spies made their way to Jericho, slipped into the city and to be less conspicuous stopped at a house belonging to a prostitute named Rahab. ²The next day someone told the king of Jericho that just before dark two Israelites had gone into Rahab's house and that they must be spies. ³Immediately the king sent some armed guards to Rahab to arrest the two men. When the guards got there, they didn't

want to search the place, so they quietly asked Rahab to have the two strangers come out because they were under arrest for spying.

⁴Rahab went upstairs and quickly hid the two Israelites. Then she came downstairs and said to the guards, "They're gone! I don't know what happened. They checked in last night but didn't tell me how long they would stay or where they had come from. ⁵They must have slipped out of the city gate just before the king ordered it closed. I have no idea which way they went, but if you hurry you might catch them."

⁶But Rahab knew where the two Israelites were because she had hidden them under a pile of flax that was drying on the flat roof of her house. ⁷So the king's guards left the city to hunt for the spies, warning the gatekeepers to close the gates behind them, which they did. The guards searched all the way to the crossing at the Jordan River, but never did find the two spies.

⁸Before the two Israelites retired for the night, Rahab went up on the roof and gave them a report of what had happened. She said to them, ⁹"I know that the Lord your God has given your people this land and everyone in the city knows it. The people here are afraid of what will happen to them. ¹⁰We heard what the Lord your God did for you when He brought you out of Egypt and how He even parted the Red Sea for you so you could walk across on dry ground. We also heard what He did for you on the other side of Jordan when you defeated the two great Amorite kings, Sihon and Og. ¹¹When we heard all that, our hearts sank, and we lost all hope of defeating you. We know that the Lord your God is the Lord of heaven and earth. ¹²So please be kind to me and to my family and promise that you won't hurt us when you attack our city. I believe in your God, and I have been kind to you. ¹³Please give me a sign that you will keep your promise and spare my life and also the lives of my parents and

brothers and sisters and their families."

¹⁴The two Israelites said, "May God take our lives if we don't spare your life and the lives of your loved ones, as long as you don't tell anyone what we were here for. If you keep your tongue, we promise that when the Lord God gives us this city we will see to it that you and your family are treated well."

¹⁵Then she let them down through a window with a rope and helped them escape, for her house was built on the massive city wall with windows facing both directions. ¹⁶Before they left, she said to them, "Don't go straight home, but head for the hill country and stay there for at least three days, because tomorrow morning the king's men will go out looking for you again and they won't give up easily. But after a few days, you can go on home."

¹⁷The men said, "Here is a sign of our promise. Take this red cord and tie it to your window. ¹⁸When our troops approach the city, they'll know which house is yours. Then bring your parents, brothers and sisters and their families into your house so they will be safe from the attack on the wall. ¹⁹Anyone who leaves your house and goes out into the street will be killed. So don't hold us responsible for their foolishness. ²⁰Remember, if we hear that you told anyone about our being here, we will not keep our promise." ²¹Rahab agreed, and after the two Israelites had repelled down the wall, she pulled the rope back in and immediately tied the red cord to her window.

²²As soon as the two men touched the ground they ran toward the hills as Rahab had told them to do. They stayed there for the next three days ²³and then made their way down out of the hills, crossed the Jordan and arrived safely back at camp where they gave Joshua a report. ²⁴They told him everything that had happened and said, "We know that the Lord has given us this land because the people there are terrified of us."

Crossing the Jordan

3 Early the next morning the children of Israel broke camp and under Joshua's leadership made their way toward the Jordan River. When they got there they set up a temporary camp before crossing over. ²For the next two days they got things ready for the big event. On the third day the leaders went through the camp and said to the people, ³"When you see the priests instead of the Levites pick up the Ark of the Lord and lead the way, you need to get in line to march according to your tribes. ⁴We will be going into new territory, so we need to stay together. The priests with the Ark will go first and we'll follow about a half-mile behind them. Don't let anyone run ahead and get closer to the Ark than that."

⁵Joshua also spoke to the people, "Commit yourselves and your families to the Lord anew, because tomorrow morning He will lead us into the Promised Land and the next few days you will see some amazing events." ⁶The next morning, after the people were ready to go, Joshua said to the priests, "We're ready! Let's pick up the Ark and move out to cross the Jordan!" They picked up the Ark and carried it toward the Jordan ahead of the people.

⁷The Lord said to Joshua, "Today I will confirm your leadership in the eyes of the people and they will see that I am with you as I was with Moses. ⁸Tell the priests to carry the Ark into the swollen river. As they put their feet into the water, the river will begin to part. They should slowly move ahead to the middle of the river and stop, then take turns holding the Ark on their shoulders until all the tribes, together with their animals, have crossed over."

⁹Joshua then said to the people, "Listen! Let me share with you the instructions the Lord gave me. ¹⁰You will see the Jordan River part in front of you, and this will confirm God's promise that He will drive out the Canaanites, Hittites,

Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites for you just as easily as He will part this swollen river. ¹¹The Ark of the Lord will be carried ahead of you into the Jordan River. ¹²Pick out twelve men, one from each tribe; later I'll tell them what to do. ¹³As soon as the priests set foot in the water, the river will stop flowing so you can cross on dry ground. The water will pile up, but the Lord will hold it back for you so you don't need to worry. It won't touch you."

¹⁴So the people made their way toward the river, with the priests and the Ark of the Lord leading the way. ¹⁵It was the time of year when spring rains and melting snow from the mountains caused rivers to overflow. But though the Jordan was at flood stage, as soon as the priests touched the water with their feet, the river began to part. ¹⁶The water coming down piled up in a great heap, backing up beginning at the village of Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan. The water normally flowing into the Dead Sea was completely cut off, leaving a twenty-mile wide strip for the children of Israel to cross over. So the people crossed over the Jordan on dry ground not far from the city of Jericho. ¹⁷The priests with the Ark remained in the middle of the river until all the tribes had crossed.

Memorial Stones

4 After all the tribes had safely crossed the Jordan River, the Lord spoke to Joshua, ²"Call the twelve men, one from each tribe, and bring them together. ³I want them to go to the middle of the river where the priests still are, pick up twelve rocks and carry them to the place where you'll pitch camp for the night."

⁴So the twelve men came to Joshua and he said to them, ⁵"Go to the middle of the river where the priests are and each of you find a rock, pick it up and carry it out. Altogether there should be twelve rocks, one for each tribe. ⁶Then carry these rocks with you to our next campsite where we'll set them up to remind us

of what the Lord has just done for us. When our children say to us, 'What are these rocks for? What do they mean? Why are they here?' ⁷we can tell them what the Lord did for us. We can tell them how the Jordan stopped flowing so we could walk across on dry ground, and how these rocks were taken from the middle of the river where the priests stood holding the Ark until all the tribes had safely crossed."

⁸The men did what Joshua asked them to do. They picked up twelve rocks from the middle of the river where the priests stood, one rock for each tribe, and carried them to the campsite and gave them to Joshua. ⁹Then Joshua took the twelve rocks and set them up as a memorial to what the Lord had done. Years later those rocks were still there. ¹⁰The priests carrying the Ark obeyed Joshua as they had obeyed Moses and stayed in the middle of the river until the people had passed and the twelve rocks were picked up by the twelve men.

¹¹As soon as the children of Israel were all across, the priests carried the Ark to the other side. The people stood and watched as the waters of the Jordan which had piled up began to flow again. ¹²The tribes of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh had joined the other tribes and now led the way into the Promised Land, armed as Moses had instructed them. ¹³There were about forty thousand armed men from these two-and-a-half tribes who had crossed over Jordan with their brothers to help them fight on the plains of Jericho. ¹⁴What the Lord did for the children of Israel that day caused them to respect Joshua as a great leader just as they had respected Moses.

¹⁵After they had safely crossed, the Lord said to Joshua, ¹⁶"Now you can tell the priests to come out of the river." ¹⁷Joshua then told the priests to come out of the river as the Lord had said. ¹⁸The priests obeyed and came up out of the river carrying the Ark of the Lord. As soon as their feet touched the other side,

the river began flowing again and flooded the whole area where the children of Israel had just crossed.

¹⁹This happened on the tenth day of the first month, just four days before the Passover. That night the people camped at Gilgal east of Jericho ²⁰where Joshua set up the twelve rocks that the men had taken from the middle of the river. ²¹Then he said to the children of Israel, "In the future if anyone asks you what these stones mean, ²²tell them that they came from the middle of the Jordan when the river was at flood stage, but that you walked over on dry ground. ²³Tell them how it happened and what the Lord did for you. Tell them how He dried up the swollen river until all the tribes had crossed over. This was just like the miracle He did for your fathers when they came out of Egypt and He opened the Red Sea so they could walk across on dry ground. ²⁴Tell them that the Lord did this so everyone will know how great He is and will always respect Him."

Circumcision Near Jericho

5 When the Amorite kings this side of Jordan and the Canaanite kings along the Mediterranean heard what the Lord had done and how He had opened the Jordan River to let the children of Israel walk across on dry ground, their hearts sank and they lost all courage to fight the Israelites.

²The Lord said to Joshua, "Tell the people to make flint knives and circumcise all those who have not been circumcised."

³Joshua did what the Lord said. All the people made knives from flintstones and circumcised all Israelites who needed to be. That's why the place is called Gibeath Haaraloth, meaning The Hill of Foreskins. ⁴All the men who had come out of Egypt had been circumcised soon after they left Egypt when the Lord made His covenant with them, but they had died in their journey through the wilderness. ⁵Though the men had been circumcised when they left Egypt, those who had been born in the

wilderness needed also to be circumcised as a sign of their covenant with God. ⁶The children of Israel had camped at various places in the wilderness for forty years until all men who were of military age and over when they left Egypt had died. They had disobeyed the Lord by refusing to go into Canaan, so the Lord told them since they did not want to go into the land He had promised their forefathers, He would grant them their wish. ⁷Now the sons of these men were circumcised because they had been born in the wilderness since the days of Sinai.

⁸After they were all circumcised, they stayed in the camp until they were healed. ⁹Then the Lord spoke to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of the heathen that fell on me and my people because I did not bring them into the land of Canaan when I first brought them out of Egypt. But I will now bring them into the land, as I said I would." So the place was called Gilgal, meaning Rolled Away.

¹⁰While the children of Israel were camped near Jericho, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, remembering what the Lord did for them in Egypt. ¹¹The day after the Passover, for the first time they ate food that had been grown in the Promised Land—roasted grain and bread made without yeast. ¹²The day they crossed the river Jordan the manna that the Lord had given to them for the past forty years stopped. That year they began to eat the food that grew in Canaan.

The Commander of God's People

¹³Joshua started making plans to attack Jericho. One morning as he left camp to pray, a huge soldier appeared in the valley, facing him with a drawn sword. Joshua walked closer and called out, "Are you for us or against us?"

¹⁴The man answered, "I'm not here to join your forces but to lead them. I'm the One in charge of the Lord's army, the Commander of God's people." Joshua fell

on his knees and bowed his face to the ground and worshiped Him. He knew it was the Lord Himself who had come to lead His people. Then he said, "What is it that my Lord wants me to do?"

¹⁵The Lord said, "Take off your sandals; you're standing on holy ground." Joshua did as he was told just as Moses had done when he stood near the burning bush.

The Fall of Jericho

6 In the meantime, the people of Jericho had shut the gates of the city and everything was tightly guarded so no one could go out or come in. ²The Lord spoke to Joshua, "I have given the city of Jericho into your hands, including its king and all its men of valor. ³I want you to march around the city with your troops, once each day for six days. ⁴The special fighting units shall go first, followed by seven priests with rams' horns, and after them, the Ark of the Covenant and Israel's rear guard. The only sound will be the marching of the men and an occasional blast of the rams' horns. ⁵On the seventh day, you are to march around the city seven times. Then the priests should give a long blast on the rams' horns, followed by a loud shout from the troops, and the walls of the city will collapse. As soon as they do, the men are to storm the city from all directions."

⁶Joshua called the priests together and said to them, "I need some of you to carry the Ark of the Lord and seven of you to handle the rams' horn trumpets." ⁷Then he called his officers and men together and ordered them to line up and get ready to march around the city ahead of the Ark.

⁸After everyone knew what to do, the priests with the seven rams' horns lined up first, those who carried the Ark next; ⁹then special warriors lined up and marched past the priests who, with the rams' horns and the Ark, fell in behind, followed by a sample of the army as a rear guard. There was no sound except

marching and occasional blowing of horns. ¹⁰Joshua had told the men that none of them should give out a war cry nor should they talk to each other as they marched around the city. He would tell them when they could do this and then they should shout with all their might. ¹¹So the troops, the priests with rams' horns and the priests carrying the Ark marched around the city just once. Then they all went back and spent the rest of that day and night in camp.

¹²Early the next morning, Joshua got up and had the priests carry the Ark around the city again. ¹³The special fighting units went first. Then came the seven priests with their rams' horns, followed by the priests carrying the Ark. After them came a sample of the army as a rear guard. They all marched around the city as they had done the day before, with occasional blowing of the rams' horns. ¹⁴On the third day they marched around Jericho again, with the priests blowing the rams' horns. Then they returned to camp. They did this each day for six days.

¹⁵On the seventh day, they got up at sunrise and started marching around the city seven times. ¹⁶Before they began their march, Joshua said to them, "At the end of the seventh time around. I want the priests to give a long blast on their rams' horns and the troops to give a loud shout, because today the Lord will give us the city. ¹⁷God wants everyone and everything in the city to be destroyed, because these people have gone beyond repentance. They are so caught up in idol worship and witchcraft that they even sacrifice their own children to demons. But Rahab and her relatives are an exception. They are to be saved because she believed in our God and hid our spies at the risk of her own life. ¹⁸Nothing devoted to their demonic gods is to be taken out of the city, no matter how beneficial it would be to you. If anyone does this, it will bring trouble on all Israel. ¹⁹The only things

you are allowed to carry out are the things made of silver, gold, bronze or iron, and these are to be gifts to the Lord for His treasury."

²⁰So after the troops and the priests had marched around the city seven times, at Joshua's command they all stopped and turned to face the city wall. Then the priests gave a long blast of the rams' horns, the troops gave a loud shout, and the walls of Jericho shook and huge sections collapsed, but Rahab's house was spared. Then the men stormed into the city from all directions and took it. ²¹They killed everyone in the city, men, women, children, cattle, sheep and donkeys.

²²Joshua spoke to the two men who had spied on the city and said, "Quick, go and find Rahab and bring her and her family and everything she owns out of the city as you promised her you would."

²³The two men went quickly, found Rahab and brought her and her loved ones out of the city. They made a place for them near the camp of Israel. ²⁴Then they set the city on fire and burned everything in it, except the silver, gold, bronze and iron which they gave as gifts to the Lord. ²⁵But Rahab and her family and those with her were spared because she accepted the Lord as her God and risked her life to save the spies. While God did not condone her lie, He blessed her for her faith and kindness. She stayed with God's people and married Salmon and became the mother of Boaz, who was the father of Obed, who was the father of Jesse, who was the father of David.

²⁶Then Joshua said, "Cursed be the man who tries to rebuild this city and its walls. He will lay the foundation at the cost of his firstborn and put in the gates at the cost of his youngest."

²⁷So the Lord was with Joshua as He had been with Moses, and the fear of the Lord and the fame of Joshua spread throughout the land.

Defeated at Ai

7 But some among the children of Israel didn't listen to the Lord and acted unfaithfully. Achan, the son of Carmi and grandson of Zabdi (also known as Zimri), from the clan of Zerah from the tribe of Judah, kept some silver and gold for himself, plus a Babylonian robe, and brought them into the camp. The Lord was greatly displeased with what Achan had done and withdrew His blessing from all Israel.

²Meanwhile, Joshua decided to send some of his men from Jericho to the city of Ai on the road to Bethel in the wilderness of Bethaven. He said to them, "Go and spy out the territory, then come back and give me a report." ³After they had spied out the land they returned and said to Joshua, "Not all our troops will be needed to take the city. Two or three thousand should do it. There's no sense in marching the whole army up there. These men can do the job, because the city is small and doesn't have a large fighting force." ⁴Without asking the Lord what to do, Joshua sent three thousand men to take Ai, and the men of Ai came out and attacked the Israelites. ⁵They chased Joshua's men all the way down the slope as far as the stone quarries at Shebarim, killing thirty-six of them in the process. When the battered troops got home and the people saw them, their hearts sank.

⁶Joshua and the tribal leaders tore their robes in anguish at the sight and threw themselves on the ground in front of the Ark and wept. They stayed there until late that afternoon, praying, with dust on their heads and grief in their hearts, asking the reason for what had happened. ⁷Joshua said, "O Sovereign Lord, why did you let this happen? The Amorites were afraid of us, but now they've defeated us. This will only stiffen their resistance. I know you didn't bring us all the way from Egypt to have us slaughtered by the Amorites. Maybe we should have stayed on the other side of

Jordan. ⁸O Lord, what can I say? How can I encourage the men to fight now that they've been defeated? ⁹The Canaanites and others will hear about this and attack us from all directions and wipe us out. Then what will happen to your reputation as a great God?"

Achan's Disobedience

¹⁰The Lord answered Joshua, "Stand up! Why do you have your face down to the ground like this? ¹¹Israel has sinned and broken my covenant. They took things from Jericho they were not supposed to take and brought them into the camp, which I told them not to do. ¹²That's why your troops were defeated. The men of Ai came at you with courage, and your men turned and ran. I will not go with you into battle until you get rid of those demonic things that one of your men has brought back from Jericho and hidden under his tent. ¹³Call the people together and tell them to get ready to present themselves to the Lord first thing tomorrow morning. Also tell them that someone took things from Jericho that I told them not to take. He brought them into the camp, and that's why the troops were defeated at Ai.

¹⁴"Tomorrow morning I will ask them to come forward tribe by tribe, and I will pick out the guilty tribe. Then they will come forward clan by clan, and I will pick out the guilty clan. Next I will ask them to come forward family by family, and I will pick out the guilty family. Finally, they will come forward man by man, and I will pick out the guilty one. ¹⁵This will give the man and his family a chance to repent. If they do not repent and come forward on their own, they are to be executed. He has gone against what I plainly told everyone and has brought on the defeat of Israel's troops at Ai. The one who has taken the things will have to be stoned to death and his body burned, together with everything he has."

¹⁶So early the next morning, Joshua had the people come forward by tribes,

and the Lord picked out the tribe of Judah. ¹⁷Then he brought the tribe of Judah forward by clans, and the Lord picked out the clan of Zerah. Next, he brought the clan of Zerah forward by families, and the Lord picked out the family of Zabdi. ¹⁸Finally, he had the family of Zabdi come forward man by man, and the Lord picked out Achan, the son of Carmi and grandson of Zabdi, from the clan of Zerah of the tribe of Judah.

¹⁹Joshua said to Achan, "Son, now tell me what you have done to bring all this trouble on us. I charge you before the Lord to confess your sin and tell us what you have done. Don't try to hide it from me." But Achan was silent and refused to speak.

²⁰When Achan realized he could no longer hide his sin, he said without remorse, "I have disobeyed and sinned against the Lord. I admit it. ²¹But when I saw a richly embroidered Babylonian robe, five pounds of silver and a small bar of gold, I couldn't resist so I took them. They are buried in the ground inside my tent. The robe is on top of the silver and gold."

²²Joshua immediately sent some men to Achan's tent where they found the things buried in the middle of his tent just as he had said, with the robe on top of the silver and gold. ²³They brought everything to Joshua for the children of Israel to see and laid them before the Lord as evidence. Achan had admitted his guilt only after he had been exposed. ²⁴So Joshua and the tribal leaders took Achan, the descendant of Zerah, to the nearby Valley of Achor. They also took along the Babylonian robe, the silver and gold, Achan's wife and grown sons and daughters, his donkeys and sheep, his tent and everything he owned.

²⁵Joshua spoke to Achan and his family one last time. "Why did you bring all this trouble on Israel and on the Lord? You knew the consequences, but none of you have shown remorse. So the Lord's sentence must be carried out." Then be-

cause Achan had brought disaster on all Israel, they stoned him and his family, killed his cattle and burned everything he owned. ²⁶They buried him and his family and piled rocks over them which stayed there for years as a reminder of what he had done. That's why some called the place The Valley of Troubles. Then the Lord again blessed Israel as He had before.

The Fall of Ai

8 That same day the Lord said to Joshua, "Don't be discouraged over what has happened and don't be afraid to go up against Ai. Take your troops and attack the city and I will deliver the king and his people into your hands. ²You are to do to Ai what you did to Jericho, except that this time you may keep the goods and the cattle. I claimed the silver and gold of Jericho because the first-fruits of all you accomplish are mine. So the spoils of war from Ai will be yours. This time I want you to attack the city from the other direction."

³So Joshua got his men ready for the attack. He picked thirty thousand of his best troops and sent five thousand out that night ahead of him. Before they left he said to them, ⁴"Listen carefully. I want you to go on ahead while it's still dark because I want you to go to the far side of the city, slightly to the west, and hide there. Don't go too far away because I want you near enough for a quick attack. Be on the alert for my signal. ⁵In the morning I'll take the rest of the troops and head for the city. The men of Ai will see us and come out for the attack. When they do, I'll sound a retreat and they'll come after us as they did before. ⁶The plan is to lure them away from the city and for you to attack while they're chasing us. They'll come after us because they'll be as sure of their victory over our larger fighting force as they were over our smaller one. ⁷But after we've lured them away from the city, you are to attack it. You should have no difficulty in

taking it. This is what the Lord wants you to do, and He'll be with you. ⁸After you've taken it, set it on fire. Do what the Lord commanded. You have your orders. I want you to march out tonight." ⁹So Joshua sent them marching into the night to wait in ambush west of Ai toward Bethel. But Joshua and the other troops spent the night in the camp of Israel.

¹⁰Early the next morning Joshua called his men together and he and the tribal leaders marched ahead of them to Ai. ¹¹They marched in full view of the people of Ai and made their way to the north side of the city where they set up camp. They were north of the city with a little valley between them and Ai. ¹²The five thousand were waiting in ambush between Ai and Bethel, west of the city. ¹³With the two groups in place, twenty-five thousand to the north and five thousand waiting in ambush to the west, Joshua decided to scout out the valley that night. ¹⁴When the king of Ai saw that the Israelites had come back to attack his city with more men than before, he rounded up every man he could. Early the next morning, he attacked the Israelites, and they battled in the little valley that opened up into the plain of Arabah. But the king didn't know about the ambush. ¹⁵When the king attacked, the Israelites ran as they had done before, and the men of Ai started after them. ¹⁶The king had called on all men in Ai and Bethel to fight the Israelites, and they pursued Joshua's men, going farther and farther away from the city. ¹⁷Not one man stayed in Ai, and the city gates were left wide open. (The capture of Bethel was postponed until later.)

¹⁸The Lord said to Joshua, "Now is the time to raise your javelin and hold it high over your head pointing it toward Ai, for I have given the city into your hands." Joshua raised his javelin and held it high in the air pointing it toward the city. ¹⁹This was the signal for the men waiting in ambush to attack Ai. As soon as they saw Joshua do this they rushed toward

the city. They ran through the open gates without meeting any resistance, took the city and set it on fire. ²⁰When the men of Ai chasing Joshua's forces noticed smoke in the sky, they looked back and saw their city on fire. Then the forces of Israel stopped running, turned around and attacked. ²¹Joshua's men had seen the smoke too, and knew that the men in ambush had taken the city and set it on fire. That was their signal to stop running, turn around and attack the men of Ai. ²²Then the troops who had taken the city and set it on fire left a few men behind to guard the gates and rushed out to attack the men of Ai from the rear. So the king and his troops were caught in the middle, and the Israelites slaughtered them until not one was left. ²³However, they didn't kill the king, but captured him and brought him to Joshua.

²⁴After the Israelites had killed all the men of Ai in the fields and in the barren countryside wherever they had chased them, they returned to Ai and killed all remaining inhabitants because of their idol worship and demonic activities. ²⁵Twelve thousand people died that day. In fact, the whole city was wiped out. ²⁶Joshua did not signal with his javelin to stop until the job was done and all the inhabitants had been destroyed. ²⁷The troops took the cattle and the other valuable things for themselves as spoils of war, just as the Lord had told them to. ²⁸So Joshua left the city in ruins and that's how it remained. It was never rebuilt. ²⁹He then sentenced the king of Ai to death by hanging from a nearby tree, and he didn't take the body down until after his troops had a chance to see it. At sunset he ordered it taken down and thrown at the entrance of the main city gate, where they covered it with a huge pile of rocks which stayed there for many years.

The Covenant Renewed

³⁰Then to renew Israel's covenant with the Lord, Joshua built an altar on top of Mount Ebal and a monument next to it as

Moses had told him to.³¹ He built both of them out of stones untouched by tools, as he had been told to do. He covered the monument with plaster. Then he had the priests offer whole burnt sacrifices on the altar of the Lord, as well as peace offerings.³² With the people looking on, Joshua inscribed on the stone monument the Ten Commandments and the final words of Moses.³³ He then ordered the people to divide themselves, half of them on Mount Gerizim and the other half on Mount Ebal. Then all Israel, citizens and foreigners alike, tribal leaders, officials and judges, stood facing each other across the little valley. The priests and the Levites stood in the middle with the Ark just as Moses had told them to do when he gave his final address before he blessed them for the last time.³⁴ Joshua read the Ten Commandments and the final words of Moses with the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience, exactly as they were written.³⁵ He did not leave out one word of what Moses had written. He read it all for everyone to hear, including the women and children, whether they were citizens or foreigners.

Friendship Treaty With the Gibeonites

9 When the kings to the west of Jordan heard about Jericho and Ai, they decided to band together against Israel. This included all the city kings from the Jordan River throughout the foothills and mountains all the way to the Mediterranean coast and north as far as Lebanon. These kings were over the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.² They all joined forces and planned to attack Israel.

³ When the news about Jericho and Ai reached the nearby people of the land of Gibeon, they decided to deceive the newly-arrived Israelites into making a friendship treaty with them.⁴ The different cities of the Gibeonites selected a delegation to go to Joshua and loaded their donkeys with used household goods,

worn-out saddlebags and torn and mended leather water bags.⁵ They wore patched sandals and clothes that looked old and worn. The bread they took with them was moldy.⁶ They made their way to see Joshua who was camped with the children of Israel at Gilgal near Jericho. When they got there, they said to him and to the other tribal leaders, "We have come a long way from a far country and have been traveling many days. We would like to make a treaty with you."

⁷ The leaders of Israel said, "Why should we make a treaty with you? How do we know that you're not lying and that you don't actually live nearby?"

⁸ The Gibeonites turned to Joshua and said, "We are here to serve you, not to fight you." Joshua asked, "But who are you and where do you come from?"

⁹ They answered, "We are your servants and have come a long way from a far country to make a treaty with you because we have heard about the kind of God you have and what He has done to bring you out of Egypt. We want to accept Him as our God."¹⁰ We have also heard what He did to the two powerful Amorite kings on the other side of Jordan, Sihon the king of Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan who lived in Ashtaroth near Karnaim.¹¹ So our leaders and people told us to go and make a treaty with you. They told us to say, 'We're ready to be your servants. Please make a treaty with us.'¹² The bread we have with us was freshly baked when we left, but look at it—it's all moldy.¹³ Our leather water bags were new when we left, but look at them—almost all of them are cracked. Our sandals and clothes were new when we left. But just look at them—see how worn they are!"¹⁴ The leaders of Israel examined their bread, their water bags, their sandals and clothes and were convinced that the men were telling the truth. But they didn't ask the Lord about it.¹⁵ So they agreed to make a friendship treaty with them not to attack their people, and Joshua and

the leaders took an oath to confirm it.

¹⁶Three days later, after the delegation returned home, the Israelites heard that the men were from nearby Gibeon. ¹⁷Joshua then sent a large fighting force to find out the truth. The troops split into four groups and left camp. On the third day they came to the cities of Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim. ¹⁸When they verified that these people had deceived Israel, they did not attack because of the oath that Joshua and the leaders had taken when they swore to the Lord to accept them as friends. The troops returned home and told Joshua and the leaders what they had found. When the Israelites heard it, they were very upset with what their leaders had done. ¹⁹The leaders tried to defend themselves, saying, "We have taken an oath and promised the Lord to accept these people as our friends. So we can't attack them. If we did, our word would mean nothing to anyone, and the trustworthiness of our God would be called into question. ²⁰We admit we didn't ask the Lord, but we can't break the oath we took or destroy people who renounce idolatry and accept the Lord. ²¹Even though they lied, the best thing we can do is to make them our servants. They can cut our wood and carry our water, including the wood and water needed for the Sanctuary." So Joshua and the leaders kept their word and did not break the oath they had taken.

²²Then Joshua called for the Gibeonite leaders and when they came, he said to them, "Why did you lie to us, telling us that you came from a far country when you actually live nearby? ²³Because of this, you will serve our people as you wanted to, but you will not have the same privileges that other foreigners do who have joined us. You and your descendants will cut wood and carry water for the house of our God." ²⁴They replied, "We were told how the Lord your God promised to give Moses the whole land and to drive out the inhabi-

tants. Our people were frightened, and that's why we did what we did. ²⁵We're now in your hands. Do with us whatever you think best." ²⁶Joshua accepted the Gibeonites and did not let Israel attack them or in any way abuse them. ²⁷So throughout their generations they worked for Israel as servants, cutting wood and carrying water for the priests and Levites at the Sanctuary.

The Sun Stands Still

10 King Adoni-Zedek of the city of Jebus (later renamed Jerusalem) heard that Joshua had captured Jericho and Ai and that he had killed all the people including their king. He also heard that the Israelites had made a friendship treaty with the Gibeonites and that they agreed among themselves to become Israel's servants. ²That frightened him because Gibeon was a strong and important city. It was much bigger than Ai. It was large enough to have its own king and an excellent fighting force. ³So Adoni-Zedek called together King Hoham of Hebron, King Piram of Jarmuth, King Japhia of Lachish and King Debir of Eglon and said to them, ⁴"Help me attack the Gibeonites and wipe them out because they have made a friendship treaty with Israel." ⁵So the five Amorite kings who ruled over Jebus, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon joined forces, marched their troops over to Gibeon and set up their attack positions.

⁶When the Gibeonites saw this they quickly sent a message to Joshua at Gilgal near Jericho, saying, "Come and help us! Five kings from the hill country with their troops, have set up positions and are getting ready to attack us. Hurry!" ⁷Joshua called up the whole Israelite army, including his special forces. As soon as they had assembled, they left from Gilgal and headed for the city of Gibeon.

⁸The Lord spoke to Joshua, "Don't be afraid of these five kings because I have given them into your hands. They will not

be able to stand against you.”⁹After an all-night march to Gibeon, Joshua ordered his men to attack in the early hours of the morning and took the five kings totally by surprise.¹⁰The Lord threw the armies of the five kings into confusion and Israel had no trouble defeating them. The Lord gave them a great victory. Joshua’s men killed enemy troops all along the road from Gibeon to Beth Horon and on to Azekah and Makkedah.¹¹As the enemy troops ran along the road connecting Beth Horon with Azekah, the Lord sent huge hailstones on them so that more troops died from hailstones than from the swords of the Israelites.

¹²The Lord gave Israel total victory over all five kings. That day Joshua said in the hearing of his men, “O Lord, make the sun stand still over Gibeon and the moon over the Valley of Aijalon.”¹³The Lord heard Joshua’s prayer. He made the sun and the moon stand still until Israel had totally defeated all five armies. All this is recorded in the Book of Jashar where it says, “The sun stopped in the middle of the sky giving Joshua an extra long day.”¹⁴Never in the history of man has there been a day like this, when the God of heaven listened to a man and slowed the rotation of the earth to help His people defeat their enemies. There was no doubt in any man’s mind who the God of heaven was and that He was on the side of Israel.

¹⁵After letting his troops rest, Joshua marched them back to Gilgal.

Amorite Kings Caught in a Cave

¹⁶When the five kings saw that their armies had been defeated, they fled and hid in a cave near Makkedah to keep from being killed.¹⁷Someone saw the five kings escape and hide in this cave and told Joshua. Immediately he called together some of his men and said to them,¹⁸“Go to the cave near Makkedah and roll some big stones in front of the mouth of the cave to close its entrance, then station some men there.¹⁹The rest

of you keep on chasing the enemy. Continue attacking them from the rear and don’t let them escape. The Lord will give them into your hands.”²⁰Joshua and his troops killed every one of the enemy, except for a few who escaped and made it back to their walled cities.²¹Then the whole army returned to Joshua who was camped near Makkedah. After this victory no one dared make fun of Israel and its God.

²²Joshua did not forget about the five kings hiding in the cave. By the end of the day he said to his troops, “Take away the stones from the mouth of the cave, go in and bring out those five kings.”²³The men went, took away the stones from the mouth of the cave and brought out the kings of Jebus (or Jerusalem), Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon.²⁴They brought them to Joshua and he called together all the Israelite warriors and ordered the kings to lie down. Then he said to the commanders, “Come here! Put your feet on their necks as a sign of our victory.”²⁵Next, he turned to his troops and said, “Don’t ever be afraid of any king’s army. Don’t ever become discouraged and give up the fight, because this is what the Lord will do to all those who fight against you.”²⁶Then Joshua took the sword and thrust it through each of the five kings and ordered their bodies to be hung on five trees. He let them hang there until that evening to let everyone see them.²⁷Just before sunset he ordered the bodies taken down and thrown into the cave where he had found the kings hiding. He also ordered large rocks to be piled up at the entrance of the cave, which stayed there for many years.

The Southland

²⁸Earlier that same day Joshua had ordered his troops to take the city of Makkedah. After they had taken it, he put the king of the city to death and ordered everyone killed. He did to the king of Makkedah what he had done to the king of Jericho.

²⁹After the troops rested for a day, Joshua ordered his men to march over to Libnah and take it. ³⁰The Lord also gave that city and its king into their hands. No one was spared. Joshua did the same thing to that king as he had done to the king of Jericho.

³¹From Libnah, Joshua and his men marched over to Lachish, laid siege to it, attacked it and took it. ³²The Lord gave them that city too, and they took it the second day of fighting, killing everyone there as they had done at Libnah.

³³During the first day of fighting, while Joshua's men were taking up their positions, Horam the king of Gezer took his troops and raced to the defense of Lachish. But Joshua defeated him and his army until no one was left. The next day Joshua took the city of Lachish.

³⁴From here they moved on to Eglon, took up their positions, attacked it and took it. ³⁵They killed everyone in the city, just as they had done at Lachish.

³⁶From Eglon, they marched over to Hebron and attacked that city. ³⁷They took it and killed everyone there, including its new king and all the people in the surrounding villages. They totally destroyed the city and left no survivors, just as they had done at Eglon.

³⁸From there, Joshua and his troops turned back to Debir and attacked it. ³⁹They took it and killed everyone in it, including its king and all the people in the surrounding villages. They did to the king what they had done to the kings of Libnah, Hebron and Jericho.

⁴⁰So Joshua conquered all the cities in the mountainous region to the south called the Negeb. He killed all the kings and left no one alive, as the Lord had asked him to do. ⁴¹Joshua's campaign took him from Kadesh Barnea in the south to Gaza on the coast to the north, the whole inland area called Goshen as far north as Gibeon. ⁴²This part of Canaan was taken in one great military thrust only because the Lord God of Israel went before them. ⁴³Then Joshua

and all the men returned to Gilgal where the children of Israel were camped.

The Northern Conquest

11 When the news of Israel's victory over the five kings spread, Jabin the king of Hazor, sent word to Jobab the king of Madon, and to the kings of Shimron and Achshaph, ²to the kings in the northern mountains, in the Jordan Valley, south of the Lake of Galilee called the Arabah, in the lowlands, and in the heights of Dor just south of Mount Carmel by the Mediterranean Sea. ³Jabin also sent messages to the Canaanite kings to the east and west of Jordan, to the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites and Jebusites, who lived in the mountains, and to the Hivites, who lived at the foot of Mount Hermon in the land of Mizpah, to come and help him fight against Joshua. ⁴They all agreed and formed a large coalition, with a huge army as difficult to number as sand on a beach. ⁵They joined forces by the waters of Merom and positioned themselves for an attack on Israel.

⁶The Lord spoke to Joshua, "Don't be afraid, because this time tomorrow I'll give all of these kings into your hand. You are not to capture their horses and chariots and use them to fight other kings or you'll end up putting your trust in them. You need to put your trust in me. So after you capture them, I want you to cut the tendon of each of their horses just above their rear hooves to make them unfit for war, and I want you to burn their chariots." ⁷Then Joshua quickly got his men ready for the attack and, against overwhelming odds, made a surprise move at the waters of Merom. ⁸The Lord fought for Israel and delivered these kings into the hands of Joshua, who defeated them and pursued them as far as Sidon and Misrephoth Maim to the north and as far as the Valley of Mizpah to the east, until no enemy troops were left. ⁹Joshua also ordered his men to cut the tendons of all the horses and to set fire to all the chari-

ots that they had captured, just as the Lord had told him to do.

¹⁰Then Joshua went back to attack the city of Hazor. He captured it and executed Jabin the king, who had started this confederacy against Israel and who was one of the few who had made it back home after the battle. ¹¹Everyone in the city was killed and the city was set on fire. ¹²Then Joshua went on and captured the cities of all these kings and killed all the people living there, just as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had told him to do. ¹³But he did not set any of these cities on fire as he had done at Hazor. ¹⁴The Israelites were allowed to help themselves to all the valuables and cattle that had belonged to the people in these cities, but not one who had lived there came out alive. ¹⁵This is what the Lord had told Moses to do, and he had passed the word on to Joshua. Joshua did everything he was asked to do.

Joshua's Conquests

¹⁶Joshua captured the mountainous regions to the north, the southern part of Canaan called the Negeb, the whole area of Goshen and the western foothills of the Jordan Valley. He also controlled the territory around the Lake of Galilee, the Arabah south of there and the mountains around the city of Jebus, later called Jerusalem. ¹⁷He also took all the land from Mount Halak west of Edom, as far as Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He captured all these kings and executed them. ¹⁸It took him more than six years to capture all this territory with its cities and kings. ¹⁹The only city that he did not take was the city of Gibeon and the surrounding villages, because he had made a friendship treaty with the people. He also captured all the other cities in the territory. ²⁰The people of Canaan had so hardened their hearts against the God of heaven that they had lost all desire to repent and change their ways. They decided to go to war against the Lord by killing His people. That's why

God had told Moses to destroy all their cities without mercy.

²¹It was during this time that Joshua defeated the race of giants who had been a terror to the spies forty years earlier. They lived in Hebron, Debir and Anab in the mountains of Judah and in various parts of Israel. Joshua totally destroyed these giants and their cities. ²²Not one of the Anakite giants survived, except those who escaped to Gaza, Gath, Ashdod and some of the cities along the Mediterranean coast where a few of them still lived. ²³Joshua took the land as the Lord through Moses had told him to do. Then he divided it and gave it to the tribes for their inheritance. So in the seventh year the land was quiet from war.

Kings Conquered by Moses

12 The Israelites had taken a lot of territory east of Jordan even before they came into the land the Lord promised them. It went all the way from the Arnon Gorge in the south, up the Jordan Valley to Mount Hermon in the north, including all the Arabah to the east. The kings they had defeated were as follows: ²Sihon, king of the Amorites who ruled from Heshbon, had territory extending from Aroer on the edge of the Arnon Gorge to the Jabbok River, which was the border between him and the Ammonites. This covered the whole southern half of the land of Gilead. ³He had also ruled over the eastern section of the Arabah from the Lake of Galilee south to Beth Jeshimoth east of the Dead Sea and on south to the foothills of Mount Pisgah. ⁴Then there was Og, king of Bashan, one of the last of the giants called Rephaim. He ruled from Ashteroth and Edrei. ⁵His territory included Mount Hermon in the north, Selecah, all of Bashan, as well as Geshur and Maacah to the south all the way to the border of the land ruled by Sihon, whose capital was Heshbon. Og's territory covered the whole northern half of Gilead. ⁶These two

kings were conquered under the leadership of Moses before Israel crossed Jordan and entered the Promised Land. Their territory was given to the tribe of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh.

Kings Conquered by Joshua

⁷The following are the kings that Israel conquered west of the Jordan River inside the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. Their territory extended all the way from Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon to the north, to Mount Halak near the land of Edom in the south. This was the land that Joshua divided among the tribes. ⁸It included the mountains in the west, the foothills, the Jordan Valley, the eastern slopes, the wilderness and the southern part of Canaan, all of which had belonged to the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.

⁹Following are the names of the cities that Joshua took from the local kings: Jericho, Ai near Bethel, ¹⁰Jebus also called Jerusalem, Hebron, ¹¹Jarmuth, Lachish, ¹²Eglon, Gezer, ¹³Debir, Geder, ¹⁴Hormah, Arad, ¹⁵Libnah, Adullam, ¹⁶Makkedah, Bethel, ¹⁷Tappuah, Hopher, ¹⁸Aphek, Lasharon, ¹⁹Madon, Hazor, ²⁰Shimron Meron, Achshaph, ²¹Taanach, Megiddo, ²²Kedesh, Jokneam in Carmel, ²³Dor on the coast, Goyim in Galilee ²⁴and Tirzah. This made thirty-one cities and kings that Joshua took, not counting the small towns and villages that surrounded these major cities.

Land Still to Be Conquered

13 By now Joshua was very old. One day the Lord spoke to him, "There's still a large part of Canaan to be taken and settled, but you are too old to continue to lead out in these ambitious conquests. ²There is still the land belonging to the Philistines and Geshurites, ³which goes from the Shihor River just east of Egypt, on north to Ekron. This part of the Canaanite territory is con-

trolled by five Philistine kings with headquarters in Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron. ⁴Then there is the Canaanite territory from the cave of Mearah near Sidon in the north, to Aphek near Mount Carmel further south which is directly west of the old Amorite border with Bashan. ⁵There is also the land of the Gebalites and all of Lebanon from Baal Gad just below Mount Hermon in the south to the entrance of the Hamath Pass in the north. ⁶This includes all the land now occupied by the Sidonians between the Lebanese mountains and Misrephoth Maim on the coast. I will drive out all these people to make room for Israel just as I have done so far. This entire land is to be given to the tribes and divided as I have said before. ⁷The land is to be divided among the nine tribes and half the tribe of Manasseh, which crossed Jordan to come west into the land of Canaan. It is to be given to them as their inheritance."

The Land East of the Jordan

⁸The tribes of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh had received their inheritance east of Jordan before Israel crossed over into the Promised Land. This was the territory given to them by Moses at their request. ⁹Their territory extended from Aroer on the edge of the Arnon River, including the city in the middle of the valley and all the plain from Medeba as far as Dibon. ¹⁰It went as far north as the border of Ammon and included all the cities in the Amorite territory once ruled by Sihon whose capital was Heshbon. ¹¹It also included the land of Gilead, the region around Geshur in Maacah, all of Mount Hermon and all of Bashan as far north as Salecah. ¹²Their territory also took in the old kingdom of Og, who was the last of the giants known as the Rephaim. He ruled his territory from the cities of Ashteroth and Edrei. It was under the leadership of Moses that the children of Israel defeated the people of Geshur and took the region of Maacah. ¹³But the Israelites did not clear the land

of all its inhabitants as the Lord had told them to do and some of the people of Geshur and Maacah continued to live within the territory of Israel.

¹⁴Of all the tribes, the Levites were the only ones who did not receive an inheritance of land. The Lord had told Moses that their inheritance would be a share in the sacrifices the people brought to the Lord.

The Land of Reuben

¹⁵Moses had taken the territory east of Jordan and divided it up among the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh. He gave the Reubenites land according to their family groups. ¹⁶Their territory extended from Aroer on the edge of the Arnon River in the south, including the city in the middle of the valley and all the plain of Medeba. ¹⁷It included the city of Heshbon and all the cities on that tableland such as Dibon, Bamoth Baal, Baal Meon, ¹⁸Jahaz, Kedemoth, Mephaath, ¹⁹Kiriathaim, Sibmah, Zereth Shahar on the hill in the valley, ²⁰Beth Peor on the slopes of Mount Pisgah and Beth Jeshimoth. ²¹These were the cities of the plain and those that made up the kingdom of Sihon, the Amorite king who had ruled out of Heshbon. Under the leadership of Moses, the children of Israel had defeated Sihon and all the local kings who ruled under him over such places as Midian, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba. ²²The Israelites captured and killed many people, including Balaam, the one whom Balak called to curse Israel. ²³These were the names of the major cities and towns that were given to the Reubenites for their inheritance, and the Jordan River and the Dead Sea made the western boundary of their territory.

The Land of Gad

²⁴The land assigned by Moses to the Gadites according to family groups ²⁵included the city of Jazer south of the Brook Jabbok, all the cities of Gilead

and half the land of the Ammonites as far as the city of Aroer, east of Rabbah. ²⁶So their territory went from the area of Heshbon in the south to Betonim Mizpah, and Mahanaim in the north to Lo Debar on the border of Gad and Manasseh in the west. ²⁷In the Jordan Valley, it included Beth Haram, Beth Nimrah, Succoth and Zaphon, which had made up the rest of Sihon's kingdom. The western border of the territory was the Jordan River northward to just south of the Lake of Galilee. ²⁸These were the major cities and towns that Moses gave to the Gadites for their inheritance.

Half the Tribe of Manasseh Settles East

²⁹Moses also assigned part of the land east of Jordan to half the tribe of Manasseh and its family groups. ³⁰Their territory included all the land of Bashan and the sixty towns and villages of Jair all of which were once ruled by King Og, who was known as the King of Bashan. ³¹The territory also included half of the land of Gilead and the cities of Ashteroth and Edrei which were the royal cities of Bashan. All this was given to half the descendants of Makir, the son of Manasseh.

³²This is how Moses divided the land east of Jericho on this side of the Jordan River before the children of Israel crossed over into the Promised Land while they were still camped in the plains of Moab. ³³Moses did not assign any land to the tribe of Levi because their inheritance was to be a share in the sacrifices the people brought to the Lord.

The Land West of the Jordan

14 The land west of Jordan was divided among the tribes by Joshua the son of Nun and by Eleazar the high priest, together with the tribal leaders. They were the ones who assigned the land to the various tribes and clans of Israel. ²Moses had told them to divide the land among the nine-and-a-half tribes

by drawing lots. ³He had already assigned land on the eastern side of Jordan to two-and-a-half tribes. ⁴The two sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, were each counted as a tribe and received land with the rest while the tribe of Levi was left out. The Levites were given cities to live in with surrounding fields for their cattle, but no tribal territory. So there were still twelve tribes that received land. ⁵The people of Israel divided the land west of Jordan just as Moses had told them to do.

Caleb Receives Hebron as His Inheritance

⁶While the children of Israel were still camped at Gilgal, some men from the tribe of Judah came to Joshua to talk to him about their inheritance. One of them was Caleb, the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite. Under the direction of Moses, he had spied out the land with Joshua and ten others years before. He said to Joshua, "Do you remember what Moses, that man of God, said to you and me years ago at Kadesh Barnea? ⁷I was forty years old when Moses sent us to spy out the land. You and I gave Moses an honest report and told him what we believed could be done under the power of God. ⁸The others who went with us gave their report in such a way as to scare the people. But we gave our report with faith, hope and courage in what the Lord could do. ⁹Because of this, Moses promised to reward us. He told me and my children that we would receive the very land that you and I walked over as our inheritance. ¹⁰That was forty-five years ago when we were making our way through the wilderness. All these years the Lord has kept me alive and blessed me with good health. I'm now eighty-five years old and as strong as ever. ¹¹I'm just as full of energy as I was when Moses sent me to spy out the land. I can still go to war and fight side by side with those half my age. ¹²So give me that mountain that we walked over, that the Lord promised me after we

had given our report and urged the people to move forward by faith. You were there and heard what I said about the giants called Anakim, the great walled cities and how with the Lord's help we could defeat them and drive them out."

¹³Then Joshua blessed Caleb for his faithfulness and gave him the city of Hebron and the surrounding mountainous area for his inheritance. ¹⁴So Hebron became the possession of Caleb, the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and his descendants, because he believed the Lord God of Israel with all his heart and was ready to follow Him anywhere. ¹⁵Hebron was originally called Kiriath Arba, named after Arba the biggest giant of the Anakim people. After the land was divided among the tribes, the children of Israel settled down and the whole country rested from war.

The Land of Judah

15 The tribe of Judah was given the following land, which was divided among their family groups: Its eastern border ran from the northern end of the Dead Sea southward along its coast, along the Edomite border and on into the Desert of Zin. ²Its southern border joined its western border at the southern end of the Dead Sea. ³Going southwest along the Edomite border, it ran along the Akrabbim Pass, into the Desert of Zin and on over to Kadesh Barnea. From there it ran past Hebron, up to Addar, on to Karkaa s, ⁴then to Azmon and along the river of Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea. This was Judah's southern border.

⁵The eastern end of the northern border of Judah began where the Jordan emptied into the Dead Sea. ⁶From there, it ran northwest toward Beth Hoglah, to Beth Arabah, to the huge Bohan Rock named after Reuben's son, ⁷to the Valley of Achor which is south of Jericho, to Debir, north to Gilgal and on to the Adummim Pass. Then the border ran to the waters of En Shemech and came out at En Rogel. ⁸From there it ran up the

Valley of Ben Hinnom on the southern slope of the hill later called Mount Zion on which the city of Jebus (Jerusalem) sat. Then the border ran up the hill just west of the Hinnom Valley to the northern tip of the Valley of Rephaim (also called the Valley of Giants).

⁹From there the border continued to the Springs of Nephtoah, coming out at the villages at the foot of Mount Ephron, then on toward Baalah (also known as Kiriath Jearim and later renamed Emmaus). ¹⁰Then it curved west toward the hill country of Mount Seir and ran along the northern slope of Mount Jearim also known as Chesalon, to Beth Shemesh and over to Timnah. ¹¹It continued on to the hill just north of Ekron, then turned toward Shikkeron, passing along to Mount Baalah, on to Jabneel or Jabneh (later called Jamnia), and from there west to the Mediterranean Sea. ¹²This was the western boundary of the land given to the people of Judah as their inheritance.

Caleb Takes Hebron

¹³In harmony with the Lord's command, Joshua gave Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, his inheritance within the land of Judah. He gave him the city of Hebron also known as Kiriath Arba, which had been named after Arba, the ancestor of Anak. ¹⁴Caleb was foremost in driving out the descendants of the three sons of Anak: Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmi. ¹⁵After Caleb took Hebron, he went on to the city Debir (also known as Kiriath Sepher). ¹⁶When he got there, he said, "I will give my daughter Achsah in marriage to the man who succeeds in taking this city."

¹⁷Othniel, the son of Caleb's brother Kenaz, accepted the challenge, and with his men took the city. So Caleb gave him his daughter, Achsah, in marriage as he had promised. ¹⁸On their wedding day, she asked Othniel for permission to ask her father for the field with springs as an additional wedding gift. A few days later, she got on a donkey to go visit her

father. As she slid off the donkey, her father saw her and went out to greet her. He asked what he could do for her. ¹⁹She said, "Father, please let me have the springs that are next to the land you already gave me so I can water my cattle." Her father not only gave her the field with springs below her land but also the field with springs above her land. He gave her two fields.

The Cities of Judah

²⁰These are the cities that belonged to the people of Judah according to their families: ²¹to the south in the Negeb near the border of Edom were the cities of Kabzeel, Eder, Jagur, ²²Kinah, Dimonah, Adadah, ²³Kedesh, Hazor, Ithnan, ²⁴Ziph, Telem, Bealoth, ²⁵Hazar Hadattah, Kerioth Hezron also called Hazor, ²⁶Amam, Shema, Moladah, ²⁷Hazar Gaddah, Heshmon, Beth Pelet, ²⁸Hazar Shual, Beersheba, Biziothiah, ²⁹Baalath, Iim, Ezem, ³⁰Eltolad, Chesil, Hormah, ³¹Ziklag, Madmannah, Sansannah, ³²Lebaoth, Shilhim, Ain and Rimmon. Altogether there were twenty-nine cities and seven villages.

³³The cities in the western foothills were: Eshtaol, Zorah, Ashnah, ³⁴Zanoah, En Gannim, Tappuah, Enam, ³⁵Jarmuth, Adullam, Socoh, Azekah, ³⁶Shaaraim, Adithaim and Gederah also called Gederothaim. Altogether there were fourteen cities with their surrounding villages.

³⁷Farther west were the cities of Zenan, Hadashah, Migdal Gad, ³⁸Dilean, Mizpah, Joktheel, ³⁹Lachish, Bozkath, Eglon, ⁴⁰Cabbon, Lahmas, Kithlish, ⁴¹Gederoth, Beth Dagon, Naamah and Makkedah. Altogether there were sixteen cities with their villages.

⁴²In the northwest there were the cities of Libnah, Ether, Ashan, ⁴³Iphthah, Ashnah, Nezib, ⁴⁴Keilah, Achzib and Mareshah. Altogether there were nine cities with their surrounding villages.

⁴⁵Then near the coast going from north to south there was Ekron with its villages, ⁴⁶which included all the villages on the way to Ashdod.

⁴⁷Then there was Ashdod with its surrounding villages, and farther along the coast there was Gaza with its surrounding villages which extended as far south as the River of Egypt.

⁴⁸In the mountains there were the cites and towns of Shamir, Jattir, Socoh, ⁴⁹Dannah, Kiriath Sannah (also known as Kiriath Sepher or Debir), ⁵⁰Anab, Esh-temoth, Anim, ⁵¹Goshen, Holon and Giloh. Altogether there were eleven cities with their surrounding villages.

⁵²In another section of the mountains there were the cities of Arab, Dumah, Eshan, ⁵³Janum, Beth Tappuah, Aphekah, ⁵⁴Humtah, Kiriath Arba also known as Hebron, and Zior. In this group there were nine cities with their villages.

⁵⁵In another section of the mountains were the cities of Maon, Carmel, Ziph, Juttah, ⁵⁶Jezreel, Jokdeam, Zanoah, ⁵⁷Kain, Gibeah and Timnah. In this group there were ten cities with their surrounding villages.

⁵⁸In still another section of the mountains there were the cities of Halhul, Beth Zur, Gedor, ⁵⁹Maarath, Beth Anoth and Eltekon. In this group there were six cities with their surrounding villages.

⁶⁰Then there were the two cities of Kiriath Baal also called Kiriath Jearim and Rabbah, with their villages.

⁶¹In the wilderness there were the cities of Beth Arabah, Middin, Secacah, ⁶²Nibshan, Salt City, and Engedi. Altogether there were six cities with their surrounding villages.

⁶³But the people of Judah did not drive out the Jebusites from their city, later called Jerusalem, so they continued to live in the land among the children of Israel.

Ephraim and the Other Half of the Tribe of Manasseh

16 The southern border of the land assigned to Ephraim and half the tribe of Manasseh, the descendants of Joseph, began on the west side of the Jordan River at the springs of Jericho just north of the city, then toward the

mountains and on to Bethel. ²From Bethel the border continued west to Luz and from there to Ataroth Addar near the land of the Archites. ³Then it went on to the territory of the Jephthites, to Lower Beth Horon and on to Gezer, turning north just before the Mediterranean thus forming the western boundary of the tribe of Ephraim.

⁴This land was given to the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph.

The Land of Ephraim

⁵Ephraim's southern border ran from Ataroth Addar in a southwesterly direction, taking in both Upper and Lower Beth Horon, ⁶and continued to the Mediterranean. Ephraim's eastern border began in the north with Michmethath, ran southeast toward Taanath Shiloh and on to Janoah. ⁷From Janoah it continued down to Ataroth and Naarah, ending just north of Jericho near Jordan. ⁸The northern boundary began with Tappuah and from there ran west to the Kanah Ravine and on toward the Mediterranean, connecting with Ephraim's western border. This was the land inherited by the descendants of Ephraim. ⁹There were some cities and villages that were within the rightful borders of Manasseh but were counted as belonging to Ephraim. ¹⁰The children of Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites from Gezer, but employed them as house servants and day laborers. The Ephraimites were later led into idolatry by them.

The Western Half Tribe of Manasseh

17 Now the half tribe of Manasseh (descendants from Manasseh's son Makir, the father of Gilead) had been given land east of Jordan before the children of Israel crossed over into the Promised Land. They received the land of Gilead and Bashan as their inheritance because they had fought so bravely. The other half of the tribe of Manasseh (descended from Joseph's oldest son) had

been given land west of Jordan, as were the descendants of Ephraim. ²The half tribe of Manasseh that crossed the Jordan and settled in the Promised Land was arranged under the ancestral houses of Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Hopher and Shemida, the male descendants of Manasseh, the son of Joseph.

³Zelophead, the son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh had no sons, only daughters. Their names were: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. ⁴They went to see Eleazar, the high priest and son of Aaron, Joshua the son of Nun, and the tribal leaders. and said to them, "Our father died in the wilderness and left no male heirs, so the Lord told Moses to give us an inheritance along with our male relatives." ⁵The descendants of Manasseh got the land of Gilead and Bashan east of Jordan and ten shares of land west of Jordan through the five great-grandsons of Manasseh and the five daughters of Zelophead, who was the son of Hopher, the other great-grandson of Manasseh. ⁶So Zelophead's five daughters got equal shares west of the Jordan as their male relatives did, from half the tribe of Manasseh that settled in Gilead and Bashan.

⁷The southern border of half the tribe of Manasseh west of Jordan went from the city of Asher to Michmethath and from there west to Shechem. Then the border ran southward to include the En Tappuah area. ⁸While the land of En Tappuah belonged to Manasseh, the town of Tappuah on the border belonged to Ephraim. ⁹From there the border continued to run south to the Kanah Ravine. The cities south of the ravine belonged to Ephraim, but there were some cities north of the ravine that Manasseh agreed to give to Ephraim. The ravine was the southernmost border of Manasseh all the way to the Mediterranean. ¹⁰To the north Manasseh bordered on the territory of the tribes of Asher, Zebulun and Issachar. ¹¹These tribes agreed that

Manasseh could have some of their cities such as Beth Shan, Ibleam, Dor, Endor, Taanach and Megiddo with their surrounding villages. ¹²But Manasseh did not take over these cities, so the Canaanites continued to live in the land. ¹³It was only later, when the Israelites had grown stronger that they conquered these cities, but they only subjected the people, they did not drive them out.

Ephraim and Manasseh Demand More Land

¹⁴The descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, came to Joshua and said, "Our tribes have each been given a portion of the Promised Land just like the other tribes, but that's not enough for us. We're much larger than the other tribes and really need two portions each. God has blessed us and we have become a numerous people. We need more of the land that has already been conquered." ¹⁵Joshua said, "If you claim to be such great tribes and say that your share of the land is too small for you, then go and fight for what you need. Go and take the hill country where the Perizzites and Rephaim live." ¹⁶The people said, "That hill country alone isn't enough; besides, the Canaanites who live in the plain have iron chariots, both in Beth Shan, as well as in the Valley of Jezreel." ¹⁷Joshua sensed their lack of faith and said, "If you're as numerous as you say you are, I will give you the extra land you want. ¹⁸That entire hill country over there is yours. Show your faith and take it to its farthest limits. Even though the Canaanites have iron chariots and are very powerful, with the Lord's help you can drive them out."

The Remainder of the Land

18 After Joshua conquered large portions of Canaan and there was peace in the land, the people of Israel assembled at Shiloh and set up the Sanctuary.

²But there were still seven tribes

which had not received their share of the land. ³Joshua said to them, "How long are you going to wait before you take over the rest of the land the Lord has given you?" ⁴Choose three men from each of your tribes and we'll send them through the country to map out areas that they think your tribes would like. When they come back they can give me a report. ⁵However, Judah will stay south of here and the tribe of Ephraim and half the tribe of Manasseh will stay north of Judah, both this side of Jordan. ⁶After these men get back and give me descriptions of the different areas of the country, we'll draw lots in the presence of the Lord to see what each tribe gets. ⁷The Levites will not be included in this because their work is to serve the Lord. And Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh already have their inheritance on the other side of Jordan, which was given to them by Moses."

⁸Before the men left, Joshua said to them, "Go and look over the land and map it out for me, then come back and give me a report. I'll look it over and then we'll draw lots before the Lord here at Shiloh to see which tribe gets what."

⁹So the men left and went through the land, listing all the cities and towns and writing down their suggestions on how to divide the land in seven parts acceptable to the tribes. When they came back they gave their recommendations to Joshua. ¹⁰He carefully listened to them and was satisfied with what they had done. Then he drew lots in the presence of the Lord by the Sanctuary and assigned an area of the country to each of the seven tribes accordingly.

The Land of Benjamin

¹¹The first lot that Joshua drew was for the tribe of Benjamin. Its small territory lay between Judah to the south and Ephraim and Manasseh to the north. ¹²Benjamin's northern border began in the east at Jordan near Jericho and went west into the mountains all the way to

Beth Aven. ¹³Then it ran south of Luz near Bethel and on to Ataroth Addar on the mountain south of Lower Beth Horon. ¹⁴From there the border headed straight south coming out at Kiriath Baal (also called Kiriath Jearim) which belonged to Judah. This was Benjamin's western border. ¹⁵The southern border began at Kiriath Jearim and headed on west to Ephron and to the Springs of Nephtoa. ¹⁶From there it turned east to the foot of the mountain that overlooks the Valley of Hinnom at the north end of the Valley of Rephaim. Then it continued on down the Valley of Hinnom south of the city of Jebus, later called Jerusalem, and from there on to En Rogel. ¹⁷Then the border curved slightly north to En Shemesh and continued on to Geliloth, which faces the Adummim Pass. From there it went to the Stone of Bohan, named after Reuben's son, ¹⁸and continued to the northern slope of Beth Arabah, then down into the Jordan valley. ¹⁹Next it ran to the north of the slope of Beth Hoglah, then to the northern end of the Dead Sea where the Jordan empties into it. This was Benjamin's southern border. ²⁰Its eastern border was the Jordan River. So these were the boundaries of the tribe of Benjamin on all sides.

²¹The cities and towns in Benjamin's territory were Jericho, Beth Hoglah, Emek Keziz, ²²Beth Arabah, Zemaraim, Bethel, ²³Avvim, Parah, Ophrah, ²⁴Chephar Ammoni, Ophni and Geba. Altogether there were twelve cities with their surrounding villages. ²⁵Benjamin's territory also included Gibeon, Ramah, Beeroth, ²⁶Mizpah, Chephirah, Mozah, ²⁷Rekem, Irpeel, Taralah, ²⁸Zela, Haeleph, Jebus (Jerusalem), Gibeah and Kiriath Jearim. Altogether there were fourteen cities and towns with their surrounding villages.

Simeon's Inheritance With Judah

19 The next lot that Joshua drew was for the tribe of Simeon. Its territory lay south of Judah, but it also extended up into a part of Judah that had

not yet been settled. ²The cities assigned to Simeon were: Beersheba or Sheba, Moladah, ³Hazar Shual, Balah, Ezem, ⁴Eltolad, Bethul, Hormah, ⁵Ziklag, Beth Marcaboth, Hazar Susah, ⁶Beth Lebaoth also called Beth Biri, and Sharuhem. Altogether there were thirteen cities with their surrounding villages. ⁷Then there were the cities of Ain, Rimmon, Ether and Ashan—altogether four cities with their villages. ⁸All these cities with their surrounding villages belonged to the families of Simeon as far south as Bealoth or Baalath Beer (also known as Ramah). This was the area assigned to the tribe of Simeon. ⁹Part of their territory came from Judah because the children of Judah had more land than they needed. That's why Simeon's territory extended up into Judah.

The Land of Zebulun

¹⁰The third lot that Joshua drew fell to the tribe of Zebulun. Its territory lay to the north beginning with the city of Sarid. ¹¹The boundary that went west from Sarid extended to Maralah, Dabbesheth and to the ravine this side of Jokneam. ¹²The boundary that went east from Sarid went to Chisloth Tabor, Daberath and Japhia. ¹³It continued eastward to Gath Hepher and Eth Kazin and came out at Rimmon where it turned toward Neah. ¹⁴There the border went north of Neah and on to Hannathon and ended at the Valley of Iphtah El. ¹⁵The territory of Zebulun included the cities and towns of Kattath, Nahalal, Shimron, Idalah and Bethlehem. There were twelve cities with their surrounding villages, including some border cities. ¹⁶All these were given to the families of Zebulun for their inheritance.

The Land of Issachar

¹⁷The fourth lot that Joshua drew was for the tribe of Issachar. ¹⁸Its territory lay southeast of Zebulun and north of Manasseh. It included the cities of Jezreel, Chesulloth, Shunem, ¹⁹Hapharaim, Shion,

Anaharath, ²⁰Rabbith, Kishion, Ebez, ²¹Remeth, En Gannim, En Haddah and Beth Pазzez. ²²The border also took in the cities of Tabor, Shahazumah and Beth Shemesh ending at the Jordan River. Altogether there were sixteen cities with their surrounding villages. ²³All these were given to the families of Issachar for their inheritance.

The Land of Asher

²⁴The fifth lot that was drawn was for the tribe of Asher. ²⁵Its territory was west of Zebulun all along the Mediterranean coast from south of Dor all the way to the north of Tyre. It included the cities of Helkath, Hali, Beten, Achshaph, ²⁶Allammelech, Amad and Mishal with their villages. The western part of the country also included Carmel and Shihor Libnath. ²⁷The eastern border took in Beth Dagon, touched the land of Zebulun by the Valley of Iphtah El and went north to Beth Emek, to Neiel and on to Cabul. ²⁸From there it went to Abdon, Rehob, Hammon, Kanah and north to the city of Sidon. ²⁹The border then went to Ramah and on to the fortified city of Tyre where it turned toward Hosah and came out at the Mediterranean Sea. It included Mahalab, Achzib, ³⁰Ummah, Aphek and Rehob. There were twenty-two cities with surrounding villages, including some border cities. ³¹All these were given to the families of Asher for their inheritance.

The Land of Naphtali

³²The sixth lot that Joshua drew was from the tribe of Naphtali. ³³Its territory was east of Asher and north of Zebulun and Issachar. The border that began at Heleph went from there to the huge oak at Zaanannim, then to Adami Nekeb and Jabneel later called Yemma, Lakkum and the Jordan River. ³⁴From there the boundary ran west to Aznoth Tabor and on to Hukkok. Then it ran along the border of Zebulun to the south, Asher to the west and the Jordan River to the east. The territory to the north belonged to

the Phoenicians. ³⁵The land of Naphtali included the cities of Ziddim, Zer, Hammath, Rakkath, Chinnereth (later called Gennesaret), ³⁶Adamah, Ramah, Hazor, ³⁷Kadesh, Edrei, En Hazor, ³⁸Iron, Migdal El, Horem, Beth Anath and Beth Shemesh. There were nineteen cities with their surrounding villages, not counting some border cities. ³⁹All these were given to the families of Naphtali for their inheritance.

The Land of Dan

⁴⁰The seventh and last lot that Joshua drew was for the tribe of Dan. ⁴¹Its territory was south and west of Ephraim and ran northward along the Mediterranean Sea to the border of Manasseh. It included the cities of Zorah, Eshtaol, Ir Shemesh (also known as Beth Shemesh), ⁴²Shaalabbin, Aijalon, Ithlah, ⁴³Elon, Timnah, Ekron, ⁴⁴Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Baalath, ⁴⁵Jehud, Bene Berak, Gath Rimmon, ⁴⁶Me Jarkon and Rakkon, including the area near Joppa. Altogether there were seventeen cities with their surrounding villages. ⁴⁷The people of Dan faced fierce opposition in taking the land. They did not rely on the Lord, so the powerful Amorites forced them back into the mountains. Later the Danites attacked the city of Leshem (also called Laish) north of Naphtali, captured it, put the people to the sword and claimed it for their own. Then they called the city Dan in honor of their ancestor. ⁴⁸These were the cities that were given to the families of Dan for their inheritance.

Joshua Settles Near Shiloh

⁴⁹When Joshua finished dividing up the land, the people of Israel wanted him to have an extra large inheritance, any one of his choice. ⁵⁰He thanked them but asked only for the city of Timnath Serah (also called Timnath Herez, meaning The Portion That Remains) located in the mountains with his own tribe of Ephraim. It was not the best location, but he chose it to be near Shiloh where the

Lord's Sanctuary was located. The Lord agreed to this, so Joshua rebuilt the city and settled there. ⁵¹These were the territories that Eleazar the high priest, Joshua the son of Nun, and the leaders of Israel assigned to the tribes by drawing lots in the presence of the Lord at Shiloh. Thus they finished dividing up the land among all the tribes of Israel.

Cities of Refuge

20 Then the Lord spoke to Joshua, ²“Tell the people of Israel to pick out six cities as cities of refuge as I told them to do through my servant Moses. ³These cities are for anyone who kills somebody unintentionally, so he can quickly go there and escape from the victim's relatives. ⁴When a man who did something like that gets to one of these cities, he is to stand before the elders at the city gate and state his case. They are to allow him to stay and also give him a place to live. ⁵If any of the victim's relatives come after him, the elders are not to turn the accused over to them, because what he did was done unintentionally. ⁶His case is to be heard before the appointed assembly. If they agree that it wasn't a case of murder, they are to issue an order for him to stay in the city until the death of the high priest. His passing will symbolically atone for the man's guilt, after which the man is free to go home. If they find that he's guilty of murder, they are to turn him loose and the victim's relative who is seeking revenge may put him to death.”

⁷So west of Jordan the people of Israel selected the city of Kedesh in Galilee in the territory of Naphtali, Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and Kiriath Arba (also called Hebron) in the territory of Judah. ⁸On the east side of the Jordan River they picked out Bezer in the territory of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead in the territory of Gad, and Golan in Bashan in the territory of Manasseh. ⁹These were the cities that the children of Israel selected for their people and for the aliens

living among them to run to if they killed someone unintentionally. This way they could escape from the dead man's relatives and stand trial before an impartial assembly.

Cities for the Levites

21 The Levites voiced concern about their inheritance, and the heads of the families went to talk to Eleazar the high priest, Joshua the son of Nun and the leaders of Israel there at Shiloh. ²The Levites said to them, "The Lord told Moses that once we got to the Promised Land, you would give us cities to live in and pasturelands around them for our livestock." ³So the people of Israel gave the Levites cities and pasturelands from their own territories just as the Lord had promised.

⁴The first group chosen by lots to receive such cities were the descendants of Levi through his son Kohath. Those who came from Kohath through Aaron, the high priest, were given thirteen cities from the tribes of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin.

⁵The rest of the descendants of Levi through Kohath were given ten cities from the tribes of Ephraim, Dan and the half-tribe of Manasseh that was this side of Jordan.

⁶The descendants of Levi through his son Gershon were given thirteen cities from the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and the half-tribe of Manasseh the other side of Jordan in Bashan.

⁷The descendants of Levi through his son Merari were given twelve cities from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Zebulun.

⁸Altogether the children of Israel gave the descendants of Levi forty-eight cities with pasturelands. This was as the Lord had instructed them, so as to scatter them among the various tribes.

⁹The children of Judah and Simeon were the first to give cities to the descendants of Levi through Kohath, ¹⁰because they were the descendants of Aaron who served as priests. ¹¹They gave them the city of Kiriath Arba (also called Hebron)

with its pasturelands. The city was situated in the mountains of Judah and was named after Arba, the forefather of Anak, who was the father of giants. ¹²But the surrounding villages with their pasturelands belonged to Caleb, the son of Jephunneh.

¹³In addition to the city of Hebron, which also was a city of refuge, the children of Judah and Simeon gave the descendants of Aaron the cities of Libnah, ¹⁴Jattir, Eshtemoa, ¹⁵Holon, Debir, ¹⁶Ain, Juttah and Beth Shemesh with their pasturelands. Altogether there were nine cities from the tribes of Judah and Simeon. ¹⁷From the tribe of Benjamin the descendants of Levi through Kohath and through Aaron received Gibeon, Geba, ¹⁸Anathoth and Almon with their pasturelands. So there were four cities from Benjamin. ¹⁹Altogether there were thirteen cities with pasturelands that were given to the descendants of Aaron.

²⁰The rest of the descendants of Levi through Kohath were given cities by the tribe of Ephraim. ²¹In the mountains of Ephraim there were Shechem which was also a city of refuge, and Gezer, ²²Kibzaim and Beth Horon with their pasturelands. This gave them four cities. ²³From the tribe of Dan they received Elteke, Gibbethon, ²⁴Aijalon and Gath Rimmon with their pasturelands. This gave them four additional cities. ²⁵From half the tribe of Manasseh they received Tanach (or Aner) and Gath Rimmon (also known as Bileam or Ibleam) with their pasturelands. This gave them two more cities. ²⁶Altogether there were ten cities with pasturelands that were given to the rest of the descendants of Levi through his son Kohath.

²⁷The other half-tribe of Manasseh gave to the descendants of Levi through his son Gershon, Golan in Bashan, which also was a city of refuge, and Be Eshtarah with their pasturelands. This gave them two cities. ²⁸The tribe of Issachar gave them Kishon, Daberath, ²⁹Jarmuth and En Gannim with their pasturelands. This gave them four additional cities. ³⁰The

tribe of Asher gave them Mishal, Abdon,³¹ Helkath and Rehob with their pasturelands. This gave them four more cities.³² The tribe of Naphtali gave them Kedesh in Galilee, a city of refuge, and Hammoth Dor and Kartan with their pasturelands. This gave them three more cities.³³ Altogether the descendants of Levi through Gershon received thirteen cities with pasturelands.

³⁴The tribe of Zebulun gave the descendants of Levi through his son Merari, Jokneam, Kartah,³⁵ Dimnah and Nahalal with their pasturelands—a total of four cities.³⁶ The tribe of Reuben gave them Bezer, a city of refuge, Jahaz,³⁷ Kedemoth and Mephaath with their pasturelands. This gave them four more cities.³⁸ The tribe of Gad gave them Ramoth in Gilead, a city of refuge, and Mahanaim,³⁹ Heshbon and Jazer with their pasturelands. This gave them an additional four cities.⁴⁰ Altogether there were twelve cities which were given to the descendants of Levi through Merari.

⁴¹This made a total of forty-eight cities that were given to the tribe of Levi for their inheritance.⁴² Each of these cities and towns had pasturelands for the livestock of the Levites.

Peace on All Sides

⁴³So the Lord brought the children of Israel into the land He had promised them through their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there.⁴⁴ The Lord also gave them peace on all sides just as He had promised He would. Not one of their enemies attacked them because of all the victories He had given the children of Israel.⁴⁵ The Lord kept every one of His promises that He had made. Not one of them failed.

Eastern Tribes Return Home

22 Then Joshua called together the men of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh and said to them,² “You have done everything that Moses the servant of the Lord asked you to do

and you have carried out all my orders.³ You’ve been away from home for a long time and haven’t deserted your brothers but have helped them possess the land just as the Lord asked you to do.⁴ Now that the tribes have settled in the land that the Lord promised to give them, you are free to go. You’re released from your obligation. Go back home to your families and to the land on the other side of Jordan that Moses gave you as your inheritance.⁵ But be careful to keep the commandments of the Lord that Moses the servant of God gave us. This means to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, to walk in His ways, to obey Him and to hold on to Him and serve Him with all your mind and strength.”⁶ Then Joshua blessed them and sent them home. So they went back to their families and their land and lived in peace.

⁷The tribe of Manasseh had been divided, with only half of this tribe living east of Jordan and the other half living west of Jordan. So it was only the men from half of this tribe living east of Jordan in Bashan that were included with the others in this farewell address. Joshua blessed all the men, and said,⁸ “You’re going back home with large herds of livestock, with lots of gold, silver, bronze and iron, and with huge quantities of cloth and clothing. Share these things with your brothers back home who couldn’t come and fight beside you. They, too, deserve a share of what you took from our enemies.”⁹ So the men of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh left their brothers at Shiloh and returned home to the land that was given to them in Gilead by the Lord through Moses.

The Altar at Jordan

¹⁰When the men got to Gilgal and had crossed Jordan, they stopped and built an altar to the Lord like the one at Shiloh, near the place where the Lord had opened the river to bring them into

Canaan. ¹¹When the other tribes heard about this altar that had been built on the other side of the Jordan River, ¹²they met at Shiloh, ready to go to war against their brothers, because building another altar was forbidden by God.

¹³But before they did so, they sent Phinehas the priest, the son of Eleazar, to the land of Gilead to talk to the leaders of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh to find out what this was all about. ¹⁴They also sent with him ten leading men, one from each tribe, each man the head of a division in his tribe. ¹⁵They crossed Jordan and went into the land of Gilead to talk to the leaders of the three tribes and said to them, ¹⁶“How could you do such a wicked thing against the God of Israel by building an altar for yourselves? This sort of thing destroys Israel’s unity and it’s nothing short of rebellion against God! ¹⁷Have you forgotten our sin at Peor when the Moabite women tempted some of us to worship their gods and how the Lord sent a plague on us? Some of our families are still suffering today from the shame and loss of our loved ones there. Have you forgotten the discipline of the Lord? ¹⁸Are you now doing the same thing? If you turn against the Lord, we’ll all suffer the consequences. ¹⁹Do you feel that your land is not blessed because the Lord’s Sanctuary isn’t here? If so, why did you choose to settle over here? If you are unhappy, why not come and live with us where the Lord’s Sanctuary is, and we’ll be glad to have you. But whatever you do, don’t rebel against the rest of us and the Lord by building a copy of His altar just for yourselves. ²⁰When Achan, the son of Zerah, disobeyed the Lord and took those things out of Jericho and hid them in his tent, the Lord disciplined all of us. Achan wasn’t the only one who was killed that day but also a number of our fighting men who had attacked the city of Ai.”

²¹Then the leaders of the three tribes answered their brothers, ²²“The Lord God is the only God! He is the God of

gods! He knows why we built this altar, and we’ll be glad to tell you. If what we did was an act of rebellion and disobedience, then we deserve to die. ²³If we built that altar for ourselves to offer our sacrifices on or for our grain and fellowship offerings, may the Lord do with us as He sees fit. ²⁴No! That wasn’t the reason for this altar. We were afraid that someday your descendants wouldn’t accept us as a part of Israel or let us worship with you. We did it as a witness to everyone who passes by to let them know that we are one people so no one can say that Reuben, Gad and Manasseh have nothing to do with Israel. ²⁵They might think that the Jordan River is a natural boundary between us. If that happens, your descendants might keep our descendants from worshiping the Lord with them. ²⁶So we decided to build a copy of the Lord’s altar that’s at Shiloh, not in order to have our own place of worship for our offerings and sacrifices. ²⁷Our idea was just the opposite. We built the altar as a witness that we are one people and that we have one faith. We built it for our descendants to let them know that no river can separate us from you and that we will bring our sacrifices and offerings to the Lord at His Sanctuary. This way your children can never say to our children that they are not part of Israel and don’t belong to the Lord. ²⁸If anyone ever brings up the idea of separation, we’ll be able to say to him, ‘Look at that altar. What does it tell you? It’s a copy of the Lord’s altar to let you know that we belong to Him. It’s not a separate place of worship!’ ²⁹God forbid that we should rebel against Him! We want to continue serving our God. We have no intention of having our own altar for our offerings and sacrifices. We plan to worship the Lord at His Sanctuary. We didn’t build the altar as an act of defiance and separateness, neither did we build it to say that now that we’ve helped you win your land, we’ll have nothing more to do with you.”

³⁰When Phinehas the priest and the

leaders of the ten tribes heard what the people of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh had in mind when they built a copy of the Lord's altar, they were very pleased. ³¹Then Phinehas said to the leaders of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, "Now we know that the Lord is still with us and that we are still one people. We were afraid that the Lord might have left us because of your disobedience. But you have not rebelled against the Lord and opened the way for Him to discipline us as we had thought."

³²So Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the high priest, and the other leading men went back home and told the people about the meeting they had had with the leaders of the three tribes in the land of Gilead. ³³When the people heard the report, they were glad. They praised the Lord for the faithfulness of their brothers across the Jordan and never again talked of going to war against them and destroying the land in which Reuben, Gad and Manasseh had settled. ³⁴Then the people of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh named the altar they had built The Witness. And they inscribed on it, "This altar is a witness to our common faith that the Lord is God."

Joshua's Farewell Address

23 Some years after the Lord had brought Israel into the Promised Land and given them peace, Joshua, who was very old, ²called together the elders, leaders, judges and officials of the people and said to them, "I'm now old. ³You have seen what the Lord our God has done for us in defeating our enemies. He has done this for our sake. He is the One who fought for us and gave us the victory. ⁴I have divided the land among all the tribes, that which was taken, as well as the land that still needs to be taken. You've been given a land that goes all the way from the Jordan River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵The Lord will help you gain control over the rest of the nations that are left. He will

drive them out ahead of you as you advance. This is what He has done in the past and what He promises to do again. ⁶So be strong and of good courage and carefully do what is written in the book of the law given us by the Lord through His servant Moses. Don't turn away from it either to the right or to the left.

⁷"Don't develop friendships with the nations that remain among you. There's danger in that. Don't get involved in worshipping their gods or in using their demonic powers to help you accomplish something. You are not to mention the name of their gods in conversation, bow down to them, swear by them or serve them. ⁸You need to hold on to the Lord your God and do what He asks you to do, just as you're doing now. ⁹The Lord has helped you to defeat some powerful people, and no army has been able to stand up against you. ¹⁰The reason that just a few of you can chase and defeat a thousand is because of the Lord, not because of your strength. It's the Lord who's fighting for you. ¹¹So be sure to hold on to the Lord your God and love Him. ¹²If you turn away from Him and begin to worship the gods of these nations and befriend their people and marry their sons and daughters, ¹³you can be sure that the Lord will no longer fight for you. He will not help you drive out the remaining nations. These people will become like a trap and a snare to you. Their wicked practices will be as whips driving you toward more wickedness, and as thorns in your eyes so that you can't see what's wrong. Little by little they'll take back the land the Lord has given you.

¹⁴"My time has come to die, but before I go, I want to remind you that not one of God's promises has failed. He did for us everything He said He would and more. ¹⁵Just as every good promise of the Lord has come true, so will His prediction of coming evil if you turn to other gods. He will not hesitate to allow you to be taken over by your enemies and dispossessed

of the land He has given you. ¹⁶If you break the covenant of the Lord which He made with you, and serve other gods and worship them, the Lord will have to turn away from you and allow you to be driven from the land."

The Covenant Repeated

24 Then Joshua had all the tribes of Israel come to Shechem. He also had the Ark brought there for the occasion, because it was here that God had first made his covenant with Abraham about the land. When all the tribes were there, Joshua asked the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel to come up and present themselves before the Lord. He said to the people, ²"The Lord God of Israel has given me a message for you. This is what He said: 'Long ago your forefathers lived on the other side of the Euphrates River. The family of Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, began to yield to the influence of idolatry. ³So I decided to call Abraham out from there and he obeyed. I took him from the other side of the Euphrates and brought him into Canaan which was then under Egyptian control and gave him a son and many descendants. I gave him Isaac. ⁴To Isaac I gave two sons, Jacob and Esau. I gave Esau the mountains around Edom, but I sent Jacob and his family to Egypt. ⁵The Egyptians afflicted them. So I raised up Moses and Aaron to bring Jacob's descendants out of Egypt. I used plagues until Pharaoh let them go. ⁶When I brought your fathers out of Egypt, you came to the Red Sea. Pharaoh and his army went after your fathers with chariots and horses to take them back. ⁷Then they cried for help, so I put darkness between you and the Egyptians. I opened the Red Sea for you and then closed the waters over the heads of the Egyptians. Although many of you were young, you saw all this with your own eyes. Then I led you to Sinai and on through the wilderness. ⁸I brought you to the land of the Amorites, east of Jordan. They

fought against you but I delivered you and gave them into your hands. I fought against them so you could safely take possession of their land. ⁹When Balak, the son of Zippor and king of Moab, decided to stand his ground and not let you pass, he sent for Balaam, the son of Beor, to come and curse you. ¹⁰But I didn't listen to Balaam and instead made him bless you. This put fear in the heart of the king and you defeated him. ¹¹Then you crossed over Jordan and came to Jericho. The men of Jericho decided to fight against you, as did the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave all of them into your hands. ¹²I sent hornets ahead of you to drive the people out. This drove the Amorite kings into a panic and you were able to take possession of the land. You didn't do all this by yourselves with your swords and bows. ¹³I gave you the land as I promised. You never worked for it or bought it. The cities you live in you never built, and you eat from vineyards and olive groves that you never planted."

¹⁴Then Joshua said, "So be grateful to the Lord for what He has done for you. Respect Him and serve Him with all your heart and soul and mind. Don't worship false gods as your fathers did on the other side of the Euphrates and in Egypt. Serve the Lord. ¹⁵If you can't serve Him and Him alone, then make up your minds whom you will serve. Will it be the gods from beyond the Euphrates, the gods of Egypt or the gods of the Amorites where you live? Make up your minds once and for all. As for me and my family, we've made up our minds. We will serve the Lord!"

¹⁶Then the people said, "We will not leave the Lord nor serve other gods! ¹⁷It was the Lord who brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, and did all these great things to free us. He was the One who led us safely through the wilderness and kept us from being wiped out by our enemies who were all around us. ¹⁸He was the One who

brought us to the Promised Land. So we also have made up our minds that we and our families will serve the Lord. He is our God!"

¹⁹Joshua said, "But you're not capable of serving the Lord in your own strength. You need to recognize how unable you are to do this. God is holy and will accept no other gods. If you disobey Him and rebel, He will not forgive you until you confess your sins and change. ²⁰If you turn to other gods, He will bring disasters on you in the hope of turning you around. Then if you continue in your disobedience and rebellion, He will bring an end to you as His people, even after He has done all this for you." ²¹When the people heard this they said, "No! This will never happen! We have made up our minds to serve the Lord!"

²²Then Joshua said, "You're your own witnesses as to what you just said, that you will serve the Lord and Him only." The people answered, "We are our own witnesses." ²³"If that's so," Joshua responded, "then get rid of those foreign gods you're still carrying around and give yourselves totally to the Lord." ²⁴The people answered, "We promise to give ourselves totally to the Lord and to worship Him and Him alone. We promise to always serve and obey Him." ²⁵Then Joshua made a covenant with the people that day at Shechem and gave them laws that would help them stay close to the Lord. ²⁶He wrote all these down in a book, then took a large stone that was nearby and set it at the foot of a huge oak

tree close to where the priest had set the Ark of the Lord. ²⁷He said, "Take a good look. This stone is our witness. It heard what the Lord said and everything that we said. It will stay here as a witness to keep you from going against your word and turning away from the Lord." ²⁸Then Joshua blessed the people and sent them home, each to his own land.

Joshua Dies and Is Buried in Ephraim

²⁹Soon afterward, Joshua, the son of Nun and servant of the Lord, died. He was one hundred and ten years old. ³⁰The people buried him on his own land at Timnath Serah which is in the mountains of Ephraim just north of Mount Gaash.

³¹The Israelites faithfully served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the older leaders who were with him and who had seen all the things the Lord had done for His people.

³²Now the body of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought with them out of Egypt and had carried with them all these years, was finally buried. They buried it at Shechem on the land that Jacob had bought years before from the sons of Hamor, father of Shechem, for a hundred pieces of silver. This was the land that was part of the inheritance of the sons of Joseph.

³³Soon after this, Eleazar, the high priest and son of Aaron, also died. They buried him at Gibeah, on the land near the city where his son Phinehas lived, in the mountains of Ephraim.

JUDGES

The Conquest of Canaan Continues

1 After the death of Joshua, the children of Israel said to the Lord, "Which tribe should be the first to go and fight for us against the Canaanites?" ²The Lord answered, "Judah should go first. I will go with them and give the land into their hands." ³Then the men of Judah talked to the people of Simeon, who lived just south of them and said, "Come and help us fight our enemies. With your help we'll be better able to take possession of our territory. Then when it's your turn to fight, we'll help you conquer your territory."

⁴So Judah and Simeon joined forces and went into battle, and the Lord gave the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hands, and they defeated ten thousand men at the battle of Bezek. ⁵During the engagement, Adoni Bezek, the king of Bezek, personally led his men into battle, but he was still defeated. ⁶When he saw that he had lost, he tried to get away, but the Israelites caught him and cut off his thumbs and his big toes so that he couldn't hold a sword or run. ⁷Then Adoni Bezek said, "I've defeated seventy kings in my life and cut off their thumbs and big toes and then watched as they tried to pick up the food I threw to them under my table. Now the Lord has done to me as I have done to them." They brought him to the city of Jebus (later called Jerusalem) where he lived until his death.

⁸It was after the battle of Bezek that the men of Judah attacked the city of Jebus, killed many of its people, then set a part of the city on fire and left. ⁹Then the men of Judah turned and fought the Canaanites in the mountains, in the foothills and in the Negeb, the dry and arid land in the south. ¹⁰They fought the Canaanites who lived in Hebron, formerly called Kiriath Arba, and defeated the people of Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmai, the descendants of three families of giants.

¹¹Caleb and his men fought the people

of Debir, formerly Kiriath Sepher. ¹²The city was difficult to take, so Caleb said, "The one who breaks through the defenses and leads his men to take the city, I will offer him my daughter Achsah in marriage." ¹³Then Othniel, the son of Caleb's younger brother Kenaz, broke through the defenses and led his men to take the city. So Caleb offered his youngest daughter to him in marriage and she agreed. ¹⁴Now Achsah had asked Othniel for permission to ask her father for a certain field as an additional wedding gift. A few days later she got on her donkey and went to visit her father. He came out to meet her and said, "What can I do for you?" ¹⁵She said, "Father, as my inheritance, you have given me some land in the south where it's dry and arid. If you want to give me an additional wedding present, give me some springs of water to irrigate my fields." So Caleb gave his daughter Achsah two fields with springs, one above the dry land and one below.

¹⁶About this time the descendants of Moses's father-in-law decided to leave the city of Jericho with its palm trees and move south to the arid part of Judah near the city of Arad and live among the Amalekites. ¹⁷The troops of Judah and Simeon continued their campaign and attacked the Canaanite city of Zephath and totally destroyed it. They renamed it Hormah, meaning Devoted to Destruction.

¹⁸The men of Judah continued on alone and headed north along the coast of the Mediterranean, taking the cities of Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron with their surrounding villages. ¹⁹The Lord was with the men of Judah as they took the land in the mountains and some of the cities along the coast. After that, they headed for the cities of the plains but they could not drive the people out because the people defended themselves with chariots of iron. The men of Judah had preserved the altars of Baal, so the Lord left them to their own devices and they were

unable to defeat the people of the plains. ²⁰As Moses had promised over forty years before, the city of Hebron was given to Caleb, who defeated the descendants of three families of giants. ²¹In the meantime the men of Benjamin failed to dislodge the people left in the city of Jebus because they, too, had preserved the altars of Baal, and the Lord did not help them.

²²When the troops of Ephraim and Manasseh, the descendants of Joseph, attacked Bethel, the Lord went with them and they took the city. ²³Before their attack, they sent some of their men to spy out the fortifications of Bethel, formerly called Luz. ²⁴When the men saw someone coming out of the city, they took hold of him and said, "Tell us how to get past these heavy fortifications and we'll be kind to you." ²⁵So he told them. Then they attacked the city and spared no one except the man who had helped them and his family. ²⁶He and his family moved to the land of the Hittites and built a city there. They called it Luz and its name was never changed.

Conquest Not Completed

²⁷But Manasseh did not take the cities of Beth Shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, Meggido and the surrounding villages. So the Canaanites continued to live there. ²⁸Even after the children of Israel became strong, they did not drive out the Canaanites from the land but used them as cheap labor and forced these people to work for them. ²⁹Nor did Ephraim take the city of Gezer, so the Canaanites continued to live there too.

³⁰Neither did Zebulun take the cities of Kitron or Nahalol, so the Canaanites continued to live there and were forced to work for Zebulun. ³¹The tribe of Asher did the same thing. They couldn't conquer the cities of Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphek or Rehob. ³²So the descendants of Asher lived among the Canaanites and there were so many of them that the people of Asher couldn't

force anyone to work for them.

³³The people of Naphtali couldn't take the cities of Beth Shemesh or Beth Anath so they, too, had to live among a large population of Canaanites, but they succeeded in forcing some of them to be their servants. ³⁴The children of Dan tried to take the plains, but the Amorites who lived there drove them back into the hills. ³⁵So the Amorites continued to live in the cities of Aijalon, Shaalbim and Mount Heres. But when the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh grew stronger, they did force some of the Amorites to work for them. ³⁶The original territory of the Amorites had extended south, all the way to the huge rock by the Akrabbim or Scorpion Pass and on to Sela beyond the Dead Sea.

Israel's Disobedience

2 The Angel of the Lord, who had been with the children of Israel in Gilgal, appeared to them in Bochim and said to the leaders, "I am the One who brought you out of Egypt and into the land I promised to your forefathers. I told them I would always be merciful to you and would never break my covenant. ²I made this same agreement with you. You were not to enter into any kind of treaty or agreement with the people of the land. You were not to worship their gods but to break down all their altars and destroy them. But you did not listen. You have disobeyed me. How could you do this? ³That's the reason I could not help you drive out the rest of the Canaanites. They will be a constant thorn in your flesh. You will not be able to escape the enticement of their worship. Your love for their gods will increase and you'll be drawn to them even more than you are now."

⁴When the children of Israel heard what the Angel of the Lord said, they wept. ⁵That's why they called the place Bochim, meaning The Place Of Weeping. They also offered sacrifices to the Lord and repented of their sins. ⁶After Joshua had led the people in renewing the covenant, he

sent them away so they could finish taking possession of the land.

After the Death of Joshua

⁷And the people served the Lord as long as Joshua and the older men lived who had seen what the Lord had done for Israel. ⁸Joshua, the son of Nun and servant of the Lord, was one hundred and ten years old when he died. ⁹They buried him at Timnath Heres in the mountains of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash, on the land that was his.

Israel's Unfaithfulness

¹⁰After all the elders and leaders who had been with Joshua died, a generation grew up who forgot all about the kindness of the Lord and didn't appreciate the things He had done for Israel. ¹¹They began to worship Baal throughout the land of Israel, committing great wickedness against the Lord. ¹²Soon they turned away from the Lord altogether and in their hearts forgot how the God of their fathers had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and worshiped many gods which they learned about from the people. ¹³They not only worshiped Baal, the god whom they believed could make their fields more fertile, but also Ashtoreth, the nude goddess of love and war.

¹⁴So the Lord removed His protection from Israel, allowed robbers to attack their villages and take their possessions, and permitted their enemies to attack and destroy their cities. Whenever Israel attempted to retaliate, the Lord did not help them. So they were unable to stand up against any of their enemies. ¹⁵When the people did gather enough courage to fight, they lost, because the Lord was not on their side, just as He had said. But the children of Israel wouldn't listen and suffered greatly.

¹⁶Occasionally the Lord would raise up leaders from among the people who were His champions. They were called judges and would save Israel from their attackers. ¹⁷But the people refused to ac-

cept these victories as reminders of what the Lord could do for them. They continued to lust after other gods and worship them. They would not listen to the leaders the Lord sent them. Their forefathers under Joshua had obeyed the Lord, but they refused and went their own way.

¹⁸Sometimes the Lord would raise up a judge for them and the people would turn to the Lord and serve Him throughout the lifetime of that judge. Then the Lord would reach out to His people in compassion and deliver them from their oppression. ¹⁹But when the judge died, the people would return to idol worship and the next generation would become even more corrupt than their parents had been, adding even more gods and goddesses. They would stubbornly cling to their ways no matter what the Lord did to get their attention.

²⁰The Lord was very displeased and said to them, "Because my people insist on having their own way, breaking the covenant that I made with their ancestors and refusing to listen to me, ²¹I will not drive out any of the local inhabitants that Joshua left in the land when he died. ²²I will let these local people test Israel's love for me to see whether they will obey me as their fathers did when they first settled here."

²³So the Lord permitted the people whom Joshua had not driven out to remain in the land, for the children of Israel did not put their faith in Him to help them in their troubles. Because of their disobedience, He could not give Israel the victories He had planned for them.

Canaanites Not Driven Out

3 So the Lord left some of the original people in the land to test the faith of Israel, particularly the faith of those who had not been through the early wars of Canaan. ²He gave this new generation a taste of war and hardship so they would appreciate the peace and prosperity He had given them before. ³The people who were left in the land after Joshua's death

were five Philistine rulers and their people, the various pockets of Canaanites, the Sidonians and the Hivites living in the Lebanese mountains from Mount Baal Hermon in the south to the Hamath Pass in the north. ⁴These people continually tested Israel's faith in the Lord to find out if they loved Him and would obey Him by keeping the commandments He had given them. ⁵So it was that the Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁶They worshiped their gods, married their women and gave their own daughters in marriage to their sons.

Othniel's Leadership

⁷The Israelites continued to do evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot all about Him and eagerly served the wooden poles of Baal or his counterpart Asherah. ⁸The Lord was deeply hurt over Israel's idolatry. So He decided to discipline them and wake them up to what they were doing. He allowed Cushan the Terrible, from upper Mesopotamia, to conquer part of Israel and subjugate the people for eight years. ⁹When these Israelites cried to the Lord for help, the Lord heard their prayers and raised up Othniel, the son of Caleb's younger brother Kenaz, to free the Israelites. ¹⁰The Spirit of the Lord came upon him and gave him wisdom, and he became the people's judge and leader. He raised up an army to fight against Cushan, and the Lord gave him the victory. ¹¹So that part of Israel was free again and all of Israel had peace for the next forty years until Othniel died.

Ehud's Leadership

¹²Then the Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord allowed Eglon, king of the Moabites, to subjugate another part of Israel. ¹³Eglon joined forces with the Ammonites and the Amalekites, and together they defeated the Israelites and took possession

of Jericho, the City of Palms. ¹⁴Eglon, the king of Moab, subjugated that part of Israel for eighteen years.

¹⁵Again the children of Israel cried to the Lord for help and the Lord heard their prayers. He raised up Ehud, the son of Gera, a left-handed man from the tribe of Benjamin, to be their leader. The people asked him to go to Eglon with the tax money the king had demanded. ¹⁶Ehud had made a double-edged sword about eighteen inches long, which he strapped to his right upper leg under his robe. ¹⁷He insisted on giving the tax money to Eglon personally, who was a very fat man. ¹⁸As soon as the tax monies were brought in, Ehud sent the men home who had helped him carry it. Then he also left.

¹⁹But at the boundary stones near the city of Gilgal, he turned back to give Eglon a message. He was ushered into Eglon's presence and said, "I have a personal message from the Lord for the king, but it is a private message." Then the king shouted, "Quiet!" and told everyone to leave the room. ²⁰So the two men were alone in the summer room on the palace roof. As the king stood up, Ehud quietly said, "I have a message from the Lord." ²¹As he said this he stepped forward and with his left hand reached under his robe to his right thigh, which caused no suspicion on the part of the king for he thought that Ehud was reaching for the message. But Ehud pulled out his sword and with one quick thrust plunged it into the king's abdomen. ²²It went in so deep that the fat closed over the handle, and the blade came out the king's back. Since Ehud couldn't draw the sword out he just left it there. ²³Then he quickly stepped outside, locked the double doors of the upper room behind him and escaped.

²⁴A short time later the king's attendants went up to his room and found the doors still locked. They said to themselves, "The king must be taking care of his bodily needs, and that's why he's locked the doors." ²⁵They waited until they were embarrassed to be away from

the king for so long. Then they took the key, quietly unlocked the doors, went in and saw the king lying dead on the floor.

²⁶While they had waited, Ehud escaped. He left the city, passing by the boundary stones, and headed for Seirah. ²⁷When he got to the mountains of Ephraim, he sounded the ram's horn. Then the Israelites came down from the hills with Ehud leading them into battle. ²⁸"Follow me!" he shouted, "The Lord has given the Moabites into our hands." So the men of Israel followed him and captured the places where the Jordan River could be easily crossed to prevent the Moabites from escaping. ²⁹They attacked the Moabites, and that day they killed ten thousand men, all very strong, hand-picked troops. ³⁰So Israel broke the power of the Moabites over them and there was peace in the land for the next eighty years.

Shamgar's Valor

³¹After Ehud died, Shamgar, the son of Anath, took over the leadership of Israel. He single-handedly killed six hundred Philistines in a narrow gorge with a sharp eight-foot long ox prod and freed a portion of Israel from their enemies.

Deborah Leads Out

4 After both Ehud and Shamgar had died, the children of Israel again forgot about the Lord and did evil in His sight. ²So the Lord let Jabin, one of the Canaanite kings who ruled from Hazor, subjugate part of Israel. The officer in charge of Jabin's troops was Sisera, who lived in the city of Harosheth Haggoiim, not far from Megiddo. ³Sisera had nine hundred iron chariots under his command, so he was able to take over that whole area of Israel and bring it under the control of Jabin. And Jabin, the Canaanite, was very cruel to the children of Israel and oppressed them for the next twenty years. So they cried for help.

⁴During this time Deborah, the prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, gov-

erned Israel. ⁵She lived in the mountains of Ephraim and usually held court out in the open under a huge palm tree between the cities of Ramah and Bethel. The people called this tree The Palm of Deborah. ⁶Deborah sent for Barak, the son of Abinoam, who lived in Kedesh, in the land of Naphtali, part of the territory of Israel that Jabin the Canaanite took. When Barak came, she said to him, "This is what the Lord God of Israel said, 'I want you to call ten thousand men from Naphtali and Zebulun to meet you at Mount Tabor in the land of Issachar. ⁷I will see to it that Sisera takes his chariots and troops down the dry bed of the Kishon River to get ready to attack you. But I will deliver him into your hands.'"

⁸Barak said to her, "If you go with me, then I'll have victory just as Moses and the Israelites had victory when the Ark was with them in the past. But if you don't go, then I won't go." ⁹Then Deborah said, "All right, I'll go with you. But because of your lack of faith in the words of the Lord, the credit of killing Sisera will go to a woman and not to you." So Deborah went with him to Kadesh. ¹⁰From there Barak sent out a call for ten thousand men from Zebulun and Naphtali to fight Sisera. They followed him to Mount Tabor and Deborah went with them.

¹¹A man named Heber decided to leave Judah and move north to settle in Naphtali. He was a descendant of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, who along with other relatives of Moses had first settled in Judah. He pitched his tents near the great oak tree at Zaanannim, which is not far from the city of Kadesh.

¹²When Sisera heard that Barak, the son of Abinoam, had gathered ten thousand troops at Mount Tabor, ¹³he took his nine hundred chariots and his entire army and marched from Harosheth Haggoiim to the Kishon River.

¹⁴Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This day the Lord will give you the victory over Sisera. Our God has already gone ahead of you." So Barak left Mount

Tabor, took his ten thousand men and marched out to battle. ¹⁵They attacked Sisera and the Lord helped them throw Sisera's chariots and army into total confusion. When Sisera saw that he had lost the battle, he left his chariot and fled on foot into the nearby mountains. ¹⁶Barak pursued the chariots and the army all the way back to Harosheth Haggoyim. All of Sisera's men were killed by the sword. Not one was left alive.

¹⁷Sisera escaped and headed north for about thirty miles until he came to the tent of Heber and his wife Jael. The family had been on good terms with the king of Hazor. ¹⁸Jael welcomed Sisera and said to him, "Sir, come on in. Don't be afraid. I'm alone." So he went in, found a corner and laid down, exhausted. She went over and covered him with a rug. ¹⁹He said to her, "I'm very thirsty. Could I have a drink of water?" So she opened a leather bag of milk and gave him a drink. This made him feel welcome and she covered him again. ²⁰Before he went to sleep, he quietly said to her, "Don't go away. Stay in the doorway of the tent and if anyone comes and asks you if someone is hiding here, tell him, 'No.'" ²¹When Jael, Heber's wife, was sure that Sisera was asleep, she took one of the tent stakes and a hammer and quietly approached him. He was totally exhausted and slept soundly. As he lay on his side, she gently positioned the tent stake on his temple and with one quick blow drove it through his head. Then she struck it again and drove it into the ground, and Sisera died.

²²A short time later, Barak came by in hot pursuit of Sisera. Jael was glad to see him and said, "Come, let me show you the man you're looking for." Barak went into the tent and Jael uncovered the body of Sisera who lay there dead, nailed to the ground with a tent stake in his head.

²³So the Lord gave Barak victory over Jabin, king of Hazor, and Sisera, his commander. ²⁴The Israelites continued to bear down on Jabin until they com-

pletely destroyed him and were free from his oppression.

The Song of Deborah

5 That day Deborah, the prophetess, and Barak, the son of Abinoam, praised the Lord and sang this victory song: ²"When the leaders in Israel took the lead, the people gladly gave of themselves. Praise the Lord!

³"Listen all you kings! Give us your attention all you rulers! We will sing to the Lord. We will play music to the God of Israel.

⁴"The Lord went before us as He did in the mountainous region of Sinai when our fathers came out of Egypt. He marched ahead of us as He did when we came into the region of Edom. He shook Mount Tabor. He sent mighty rains from heaven. ⁵Just as the mountains shook before the Lord at Sinai, so the earth shook at the presence of the God of Israel against Sisera.

⁶"In the days of Shamgar, the son and warrior of Anath, and in the days of Jael, the streets in Israel were empty. Merchants no longer came through the land and travelers took the back roads home. ⁷Life in the villages disappeared. The people were plundered and fled to the fortified cities for protection. Then the Lord raised up Deborah, a prophetess, who was like a loving mother to Israel.

⁸War had come to the land because Israel had gone after other gods. Cities came under siege and there was fighting in the gates. Not a spear or a shield was found among forty thousand men in Israel. They were forbidden to make weapons of war. ⁹Our hearts are with the men who risked their lives and willingly followed their commanders. Praise the Lord for their faith and courage!

¹⁰"Those who can afford to ride on white donkeys with saddle blankets, and those who must walk wherever you go, listen! ¹¹Do you know what the people are saying by the watering places? They talk about what the Lord has done for

Israel. They tell each other about the victories of the Lord and the courage of their men in battle.

¹²They say, 'Deborah gave us a new song and Barak led our armies to victory!' ¹³Then the faithful ones gathered around our leaders. The people of Israel came to Barak ready to go to war. ¹⁴Men of courage came from Ephraim and Benjamin. Captains came from Manasseh, and commanders came from Zebulun. ¹⁵The leaders in Issachar listened to Deborah and the men of Issachar rallied around Barak. But the people of Reuben were divided; they couldn't make up their minds. ¹⁶Why did the men of Reuben stay home with the sheep? Why did Reuben's leaders sit around their campfires talking about whether to come or not? ¹⁷The tribe of Gad stayed on the other side of Jordan. And Dan joined the Phoenicians in sailing the seas. Asher stayed at home to enjoy life on the coast. ¹⁸But the people of Zebulun were ready to lay down their lives to be free, and the men of Naphtali were ready to fight to throw off the yoke.

¹⁹At Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo, the kings of Canaan fought alongside Sisera, but they were defeated. That ended their raids into Israel to carry away the spoils of war. ²⁰The forces of nature fought against them. The Lord of heaven fought against their armies. ²¹The Kishon River rushed down upon them and swept them all away. March on, men of Israel; be courageous and strong.

²²'Our enemies came on horses whose hooves shook the ground. ²³There is a curse on the inhabitants of Meroz, said the Angel of the Lord, because they did not assist their brothers in the fight against Sisera, though they were right there.

²⁴Blessed be Jael, the wife of Heber, the Kenite, the most courageous of women who live in tents. ²⁵Sisera asked for water and she gave him milk. She served him with a bowl fit for nobles.

²⁶She was not afraid, but used a tent stake and hammer to strike down Sisera. She pierced his temples and nailed him to the ground. ²⁷He struggled to free himself, but could not get up. Then he sank down in front of her and died. He lay dead at her feet.

²⁸'At home, his mother waited for him. She looked out the window and wondered why his chariot was delayed, why his horses were so slow in coming. ²⁹Her wisest ladies tried to comfort her. She believed them and said to herself, ³⁰'He'll be coming soon. He has found more villages to plunder and more spoils to take. He has found a girl or two for each of his trusted men. He has taken rich cloth for himself and embroidered dresses for me that are fit for a queen.'

³¹'Lord, may all your enemies perish like Sisera. But may those who love you shine as the rising sun.' So there was peace in Israel for the next forty years.

Gideon and the Midianites

6 Again the children of Israel forgot what the Lord had done for them and did evil in His sight. So the Lord allowed the Midianites to overrun a large part of the country and oppress the children of Israel for seven years. ²The Midianites were so cruel and oppressive that many Israelites went to live in caves and mountain hideouts. ³When the children of Israel planted their crops, the Midianites, who never settled in one place, would ask the Amalekites and other desert tribes to join them in plundering Israelite villages. ⁴They would set up camp and destroy the produce of the land all the way from Gaza in the south past the Sea of Galilee in the north. They left nothing untouched, killing all the sheep, donkeys and cattle they could find. ⁵They would swarm over the land like locusts, leaving it stripped. There were so many of them it was impossible to count them. They came with their camels and tents and ruined the land wherever they went. ⁶Israel was helpless against such numbers. So they

turned to the Lord and cried for help.

⁷The Lord answered their prayers because they were terribly oppressed by the Midianites. ⁸Through a prophet He sent them this message: The God of Israel says, "I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. ⁹I not only took you out of the hands of the Egyptians, but also gave you victory over the people who fought you in the land of Canaan. I drove them out before you and gave you their land as an inheritance. ¹⁰I told you that I am the Lord your God and that you should not worship other gods, but you didn't listen to me."

Gideon and the Angel of the Lord

¹¹Early one morning, the Angel of the Lord took on the appearance of a man and sat on a rock under an oak tree on the property belonging to Joash the Abiezrite. Nearby, his son Gideon was threshing grain inside an old dug-out winepress to keep from being detected by the Midianites. ¹²The Angel of the Lord said, "Gideon, the Lord is with you. You're a brave and mighty man."

¹³Gideon was startled but saw what looked like a fellow Israelite. So he said, "If the Lord is with us, then why has He let the Midianites overrun our country? Where are all His mighty acts that our fathers told us about? The Lord isn't with us. He's left us. That's why we're being overrun by these Midianites."

¹⁴The Angel of the Lord answered, "Go and save the children of Israel from the Midianites. Am I not the One who is sending you?"

¹⁵"But Sir," Gideon said, "how can I save Israel? My family is the smallest one in Manasseh. No one listens to us. Besides that, I'm the one that's least thought of among all my relatives." ¹⁶The Angel of the Lord said, "I'll go with you and you'll strike down every one of the Midianites as if they were one man." ¹⁷Gideon spoke up, "Are you really an angel of the Lord? Give me a sign so I can know who you are.

¹⁸Stay right there until I come back with an offering." He answered, "I'll stay here. Go and get your offering."

¹⁹So Gideon got a young goat, killed it, cooked its meat and also took flour and baked some unleavened bread. It was some time before everything was ready. Then he put some of the meat and bread in a basket and some of the broth in a pot and took them to the visitor. ²⁰The Angel said, "Take the meat and the bread and lay them on this rock and pour the broth over them." Gideon did as he was told. ²¹Then the Angel of the Lord touched the meat and bread with the stick in His hand, and fire came out of the rock and consumed them. Then He disappeared. ²²Gideon was convinced. He now knew that the Man he had been talking to was the Lord. He fell on his knees and said, "O Sovereign Lord! I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face and I'm still alive! How can this be?"

²³Then the Lord spoke to Gideon, "Don't be afraid. I'm still here. You're not going to die." ²⁴That same day Gideon built a small altar there and called it The Altar of the Lord of Peace. For years the altar stood there, not far from the town of Ophrah in the land belonging to the descendants of Abiezer.

²⁵That night the Lord spoke to Gideon again, "Take your father's second bull, the one that's seven years old. Pull down the altar to Baal that belongs to your father and the wooden pole next to it that honors the fertility goddess Asherah. ²⁶Build an altar for me on that same hill with layers of natural stone. Use the wood from the Asherah pole to make a fire and then offer the bull as an offering to me." So the next morning Gideon told his father what the Lord wanted him to do, and his father agreed. ²⁷That night Gideon took ten of their farmhands and did exactly what the Lord had told him. He was afraid to do it during the day because the rest of the family and the townspeople might try to stop him.

Gideon Destroys the Altar Built for Baal

²⁸The next morning when the people got up, they saw that Baal's altar was gone, as was the pole of the goddess Asherah. They also noticed that a new altar had been built and that a bull had been offered on it. ²⁹They said to each other, "Who did this?" When they checked it out, they found that Gideon, the son of Joash, had done it. ³⁰So the men of the town went to Joash and said to him, "Tell your son Gideon to come out. He needs to die for what he has done. He pulled down the altar we built to Baal and cut down the pole we put up for the goddess Asherah."

³¹But Joash believed that the Lord had visited his son Gideon, so he stood up for him and said, "Why are you defending Baal? If Baal is a true god, he should be able to defend himself. Are you trying to save him? Let's wait until tomorrow morning. If by then Baal can't defend himself, then he's not a real god. And anyone who fights for him will be put to death." ³²That day the people called Gideon, Jerub Baal, meaning The Man Who Challenged Baal to Defend Himself, because of what his father Joash had said.

³³In the meantime, the Midianites, the Amalekites and some other desert tribes decided to join forces and make another raid on Israel. They crossed the Jordan River and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. ³⁴The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon. He blew the ram's horn and called together the men of Abiezer for battle. ³⁵He also sent messengers throughout the tribe of Manasseh, inviting their men to join him. Then he called on the tribes of Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali asking their men to come and fight the Midianites.

The Fleece

³⁶Gideon still had doubts in his mind and said to the Lord, "Lord, how can I fight against these well-armed Midianites? I'm not strong enough to save Israel. How do I know you'll be with me?"

³⁷Tonight I'm going to lay this piece of wool outside on the threshing floor. If by tomorrow morning the wool is wet and the ground around it is dry, then I'll know that you'll be with me."

³⁸The next morning Gideon got up and went out to see if the piece of wool was wet or dry. He noticed that the ground of the threshing floor was dry, but when he picked up the piece of wool and squeezed it, he got enough water from it to fill a small bowl. ³⁹As he thought about this, he decided that it wasn't a good test because wool always absorbs moisture. So he said, "Lord, please don't be upset with me. Let me ask for one more sign. This time make the ground around the wool wet and the piece of wool totally dry." ⁴⁰So that's what happened. The next morning the ground was wet with heavy dew and the piece of wool was totally dry.

Gideon's Force Reduced to Three Hundred

7 Early in the morning, Gideon, together with volunteers from different tribes, pitched camp at Harod's Spring. The Midianites were camped north of them in the valley below a hill called Moreh.

²Then the Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to use in defeating the Midianites. If I give you the victory with this many men, the people of Israel will think that they have done it. ³Say to the men, 'Anyone who is afraid and thinks we can't defeat the Midianites can go home now.'" About twenty-two thousand men left and about ten thousand stayed.

⁴The Lord spoke to Gideon again, "You still have too many men. March them down across the brook, and I'll sift them out for you. I'll tell you which ones should go with you and which ones should go home." ⁵So Gideon marched his men down to the brook, and the Lord said to him, "Stop and watch how the men drink. Some will hastily scoop up water with cupped hands like a dog lapping water with its tongue, all the time

watching for the enemy. Others will get down on their knees, put their mouths to the water and leisurely drink.”⁶At the brook only three hundred men drank from cupped hands. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.⁷Then the Lord said to Gideon, “To save Israel I’ll use the three hundred who drank water in cupped hands. Send the rest of the men home.”⁸So Gideon ordered all the men who had gotten down on their knees to drink to leave their food supplies and their rams’ horns and go home. With the three hundred, he climbed the hill close to the Midianites who were camped in the valley.

⁹That night the Lord said to Gideon, “Get up and attack the Midianites. I will give them into your hands.”¹⁰But if you’re still afraid, then go down to their camp with Purah, your servant, and listen to what they are saying.¹¹What you’ll hear will give you courage.” So Gideon and Purah made their way down the valley to the edge of the enemy camp.

¹²The Midianites, Amalekites and the other eastern tribesmen filled the valley as thick and tight as locusts. They had so many camels that a person could hardly count them, like grains of sand on the seashore.¹³Gideon and Purah made their way to the edge of the camp just as one of the Midianites was telling his tentmate the dream he had had. He said to his friend, “Are you awake?” His friend said, “Yes, why do you ask?” He said, “Because I just had a strange dream. I saw a huge round loaf of barley bread come rolling down the mountain right into our camp. It hit our tent with such force that it knocked it down, and it fell over our heads and covered us up.”¹⁴His friend said, “This can mean only one thing. Gideon and his men will come rushing down the mountain and overrun our camp. God is going to give our whole camp into his hands.”

¹⁵When Gideon and his servant heard the dream and the meaning given to it by the Midianite, they bowed their heads to

the ground and worshiped the God of Israel. Then they returned to camp. Gideon quietly woke his men and said, “Get up! The Lord is about to give the Midianites into our hands.”¹⁶He divided them into three groups of one hundred each and had each man take a ram’s horn and a clay jar with a smoldering torch inside.¹⁷He said to them, “We’ll quietly make our way to the edge of the enemy camp, and when we get there, watch me and my men and do what we do.”¹⁸We’ll surround the camp from three sides. When we blow our rams’ horns, then you blow yours so the sound will come from three directions at once, and then shout, “For the Lord! For Gideon!”

¹⁹So Gideon and his one hundred quietly made their way across the valley to the edge of the Midianite camp. It was about midnight when they got there, just after the changing of the guards. Then Gideon gave the signal and his men blew their rams’ horns, smashed their jars and waved their smoldering torches in the air which then burst into flames.²⁰As soon as the other two groups heard Gideon blow his ram’s horn, they blew theirs, broke their jars and waved their torches in the air, which also burst into flames. They held their flaming torches high with their left hands and had their rams’ horns in their right hands. Then they shouted, “A sword for the Lord! A sword for Gideon!”²¹All of Gideon’s men held their position, but the Midianites and the others broke into a panic, yelling and screaming as they ran.²²Then the Lord caused many of the Midianites and their allies to turn on each other, because they thought they were being attacked by Gideon. The rest of the Midianites ran in the direction of Beth Shittah toward Zererah. They ran as far as the border city Abel Meholah near Tabbath.²³Men from Naphtali, Asher and Manasseh were called to help go after the Midianites.

²⁴Gideon also sent messengers to the men of Ephraim, saying, “Come quickly and help us attack the Midianites! Cover

the southern fords in the Jordan River up to Beth Barah." The men from the mountains of Ephraim responded to Gideon's order and hurried to help him. ²⁵They stopped a large number of the Midianites at the Jordan before they could cross, and in the process captured two Midianite generals, Oreb and Zeeb, also known as Raven and Wolf. They executed them on the spot, one by a huge rock, later called Raven's Rock, and the other by a winepress, later called Wolf's Winepress. The Ephraimites sent the severed heads of the two generals to Gideon, who by now was already on the other side of the Jordan River.

Gideon Frees Israel From the Midianites

8 The Ephraimites said to Gideon, "Why didn't you ask us to help you when you first went out to fight the Midianites? Why did you wait to call on us?" They were very angry with him. ²Gideon answered, "What I did in this battle was nothing compared to what you did. The last part of the battle was much more important, just as grapes grown in Ephraim are much better than the grapes my family can grow. ³God gave Oreb and Zeeb, the two Midianite generals into your hands, not into mine." When the Ephraimites heard Gideon's response, their anger dissolved and they were satisfied.

⁴Gideon and his three hundred men were already exhausted when they came to the Jordan River, yet they crossed over and continued to chase the Midianites. ⁵At Succoth Gideon said to the city fathers, "Please give my men some bread. They're exhausted but we need to go after the two Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna." ⁶But the city fathers said, "You haven't captured them yet. How do we know that you can catch Zebah and Zalmunna? Why should we feed your troops and endanger our relationship with the two kings?"

⁷Gideon said, "After all you saw the Lord do for us, you still doubt? You just

saw fifteen thousand Midianites on the run! If that's how you feel, we'll go on, but after the Lord gives Zebah and Zalmunna into our hands, we'll be back and I'll have all of you whipped with branches from your own thorn trees." ⁸Then Gideon and his weary men pushed on ahead to Penuel, several miles up the Jabbok Brook. He asked the city fathers there for bread, but they gave him the same answer as the people of Succoth. They also ridiculed them. ⁹Gideon said to them, "After the Lord gives us victory over the Midianites, we'll come back and tear down this fortified tower that you put so much trust in."

¹⁰Now Zebah and Zalmunna with their force of fifteen thousand were hiding out at Karkor on the edge of the desert. That's all who were left because the one hundred twenty thousand men who had made up the Midianite coalition had already been killed. ¹¹Gideon decided not to attack the two princes head-on, but made a wide circle around their camp following the trade route east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and then launched a surprise attack. ¹²Zeba and Zalmunna, the two kings, tried to get away, but Gideon and his men went after them and captured them. Then the Midianites panicked. Those who did fight were killed. The rest scattered in all directions.

¹³The Lord had given Gideon's men extra strength that day, but now they were totally exhausted. So after they had eaten from the supplies of the Midianites and rested, they returned with the two kings to Succoth by way of Heres Pass. ¹⁴On their way to Succoth, Gideon captured a young man from there and questioned him. He listed for Gideon seventy-seven officials of Succoth. ¹⁵When Gideon and his men got to Succoth, he said to the city fathers, "You wanted to see us capture Zebah and Zalmunna before you would give us something to eat. Well here they are!" ¹⁶Then he ordered the city fathers stripped to the waist and whipped with

branches from their thorn trees just as he had said he would. He hoped this would teach them a lesson not to doubt what the Lord could do for the Israelites. ¹⁷But first Gideon and his men stopped at Penuel where his men had been ridiculed, and they tore down the fortified tower. Because the men of Penuel tried to defend the city, Gideon ordered his troops to kill all the men who were against him.

¹⁸After letting the people of Succoth see Zebah and Zalmunna, Gideon said to the two kings, "When you overran the land around Mount Tabor, what did the men you killed look like?" They said, "They looked like you. Everyone we captured and killed stood in front of us like a prince." ¹⁹Gideon said, "Those were my brothers. We all had the same mother. As the Lord lives, if you had not killed them, I wouldn't kill you." ²⁰Then he said to his son Jether, "Pull out your sword and kill these two kings." But Jether hesitated because he was still very young and had never killed anyone before. ²¹Then Zebah and Zalmunna said to Gideon, "This is a man's job. Why don't you do it yourself." So Gideon pulled out his sword and killed them. Then he took the gold ornaments from the necks of their camels and left the animals with the people of Succoth.

Gideon's Mistake

²²Gideon's men admired him for the leadership he had provided Israel, and they said to him, "You have saved us from the Midianites, so we want you and your descendants to be our leaders." ²³But Gideon said, "I will not be your ruler, neither will my sons or grandsons. The Lord is our ruler." ²⁴Then he said, "I do have one request. I would like each of you to give me one gold earring from your war booty before you leave." It was the custom of the Midianite and Ishmaelite troops to wear such earrings. ²⁵They said, "We'll gladly give you these earrings." So they spread out a cloth

and everyone threw in the most valuable earring from their booty. ²⁶The earrings the men gave Gideon weighed forty-three pounds. They also gave him ornaments taken from the Midianites, including gold chains from the necks of their camels.

²⁷Gideon praised his men and dismissed them. When he got home, he made a vest and a breastpiece from his war booty like the one the high priest wore. Then he hung them up in his hometown as a reminder of what the Lord had done for Israel. He also erected an altar there to God, but he didn't ask the Lord about any of these things, and they became a spiritual snare to Gideon and his family. The people of Israel abandoned the program of worship Gideon reinstated for the Lord and instead, worshiped and offered sacrifices to the vest with its breast-piece, as if it were an idol. ²⁸But the Midianites had been defeated by the Israelites, and the land had peace for the next forty years.

²⁹Gideon stayed in Ophrah where he had grown up, and lived there the rest of his life. ³⁰He had a harem of many wives, and over the years, he had seventy sons. ³¹He also had a Canaanite servant woman who lived in Shechem and she bore him a son whom he named Abimelech. ³²Gideon lived for many years. They buried him in the family tomb where his father Joash was buried, which was in Ophrah in the land of the descendants of Abiezer.

³³No sooner had Gideon died than the children of Israel again returned to the worship of Baal. They renewed their agreement with the Canaanites to have a common worship as a sign of peace and reopened the temple of Baal in Shechem. ³⁴They forgot all about the Lord and what He had done for them and how He had rescued them from the oppressive hands of the Midianites. ³⁵They also forgot all about what Gideon and his family had done for Israel.

Abimelech Kills His Brothers

9 Now Abimelech, the son of Gideon from the Canaanite woman in Shechem, went to his mother's relatives who lived there and said to them, ²"Go and ask the townspeople whether they want the seventy sons of Gideon to continue to govern them, or just one man, one of their own." ³His uncles went to the city fathers and talked to them about this, and they decided that Abimelech should be the man to govern them because he was not only Gideon's son, but their relative through his mother. ⁴To help him get set up, they gave him seventy pieces of silver which they took from the temple of Baal. He used the money to hire seventy blood-thirsty men as bodyguards. ⁵He took these men with him to Ophrah, his father's hometown, and asked his seventy half-brothers to meet him by the altar of the Lord that his father Gideon had built. When they came, he had his bodyguards kill them as human sacrifices. Gideon's youngest son, Jotham, was able to escape and went and hid. ⁶When Abimelech and his men returned home, the city fathers of Shechem and Beth Millo got together under the great tree by the stone pillar that Joshua had set up years before as a witness to what the Lord had done for Israel, and they made Abimelech their king.

The Parable of the Trees

⁷When Jotham heard that a festival was being planned at Shechem, he climbed Mount Gerizim nearby and shouted down to the people who had come for the celebration, "Listen to me! Listen to me, so God may listen to you!" ⁸One day the trees decided to pick a king. They said to the olive tree, 'You be our king.' ⁹But the olive tree said, 'Should I stop producing my rich oil which is used to honor gods and men, and do nothing but sway over other trees?' ¹⁰So they went to the fig tree and said, 'Come be our king.' ¹¹But the fig tree said, 'Should I give up producing

sweet, delicious figs and do nothing but sway over trees?' ¹²Then the trees went to the vine and said, 'Come be our king.' ¹³But the vine said, 'Should I give up growing grapes used for offerings to God and for juice to cheer the hearts of men, and do nothing but sway over other trees?' ¹⁴Finally, the trees decided to go to the scraggly thornbush. They said, 'We want you to be our king.' ¹⁵The thornbush said, 'If you want me to be your king, then come and take refuge in my shadow. If you don't do this, then let fire come out from my branches and consume all of you, including the giant cedars of Lebanon.'

¹⁶Jotham continued, "Are you being honest with yourselves? Are you making Abimelech king because he really deserves it? Have you been fair to the house of Gideon? Have you honored him as he deserves? ¹⁷Have you forgotten that he risked his life for you? Have you forgotten that he freed you from the oppression of the Midianites? ¹⁸Today you have insulted him. You have killed all his sons except me. You have honored Abimelech because he's your relative. You have made the son of my father's servant woman your king. ¹⁹If you have done right, if you have honored Gideon in this, may you be happy with Abimelech and he with you! ²⁰But if not, may fire come from him and destroy Shechem and Beth Millo, and may fire come from you and destroy Abimelech!" ²¹Then Jotham ran to the city of Beer and lived there because he was afraid that Abimelech would kill him.

Downfall of Abimelech

²²After Abimelech had been king for three years, ²³God allowed Abimelech and the people of Shechem to become disenchanted with each other. The people rebelled against Abimelech and, in turn, he hated them. ²⁴So they ended up paying for the evil they had committed against Gideon when they had encouraged Abimelech to kill Gideon's seventy

sons. ²⁵Then the men of Shechem laid a trap for Abimelech. They went up on a nearby hill and robbed everyone who came along the road to Shechem. Abimelech heard about this and realized it would endanger his popularity as a leader unless he went after these men.

²⁶A man named Gaal, the son of Ebed, moved with his brothers from beyond Jordan to Shechem. Soon the people looked to him as their leader. ²⁷During harvest time they went into the vineyards to pick grapes, crushed them and let the juice ferment. Then they held a festival in the temple of Baal. While they were eating and drinking, they began to curse Abimelech. ²⁸Gaal sneered, "Who is Abimelech anyway? Why should we serve him? Isn't he the son of Gideon? Isn't it better to have a pure Canaanite rule over us than a half-breed? Isn't it better to be ruled by a descendant of Hamor, the first king of Shechem? Why should we listen to Abimelech and Zebul his appointed governor? ²⁹If you would make me your leader, I'd get rid of both of them for you. I'm ready to challenge Abimelech's whole army."

³⁰Zebul attended the festival and heard this, and he became very angry. ³¹Under the cover of night he sent messengers to Abimelech who was at his other palace in nearby Arumah, saying, "Gaal, the son of Ehed, and his kinfolk are stirring up the people of Shechem against you. ³²So you and your men should go there at night and wait in the fields outside the city. ³³At sunrise, attack the city. When Gaal and his men come out to fight, go at them with all the force you have."

³⁴Abimelech followed Zebul's advice, took his men and under the cover of darkness marched to Shechem. Then he divided them into four companies and had them hide in different spots some distance from the city. ³⁵Gaal got up early that morning and went to the city gate to stand next to Zebul, who was there conducting the city's business.

Gaal spotted Abimelech's men in the distance and got nervous. ³⁶He turned to Zebul and said, "Look! There are men in the field and on the hillside! They look like Abimelech's men!" Zebul said, "You're seeing things. Those are the shadows of swaying trees on the mountains. Relax." ³⁷But Gaal spoke up, "Look! Men are coming down the slopes! Others are coming along the road over there by the fortune-teller's tree." ³⁸Zebul said, "Sure enough. Those are Abimelech's men. Why aren't you bragging now? Aren't these the men you challenged to a fight? Here's your chance!" ³⁹Then Gaal ran back into the city and called the men together and went out to fight Abimelech. ⁴⁰Abimelech attacked Gaal and his men from four directions at once, killing many of them before they reached the city gates. ⁴¹Then Abimelech went back to Arumah, and Zebul and his men drove Gaal and his brothers out of the city back across Jordan.

⁴²The next day Abimelech got word that the people of Shechem were going out into the field to finish harvesting their grapes. ⁴³So he divided his men into three groups and had them hide in the vineyards. When the people came out to harvest, he ordered his men to attack and kill them. ⁴⁴Abimelech took one of the groups and positioned himself by the city gates. The other two groups attacked the people in the fields. ⁴⁵That whole day Abimelech fought the men of Shechem. Eventually he took the city, killed everyone in it, set fire to it and then in a symbolic gesture of hate, scattered salt over the city's ashes as a sign that nothing should ever grow there.

⁴⁶Some of the leading men of the city and their families escaped and found safety in one of the nearby temples of Baal. ⁴⁷Abimelech heard that they were hiding there, ⁴⁸so he took some of his men and went after them to the top of Mount Zalmon. When he got there he took an ax, chopped large branches off some trees nearby, put them on his shoulders and or-

dered his men to do the same. ⁴⁹So they followed his example and carried the branches to the temple gate, piled them up and set them on fire. Soon the whole temple was on fire, and a thousand people died in the flames.

⁵⁰Then Abimelech decided to march over to Thebez and besiege it, because they had joined Shechem in its revolt against him. He attacked and soon took it. ⁵¹Many of the townspeople ran to the huge fortification tower in the center of the city and locked themselves in. ⁵²As Abimelech marched into the city, he realized what had happened and decided to set the tower on fire, which he had done to the temple of Baal. As he walked up to the tower door, ⁵³one of the women watching him from above threw a millstone down on his head, and it hit him and cracked his skull. ⁵⁴As he lay there, he called to his armor bearer, "Take your sword and kill me. I don't want anyone to say that a woman killed me." So the young man pulled out his sword and ran it through Abimelech, and he died.

⁵⁵When his men saw that Abimelech was dead, they all returned home. ⁵⁶This is what God allowed to come on Abimelech for his crimes against his own father and his seventy half-brothers. ⁵⁷And this is what happened to the people of Shechem who encouraged Abimelech to do it. The curse of Jotham, the one remaining son of Gideon was fulfilled.

Tola's Leadership

10 After the death of Abimelech, the Lord raised up Tola, the son of Puah and the grandson of Dodo, to defend Israel. He was from the tribe of Issachar and lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim. ²He governed Israel for twenty-three years. He died and was buried in his hometown of Shamir.

Jair's Leadership

³After Tola came Jair. He was from the mountainous region of Gilead and governed Israel for twenty-two years. ⁴He

had thirty sons who governed thirty cities and they rode on donkeys because there were no horses in Israel. The people called that part of the country The Settlements of Jair. ⁵When Jair died, they buried him in the city of Kamon.

Enemies of Israel Raid the Land

⁶The Israelites again did evil in the eyes of the Lord. This time they not only worshiped Baal and the nude goddess Ashtoroth, but also the gods of Aram, Sidon, Moab and the gods of the Ammonites and Philistines. They forgot about God and stopped serving Him altogether. ⁷The Lord was very displeased with what they were doing, so He allowed the Ammonites and the Philistines to invade their country. ⁸For eighteen years they mistreated the Israelites, oppressed them with heavy taxes and crushed any resistance that surfaced. The Ammonites controlled all the territory of Gilead east of Jordan that had once belonged to the Amorites. ⁹They even crossed Jordan and came west and raided the people of Judah, Benjamin and Ephraim. This made the children of Israel suffer terribly.

¹⁰Then the people cried to the Lord, "We have sinned against you, O Lord. We have turned away from you and worshiped and served Baal and all these other gods." ¹¹The Lord heard their cry and said, "When the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, ¹²the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Midianites fought against you and oppressed you before, and you cried to me for help, didn't I save you? ¹³But after all I did for you, you again turned away from me and worshipped Baal, adding even more gods. So this time, I'm not going to help you. ¹⁴Go to your gods and let them help you. Let them free you from your oppression." ¹⁵The children of Israel said to the Lord, "We have sinned and deserve to live with the consequences. So do with us what you want, but please deliver us from these people before they wipe us out!" ¹⁶So the people

put away their gods and again gave their hearts to the Lord and listened to Him. The Lord had pity on His people and couldn't stand by and see them suffer any longer.

¹⁷The next time the Ammonites gathered for war and set up camp in Gilead, the Israelites set up camp at Mizpah. This was the time of year when the Ammonites were getting ready to make their annual raid into Israel to carry off the crops and collect taxes. ¹⁸Then the Israelites said to each other, "Whoever has the courage to lead out and attack the Ammonites will be our leader."

Jephthah's Leadership

11 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a powerful warrior. He was the son of a man named Gilead and a prostitute. ²Gilead had other sons, but none of them accepted Jephthah as part of the family. They forced him to leave home because his mother was a prostitute. They said to him, "There's no reason for you to stay here, because you're not included in the family inheritance. You need to leave and find a place of your own." ³So Jephthah left and went to the town of Tob. There he signed up with a group of mercenaries and soon became their leader.

⁴Some time later, the Ammonites made war on Israel. ⁵The elders of Gilead had heard about Jephthah's mercenaries and sent this message to him, ⁶"Come and lead our men into battle against the Ammonites." ⁷Jephthah sent a message back which said, "Didn't you support my brothers when they forced me to leave my father's house? So why do you come to me?" ⁸The city fathers sent messengers back, saying, "We're turning to you because we need someone to lead our men against the Ammonites, and we want you to be our territorial governor." ⁹Jephthah returned this message with them, "Are you sure? If I come back and lead your men against the Ammonites and the Lord helps me win, how do I know you'll follow through on your

promise?" ¹⁰The city fathers answered him, "The Lord be our witness. We have taken an oath to do what we said."

¹¹Jephthah decided to accept their offer and left the city of Tob and went to Gilead, and the people made him their commander and territorial governor as they had promised. Next he went to Mizpah and there he promised the Lord that he would defend Israel.

¹²He sent a message to the Ammonite king and asked, "What do you have against us that you keep making raids into our territory?" ¹³The king answered, "When the children of Israel came up out of Egypt, they took our land from the Arnon River in the south to the Jabbok in the north, all the way west to the Jordan. Now we want it back."

¹⁴Jephthah sent his messengers back to the Ammonite king and said, ¹⁵"What you're saying is not true. This land didn't belong to you. ¹⁶When Israel came out of Egypt, they first passed through the Red Sea, made their way through the wilderness and then came to Kadesh. ¹⁷Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom asking him for permission to pass through his country, but he refused. Israel then sent messengers to the king of Moab asking the same thing, and he, too, refused. So Israel camped at Kadesh for some time. ¹⁸The Lord had told them not to attack, so they took the eastern route around these countries and camped south of the Arnon River. ¹⁹Israel sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who first ruled all this territory between the Arnon and the Jabbok from his capital at Heshbon. The messengers asked him for permission to pass through his country but he refused. ²⁰In fact, he called out his troops and camped at Jahaz just the other side of the Arnon River ready to attack Israel. ²¹That's when the Lord told Israel to attack and gave Sihon and all his men into their hands and they defeated him. So Israel took over the land from the Amorites. ²²Therefore, the land between the Arnon

River in the south and the Jabbok in the north did not belong to you. It belonged to the Amorites. ²³The God of Israel fought for His people and defeated the Amorites. What gives you the right to claim this territory? ²⁴Wouldn't you hold on to what your god Chemosh gave you? It's the same with us. What our God has given us we are not about to let go. ²⁵Do you think you're more powerful than Balak, the king of Moab, was in his day? He never challenged Israel as you're doing, because his people, like yours, are distant relatives of Israel through Abraham's nephew Lot. ²⁶For the last three hundred years Israel has had this land, including such cities as Heshbon and Aroer with their surrounding villages and all the cities along the Arnon River. Why haven't you taken those cities back in all that time? Why do you keep making raids into Gilead? ²⁷What have we done to you? Have we wronged you in any way? You're harming our people by making these raids into our territory. They're suffering terribly and that's not right. So let the Lord God of Israel be our judge. Let Him decide whether this territory belongs to you or to Israel." ²⁸But the king of Ammon paid no attention to Jephthah's reasoned approach.

Jephthah's Vow

²⁹Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and he went all through Gilead recruiting men to fight the Ammonites. He also sent word to some of the tribes asking them for help, but only Gad and Manasseh responded. He had the volunteers meet him at Mizpah, and when they came, he organized them into companies and marched against the Ammonites. ³⁰As they advanced, Jephthah made a vow to the Lord. He promised, "If you help me fight the Ammonites and win, ³¹when I get back home, I'll give you whatever comes running out to meet me. If it's a prize animal, I'll sacrifice it, or if it's someone from my household, he will serve you for the rest

of his life." ³²Then Jephthah attacked the Ammonites and the Lord gave him the victory. ³³He inflicted a massive defeat on them and captured twenty cities and towns from Aroer to Minnith and as far as Abel Keramim. So the Ammonites were defeated and subdued before the men of Israel.

Jephthah's Daughter

³⁴When Jephthah got home, his daughter was the first to come running to meet him with a tambourine and with dancing and singing. She was his only child. ³⁵When he saw her, he stopped, tore his robe in grief and cried out, "Not my daughter! Sweetheart, you just broke your father's heart! Why does it have to be you? I promised the Lord that if He gave me the victory over the Ammonites, I would give to Him the first person or animal that came running out to meet me. I made this promise under oath, and I can't back out." ³⁶His daughter said, "Don't worry, Father. I'll gladly serve the Lord for the rest of my life. He gave you the victory over the Ammonites and Israel is free again. That's all that matters. ³⁷Just let me spend two months visiting my girl friends and saying good-bye to them. We'll all have a good cry, because I'll never get married or have a family and leave a legacy in Israel as they will."

³⁸Jephthah said, "Yes, you may go." So she visited her girl friends and they spent the next two months in a place in the mountains and wept together. ³⁹At the end of two months Jephthah gave her to the Lord, and she served Him as a virgin for the rest of her life. ⁴⁰This started the custom among the virgins of Israel to meet together once a year for four days, to commemorate the dedication and willingness of the beautiful daughter of Jephthah to remain unmarried in order to keep her father's vow to the Lord.

Civil War

12 When the Ephraimites heard about Jephthah's victory over the

Ammonites, they called their men together, crossed the Jordan, marched over to Zaphon where Jephthah now lived and said to him, "Why did you fight the Ammonites without us? Why didn't you give us a chance to have part in this victory? Speak up, or we'll burn your house down!"

²Jephthah answered, "My people had a real problem on their hands because the Ammonites kept raiding their land. When I called for volunteers, only Gad and Manasseh responded. I don't know of one man who came to help us from Ephraim. ³So when I saw that the other tribes I contacted didn't respond, I decided to go ahead with my men and those from Gad and Manasseh. I took my life in my hands to fight the Ammonites, but the Lord gave me the victory. Why does this upset you so much?"

⁴Then civil war broke out between the people of Gilead and the Ephraimites. Jephthah called his men together and they fought against the men of Ephraim and defeated them. They were angry because the men of Ephraim had called them names, saying, "You Gileadites are nothing but the scum of Manasseh who refused to cross Jordan and settle with the rest of your tribe in the land of Canaan. You're a disgrace to Israel, and we're going to wipe you out."

⁵The Gileadites not only defeated the Ephraimites but also captured the various crossings of Jordan that the Ephraimites needed to get back home. They would ask anyone wanting to cross, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If the man said, "No," ⁶they would say, "All right, say the word, 'Shibboleth.'" The Ephraimites couldn't pronounce it correctly. If the man said "Sibboleth" instead, they would grab him and kill him. When the fighting was finally over, forty-two thousand Ephraimites had lost their lives in that war.

⁷Jephthah governed Israel for six years. When he died they buried him in his hometown in Gilead.

Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon Govern Israel

⁸After him, Ibzan from Bethlehem governed Israel. ⁹He had sixty children, thirty sons and thirty daughters. He gave his daughters in marriage to those outside his tribe and brought in thirty young women from other tribes for his sons. This way he was able to build friendships with the other tribes. He governed Israel for seven years. ¹⁰When Ibzan died, they buried him in the land of Judah, in his hometown of Bethlehem.

¹¹After that, Elon, the Zebulunite, governed Israel for ten years. ¹²When he died, they buried him in Aijalon, in the land of Zebulun.

¹³Then Abdon, the son of Hillel, from Pirathon in Ephraim governed Israel. ¹⁴He had forty sons and thirty grandsons. He was wealthy enough to buy seventy donkeys for them to ride. He governed Israel for eight years. ¹⁵When he died, they buried him in his hometown of Pirathon in Ephraim. This was in the mountains that once belonged to the Amalekites.

The Birth of Samson

13 Again the Israelites turned away from the Lord, so He let the Philistines oppress them for forty years.

²During this time there was a man living in Zorah in the territory of Dan named Manoah. His wife was not able to have children. ³One day the Angel of the Lord who had led the children of Israel out of Egypt appeared to her and said, "I know you haven't been able to have children, but soon you'll become pregnant and have a son. ⁴I don't want you to drink any alcoholic beverages, not even unfermented wine. Nor do I want you to eat any unclean food because that will affect the development of your baby before he's born. ⁵As he grows up, I don't want you to cut his hair. No knife or razor is to touch his head. He is to be set apart for the Lord from the day he's born. The boy is to be a Nazarite. He is not to drink of the fruit of the vine, nor eat its products, fresh or dried. Nor is he to touch a dead body. I

have chosen him to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Philistines.”

⁶Manoah’s wife quickly found her husband and told him all about it, saying, “A man of God appeared to me. He looked awesome, like the Angel of the Lord. I didn’t ask him where he came from and he didn’t give me his name. ⁷But he said to me, ‘You’ll soon get pregnant and give birth to a son. I don’t want you to drink any alcoholic beverages, not even unfermented wine. Nor do I want you to eat unclean foods, because the boy is to be set apart for the Lord from the day he’s born. He is to be a Nazarite all his life.’”

⁸Then Manoah prayed to the God of Israel, “Lord, let this man of God who spoke to my wife come back again to let us know how to raise this boy. I believe you that we’ll have a son, but knowing how to bring him up as you want us to won’t be easy. We need your help.” ⁹The Lord heard Manoah’s prayer and the Angel of the Lord came and talked to his wife again. This time it happened when she was alone in the field. ¹⁰She hurried home to get her husband and said, “He’s here! That man of God who appeared to me the other day is back again! Come and talk to him!”

¹¹Manoah ran out to the field with his wife and said to the man of God, “Are you the man who talked with my wife the first time?” He said, “I am.” ¹²Manoah said, “When your prediction comes true and our boy is born, how should we raise him? What guidelines should we follow to get him ready for his life’s work?” ¹³The Angel of the Lord said, “Your wife is to do everything I told her to do. ¹⁴She is to stay away from everything that comes from the vine, including unfermented wine, and she is not to eat anything unclean. She needs to be very careful about this and do everything I say. The boy is to be trained to do the same.”

¹⁵Manoah said, “Please don’t go away. Stay just a little longer until we can kill a young goat and get you something to eat.” ¹⁶The Angel said, “I’ll stay a little

longer, but I won’t eat. So go ahead, get the young goat and bring it here and offer it to the Lord.” Up to this point Manoah didn’t know that the Angel was the Lord. ¹⁷So he asked, “What is your name? We would like to know so we can tell others that you were the one who told us that we would have a son and that you also told us how to raise him.” ¹⁸The Angel said, “What’s the real reason you want to know my name? It’s a name too wonderful for you to fully understand.” ¹⁹That’s when Manoah realized that the Man of God he was talking to was the Lord. He fell on his knees, bowed to the ground and then ran and got the young goat. He also brought grain with him and then offered both of them on a nearby rock to the Lord. What Manoah and his wife saw next left them amazed. ²⁰The Angel of the Lord set the offering and the rock on fire, and then He ascended in the middle of the flames. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their knees and bowed with their faces to the ground.

²¹They stayed on their knees until they were sure that the Angel was gone. He never came back. ²²Then Manoah said to his wife, “We’re surely going to die because God Himself has visited us.” ²³But his wife said, “If we are doomed to die, how can we have a baby and raise it? If the Lord had wanted to kill us, why would He accept our offering and tell us what to do?”

²⁴Soon afterward Manoah’s wife became pregnant and later gave birth to a son. They called him Samson. The Lord was with the boy as he grew up and blessed him in extraordinary ways. ²⁵One day while he was still a young man, he went to visit the city of Mahaneh Dan, occupied by the Philistines and located between the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol. While he was there he saw how harshly they treated his people. That’s when the Spirit of the Lord began to come upon him.

Samson's Marriage

14 After he was grown, Samson went down to the city of Timnah. While he was there he was befriended by a beautiful Philistine young woman and immediately fell in love with her. ²He decided to marry her, so he went back home and said to his parents, "I met a beautiful woman in Timnah, and I want to marry her." ³His parents said, "Doesn't Israel have beautiful young women? Why do you have to marry an idol-worshiping Philistine?" But Samson would not listen to reason and said, "I fell in love with her, and I'm going to marry her. So please make arrangements for our wedding."

⁴He could not be convinced otherwise, so God used the occasion to confront the Philistines who controlled this whole area of Israel.

⁵Samson's parents agreed to go to Timnah to make arrangements for the wedding. Samson went ahead and as he passed by some vineyards, a young lion that had been hiding there roared and then attacked him. ⁶The Spirit of the Lord came on him; he caught the lion, threw it to the ground and tore its hind legs apart as easily as a baby goat's. He decided not to frighten his parents by telling them. ⁷Then he went on his way to tell the woman that he wanted her to be his wife and that his parents were coming to meet her. ⁸She met them and agreed to the marriage. During the next few months it was easy for Samson to go back and forth to see her because Timnah was only a few miles down the road from where he lived. One day he decided to go past the vineyards where he had killed the young lion. When he got there he noticed that a swarm of bees had made their nest inside the lion's skeleton. ⁹He reached down and scooped up some of the honey and ate it. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some and they ate it, but he didn't tell them that he'd gotten it from a beehive in a lion's skeleton which made it unclean.

¹⁰Now it was customary that before the wedding, the parents of the groom would

sponsor a seven-day wedding feast for their son and his friends. Samson's father had made arrangements in the young woman's hometown for the wedding feast and the time had come for the festivities.

¹¹When Samson got there, he found that the Philistines had sent thirty young men to make sure that Samson and his Hebrew friends would behave themselves and not cause trouble. ¹²As was their custom, the groom and his guests played the game of riddles. Samson challenged the thirty Philistines by saying, "If you can solve this riddle before the week is over, I'll give you thirty linen garments and thirty festal robes. ¹³If you can't solve the riddle, then you have to give me thirty linen garments and thirty festal robes." The Philistines agreed and said, "Tell us the riddle." ¹⁴Samson said, "Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet." Three days went by and they still couldn't solve the riddle.

¹⁵On the fourth day of the feast, they went to see his bride and said to her, "We want you to find a way to get Samson to tell you the answer to his riddle. If you don't find out, we'll set your parents' house on fire with you inside. You don't think that we came here to be made into fools or to be robbed of what he promised, do you?" ¹⁶So Samson's wife went to Samson with tears in her eyes and said, "How do I know that you really love me if you won't even tell me the answer to your riddle?" Samson said, "I haven't even told my father and mother. I have no reason to tell them and no reason to share it with you." ¹⁷Every day for the rest of the week she went to see Samson with tears in her eyes and pleaded with him to give her the answer to his riddle as proof that he loved her. On the last day he finally gave in and told her. Then she turned around and told it to the thirty Philistines. ¹⁸Just as the feast was coming to an end, the Philistines came to Samson and said, "We have the answer to your riddle: What is sweeter to eat than honey? Who is stronger than a

lion?" Samson immediately knew where they had gotten the answer and said, "If you had not pressured my wife you never would have solved my riddle."

¹⁹Then Samson left and went to the Philistine city of Ashkelon, about twenty-five miles away. While at a party, he killed thirty well-dressed young men who had challenged him to a fight, took everything they had and headed back to Timnah to give their belongings and robes to the men who had answered his riddle. When he got there, he found out that they had threatened to kill his wife unless she gave them the answer to his riddle. He became very angry, not only at the Philistines but also at his wife, so he left and returned to his parents' home in Zoar. ²⁰The Philistines thought he had gone for good, so the young woman's father promised her to the best man at the wedding, the leader of the thirty men.

Samson Defeats the Philistines

15 Not long afterward Samson decided to see his wife who was still at home with her parents. He took a baby goat with him as a present to her father. This happened at the time of the wheat harvest. When he got there he gave his father-in-law the baby goat and said, "I would like to see my wife. I understand that she's here." But the father would not let him in. ²He said to Samson, "I thought you had left her for good, so I promised her to your friend who was best man at your wedding. But her younger sister is even more beautiful, so why don't you take her?"

³Samson said to his father-in-law, "This time I'm going to get even with you Philistines. You just wait and see." ⁴So he went out and caught three hundred jackals. He tied pairs together by their tails with a long rope, attached a torch to the middle of the rope holding each pair, lit the torch and then let them go. ⁵The jackals took off, dragging the flaming torch behind them. So Samson got even with the Philistines for what they had

done to him, burning down large fields of wheat as well as a number of vineyards and olive groves. ⁶The Philistine leaders asked around to find out who had done this. They learned that Samson had done it because his father-in-law had given away his wife. So they went to Timnah, tied up the whole family and set their house on fire with them in it. ⁷When Samson heard that they had killed his wife and his in-laws, he sent this message to the Philistines: "If that's the kind of people you are, I swear I won't stop until I've paid you back." ⁸Then he single-handedly attacked part of their army and killed many of their men. After that he went to live in a cave in a large rocky cliff near Etam to protect himself.

⁹The Philistines decided to go after him. They took over a thousand men, marched into the territory of Judah and surrounded the area where Samson was, which was later called Lehi, meaning The Place of the Jawbone. ¹⁰When the Philistines came, the people of Judah said to them, "Why are you marching into our territory? What have we done?" The Philistines said, "We're not here to pick a fight. All we want is to get a man from Dan named Samson who is hiding here, because of what he has done to us."

¹¹The men from Judah said, "Let us handle it for you." So three thousand troops from Judah went over to the rocky cliff near Etam and said to Samson, "Don't you know that the Philistines are our masters? Look what you've done to us!" He said, "I only did to them what they did to me."

¹²They said, "We've come to tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines so they'll leave us alone. That's the only way things can be settled now." Samson said, "All right, I'll let you come and tie me up, but promise that your men won't attack me." ¹³They said, "We give you our word. We'll just tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines. We won't let our men harm you." So Samson came out of his cave and they tied him up with two new ropes and led him away.

¹⁴When they reached Lehi, the Philistines saw him and let out a war cry. Then they headed straight for Samson. That's when the Spirit of the Lord came on him and he snapped the new ropes from around his upper body and his arms and hands as if they had been burnt strings. ¹⁵Then he picked up a jawbone from a donkey's skeleton that was lying nearby and killed a thousand men. ¹⁶When it was all over he said, "With a donkey's jawbone I made donkeys out of them all. With only a jawbone I killed a thousand men." ¹⁷Then he threw the jawbone down, and from that day on, the people called the place Ramath Lehi, or Jawbone Hill.

¹⁸Because of the length of the battle and the heat, Samson was exhausted and very thirsty. He prayed to the Lord, "Lord, you've given me a great victory; now don't let me die of thirst. Don't let the Philistines find me half dead or they'll torture me until I'm gone." ¹⁹The Lord heard Samson's prayer and carved out a low spot in the rocks right there at Lehi and filled it with water from a spring. Samson drank from it, and his strength came back and his spirit revived. So the spring was called En Hakkore, The Spring of Prayer. ²⁰The people of Israel did not follow up on Samson's victory to rid themselves of the Philistines. So they were oppressed by them for another twenty years. It was during this time that the people in Samson's local area decided to make him their leader and judge.

Samson and Delilah

16 During the time that Samson was the leader of his people, he was able to travel throughout the Philistine territory without the threat of being harmed. One day he decided to make a trip to the city of Gaza on the Mediterranean coast, which was about thirty miles from his hometown. While there he met a prostitute and spent the night with her. ²When the people of Gaza learned

that Samson was in town, the men of the city armed themselves and quietly surrounded her house while others waited for Samson at the city gate. They stayed there all night and said to themselves, "We'll keep an eye on the place just in case he leaves while it's still dark, but most likely he'll leave early in the morning. Then we'll jump him at the city gate and kill him."

³About midnight, Samson's conscience bothered him so he decided to leave for home. When he got to the city gate and found it locked, he took hold of it and pulled the bars, posts and all, out of the ground, put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of a hill on the way to Hebron. The men of Gaza were stunned by what they saw and too scared to do anything about it.

⁴Some time later, Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah from Sorek near his hometown. ⁵The five rulers of the Philistines came to bargain with her. "Get Samson to tell you the secret of his strength," they said, "so we can capture him. We won't kill him; we'll just make him work for us. Each of us will give you eleven hundred pieces of silver." ⁶Delilah agreed, as long as they promised not to kill him. So the next time Samson came to see her, she said, "Tell me the secret of your great strength. What would someone have to do to make you only as strong as other men?"

⁷Samson said, "If someone tied me up with seven new bowstrings that are not yet dried out enough to be strung on bows, then I would be no stronger than any other man." ⁸Delilah told this to the Philistines and they brought her seven new bowstrings that had not yet been dried. So the next time Samson came to see her she waited until he was sound asleep, then tied his hands together with the seven bowstrings. ⁹One of the Philistines was hiding in the other room and as soon as he saw that Samson's hands were tied, he gave the signal to the troops outside and Delilah cried,

"Samson! The Philistines are here!" Samson woke up and snapped the seven bowstrings as easily as someone snaps a burning string. When the Philistines saw this, they ran as fast as they could.

¹⁰But Samson didn't learn his lesson, and he visited Delilah again. She said to him, "Last time you were here you lied to me. How do I know that you really love me? Now tell me the secret of your strength." ¹¹He said, "I'm sorry. The truth is, if you tie me with new ropes that have never been used, then I'll be no stronger than any other man." ¹²Again Delilah told this to the Philistines, and they brought her some new ropes. The next time Samson came to see her, she waited until he was sound asleep and tied his hands together as she had done before. As soon as the Philistine in the other room saw this, he signaled to the men outside, and Delilah cried, "Samson! The Philistines are here!" Samson woke up and snapped those new ropes as if they had been threads. When the Philistines saw this, they ran as fast as they could.

¹³Samson still had not learned his lesson. The next time he visited Delilah, she said to him, "You lied to me again! Yet you keep telling me that you love me. How am I to believe you? Tell me the secret of your strength." He said, "I'm sorry. I'll tell you. If you weave my hair tightly into that new piece of cloth coming from your loom over there, then I'll be no stronger than any other man."

¹⁴When he was sound asleep, she pulled the loom closer, gently wove his long hair into the cloth and fastened it with a pin. Then Delilah cried, "Samson! The Philistines are here!" Samson woke up, and with his hair tied to the end of the fabric, he pulled up the whole loom and everything with it. When the Philistines saw this, they ran as fast as they could.

¹⁵Samson ignored Delilah's deceptions and visited her again. She said to him, "You've lied to me three times now. You say you're sorry, but you keep right on

lying. You keep telling me that you love me, but I don't believe you anymore. The only way I'll believe you is if you tell me the source of your strength."

¹⁶She kept after him until he grew tired of her nagging and told her the truth. ¹⁷He said to her, "I've been set apart to serve God in a special way from the day I was born. My long hair is sign of being under the Nazarite vow for the rest of my life. I was told never to cut my hair or the Lord would leave me, and I would be no stronger than any other man. And that's the truth."

¹⁸Delilah told this to the Philistines and said, "Come back just one more time and bring the money with you. I really believe that Samson has told me the truth." So the Philistines agreed and brought the money they had promised her. ¹⁹The next time Samson came to see her, she had him lay his head on her lap while she stroked his hair. When he was sound asleep she called in a man to carefully cut off his seven long braids of hair. As Samson slept, he began to weaken and his strength left him.

²⁰Then Delilah cried, "Samson! The Philistines are here!" Samson woke up and said to himself, "I'll go after them as I did before and teach them a lesson they'll never forget." But he didn't know that the Lord had left him. ²¹He went after the Philistines but they could tell that he wasn't the same as he had been before. So they jumped on him, wrestled him to the ground and tied him up. Then the Philistines put out his eyes and took him to Gaza on the coast where earlier he had carried away the city gates. They put his ankles and wrists in shackles and put him to work pushing the arm of a huge millstone to grind grain. ²²In true remorse, Samson confessed his sins and reconsecrated himself to God. As his hair grew back, his strength began to return.

The Death of Samson

²³When the time came for the next festival to honor their god which was half

man and half fish, the Philistine rulers suggested that Samson be brought in as a trophy of victory. They said, "Dagon has delivered Samson into our hands and has taken away his strength. Let's praise him!" ²⁴When the people saw Samson, they said, "Dagon was the one who gave us the victory! He helped us capture the man who burned down our fields and killed many of our people. Let's praise our god for what he has done!" ²⁵During the course of the festival as they were enjoying themselves, someone shouted, "Bring Samson into the arena! Let him put on a show for us!" Others joined in. So they brought Samson into the arena and made fun of him. They had him do things that made him look like a fool. After that they had him stand between the two main pillars holding up the temple of Dagon so everyone could see him. ²⁶Samson was very tired, so he said to the boy who led him, "Guide my hands to the pillars so I can lean against them and rest." And the boy did. ²⁷Now the arena was full of important men and women, including the five rulers of the Philistines who were sitting in a special place of honor. There were about three thousand people sitting on the huge flat roof looking into the arena to watch Samson perform.

²⁸Then Samson prayed to the Lord, "O Sovereign Lord, I have asked you to forgive me my sins so many times. I believe you have forgiven me. So please give me back my full strength just one more time. I want to let these Philistines know that their god is nothing. Besides, why did they gouge out both my eyes and bring me here to make fun of me?"

²⁹Samson believed that the Lord heard his prayer and that He would answer it. So by faith he encircled the two main pillars, his right hand around one and his left hand around the other. ³⁰Then he shouted, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he leaned forward with all his might. The pillars gave way and down came the roof with all the people who had been sitting on it. Then

the walls fell in on top of them. So Samson killed more Philistines at his death than he had killed during his life. ³¹His brothers came and dug out his body from the rubble and took it home. They buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. Samson had governed that part of Israel for twenty years.

Micah's Idols

17 There was a man called Micah, who lived in the mountains of Ephraim. ²One day he said to his mother, "I heard you curse the man who stole the eleven hundred pieces of silver you had saved all these years. I need to confess that I'm the one who took the money, and I'm giving it all back to you. Here it is." His mother said, "The Lord bless you, my son, for confessing your sin!" ³Then she said, "Now that you've given me my money back, I need to consecrate it to the Lord to keep the curse from hurting you. Here, take what you need to make an image in honor of the Lord." ⁴But he refused to take the money from his mother and said, "No, it's better that you do it." So she took two hundred pieces of the money, gave it to a silversmith and told him to make a small idol and cover it with silver, which he did. Then she took the idol and gave it to Micah. ⁵To honor the Lord, Micah had a shrine built in his house that looked like the inside of the Sanctuary. He chose one of his sons to serve as priest and had a vest made for him like only the high priest wore. ⁶In those days there was no king or central government in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes, especially if he had money. This was the case with Micah.

⁷About this time, a young Levite from Bethlehem in Judah ⁸decided to leave home and look for another place to live. On his way through Ephraim, he stopped at Micah's house. While there, he especially noticed the shrine because it looked similar to the Sanctuary. ⁹Micah showed him around and then asked,

"Where are you from?" The young man said, "I'm a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I'm looking for work. The tithe is not coming in as it should, and I do have to eat." ¹⁰Then Micah said, "Come and work for me, and I'll support you with tithe, and you can be a spiritual father and priest for me and my family. I'll pay you ten pieces of silver a year, plus a place to live, clothes and food."

¹¹The young Levite agreed. So Micah took him in and treated him as one of his own sons. ¹²He removed his son and made the young Levite his priest, to live with him in his own house. ¹³Micah said to himself, "Now that I have a Levite as my priest, I know that the Lord will bless me and things will go well for me." But everything he had done was contrary to what the Lord had commanded.

Micah and the Danites

18 At that time Israel did not have a king, only local judges to settle differences between tribes. The Danites had been assigned territory in the highlands. They were unable to conquer it, so they had to move to the mountains. They desperately wanted some good land of their own. ²So they selected five men from Zorah and Eshtaol to go to Ephraim to see if they could find some unclaimed territory suitable for them. They came to Micah's house in Ephraim, and he invited them to stay overnight. ³While they were there, they noticed the shrine he had built which looked like the Sanctuary. They also recognized the voice of the young Levite who was serving there. They said to him, "You look familiar; we have met you somewhere before. What are you doing these days? Who are you working for?" ⁴He told them what had happened and how Micah had offered him this job as family priest. ⁵Then they said, "Ask the Lord if our mission will be successful." ⁶So the Levite prayed to the Lord, then said to them, "Yes, your mission will be successful. The Lord is with you. You'll find the land you need. Go in peace."

⁷So the five men left. They went on north and came to the city of Laish, later renamed Dan. There they saw a peaceful people living in relative safety who devoted themselves to commerce and business like the Sidonians and who had no desire for war. Their land was rich and provided for all their needs. ⁸When the men got back to Zorah and Eshtaol, the people asked them what they had found. ⁹They said, "We've found a great place to live! It's all the way up by Laish, but let's not hesitate to go and take it. It's a good land. It's inhabited by a small colony of Aramaic-speaking people, and it will be very easy to subdue, because they're not expecting anyone to attack them." ¹⁰The country is great and has everything we could wish for. The Lord has given it to us. Let's go now!"

¹¹So six hundred men from the tribe of Dan left Zorah and Eshtaol and headed for Laish. ¹²On the way they camped at Kiriath Jearim in Judah—the place is still called Dan's Camp. ¹³From there they went on to the hill country of Ephraim and were not too far from Micah's house.

¹⁴Then the five men who had previously spied out the land said to their fellow Danites, "Micah has a shrine in his house that looks like the Sanctuary. He also has a young Levite living there who has a vest that looks like the one only the high priest is to wear, and there's a silver idol in the house." ¹⁵Their fellow Danites said, "Let's go and take a look at it." So they marched over to Micah's house to meet the young Levite. When he came out they greeted him. ¹⁶While the six hundred men with their weapons stood by the entrance of the gate talking to the Levite, ¹⁷the five who had explored the land went into the house to look for the silver idol, the special vest and any other household gods they could find. ¹⁸When the Levite saw them carrying out the silver idol, the special vest and other household gods, he stopped them and said, "What are you doing?" ¹⁹They said, "Keep quiet! Don't you dare say another word. We want you

to come with us to be our spiritual father. Isn't it better to be a priest for a whole tribe than to minister to just one family?"²⁰The Levite was happy to accept their invitation. So he let them take the silver idol, the vest and the other household gods, and went with them.

²¹The Danites decided to let their families and livestock go ahead of them, and they followed behind. ²²They had gone quite a distance before Micah noticed what had happened. Then he called all the armed men in the area and asked them to help him go after the Danites. ²³When they saw the Danites, they shouted to them to stop. They did and then waited for Micah to catch up with them. They said to him, "What's the idea of coming after us with a band of armed men?"

²⁴Micah said, "You took my gods, my priest, the special vest and the silver idol. Then you have the nerve to ask, 'What's the idea of coming after you?'" ²⁵The Danites said, "Now don't start an argument or some of our hot-tempered men will think nothing of killing you and those with you, as well as going back and killing your entire family." ²⁶Micah saw that the Danites were too much for him, so he turned around and went back home, and the Danites went on their way.

Danites Conquer Laish

²⁷They took with them the Levite and the other things that Micah had made and headed north for the city of Laish. When they got there, they attacked those peaceful people and totally surprised them. They captured the city and burned it to the ground. ²⁸No one came to defend them because they lived too far from Sidon or any other city. Laish was located in the valley of Beth Rehob, some distance from any other Aramaic city or tribe. So the Danites rebuilt the city and settled there. ²⁹They named the city Dan, after their ancestor Dan, who was one of the sons of Jacob and a brother to Joseph.

³⁰Then the Danites set up the silver

idol that they had taken from Micah, and the Levite and his sons served them as priests for many years until the land was invaded by the Aramean states adjoining Syria. The Levite who served first Micah and then the Danites was Jonathan, son of Gershom and grandson of Moses. ³¹The Danites hung on to the silver idol which Micah had carefully made during the time the Sanctuary of the Lord was at Shiloh.

The Levite and His Concubine

19 In those days Israel had no central government and no king to guide them. There was a Levite who lived in the mountains of Ephraim who took a servant girl from Bethlehem to be his second wife. ²One day they had a big argument and he treated her very cruelly, so she left in anger and went back to her father's house in Bethlehem. ³About four months later, the Levite went to see her and to kindly speak to her hoping she would come back. He took his servant with him, plus a couple of donkeys. When he got to her house, his wife's father was glad to see him and invited him in. ⁴He asked the young Levite to stay two or three days, which the Levite did. The couple made up, and they all ate and drank together and everyone was happy.

⁵On the morning of the fourth day the couple got up early to get ready to leave, but the father hated to see them go and said, "Don't leave so early. Here, sit down and at least have a good meal before you go." ⁶The two men sat down and ate and when they were finished the father said, "Why don't you two take it easy? Stay over another night and leave tomorrow." ⁷The Levite wanted to get going, but the father of his wife insisted he stay another day, so the young man agreed.

⁸On the morning of the fifth day, the same thing happened. The father insisted that the couple have something to eat first and they agreed. They ate and visited together and soon it was past noon. Then the father said, "You don't want to get started now. Why don't you

stay another day. We don't know when we'll see you again." ⁹But the couple decided to pack. When they were ready to leave, the father urged them to sit down first and eat a bite. So they sat down and had another good meal. Then the father said, "It's not good to start out so late. Think of how far it is to where you can get good lodging. Stay one more day and then get up early tomorrow morning and I'll help you get started."

¹⁰But this time the Levite did not give in, so the couple said good-bye and left. They got on their donkeys and headed for the city of Jebus, later called Jerusalem. ¹¹When they got near there, the servant said, "It's getting late in the day. Why don't we stop here and stay overnight and then leave early in the morning?" ¹²The Levite said, "No, let's not spend the night here because the city is still in the hands of the Jebusites. Let's go on to Gibeah and spend the night in an Israelite city. ¹³We may even be able to reach Ramah, which is only a few miles beyond Gibeah. We'll stay overnight in one or the other." ¹⁴They pushed on ahead but the sun was already beginning to set before they reached Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin. ¹⁵So they decided to spend the night there. As the custom was, they sat in the city square and waited for someone to invite them home. But no one came.

¹⁶It was getting late when an older man, originally from Ephraim, but now living in Gibeah came in from the field. ¹⁷When he passed through the town square and saw the Levite with his wife and servant sitting there, he stopped and said, "Where are you folks from? Where are you going?" ¹⁸The Levite said, "We just came from Bethlehem and are on our way to my home in the mountains of Ephraim. No one has offered to take us in for the night, so we're still sitting here. ¹⁹We've got plenty of food for our donkeys and for ourselves. All we need is a place to sleep."

²⁰The man said, "Come along with me. It's not a good idea to spend the night sleeping out here. You can stay at my house. I'll put you up for the night." ²¹So they went with the man to his house, fed their donkeys and then washed up and had something to eat.

The City of Gibeah Unsafe

²²No sooner had they finished than they heard shouting outside, and then someone pounded on the door. When the old man opened it, he saw a group of lawless young men from the city. They were shouting, "Bring out the young man. We want to have sex with him." They did this to all strangers who came into town. ²³The old man went outside to talk to them and said, "Wait a minute. This man is my guest. I invited him to stay overnight in my house. I'm the one responsible for his welfare. I don't want you to abuse him. ²⁴I have a virgin daughter and this man has a servant girl wife. I'll bring both of them out to you instead. But don't abuse this visitor. He's my guest. How low can you men get?"

²⁵But they wouldn't listen to him. So the Levite pulled the man inside, took his concubine and pushed her out to them, then closed the door. The young men took her and raped her all night and then let her go. ²⁶She made her way back to the man's house and when she reached the door, she collapsed. At dawn she was still there.

²⁷The Levite got up early that morning and opened the door of the house to be on his way. There was his common-law wife lying at the foot of the door with her hands on the threshold. ²⁸He said, "Come on, get up. It's time to go." But she didn't move. Then he realized that she was dead. So he put her body on his donkey and headed for home. ²⁹When he got home, he took a knife and cut her body into twelve parts according to her bones, and hired twelve men to take the parts to the leaders of each tribe. ³⁰When the people heard what had happened they be-

came angry and said, "We haven't heard of such cruelty since we left Egypt! We need to do something about this!"

Israel Attacks Benjamin

20 Then men from all over Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south and from the land of Gilead on the other side of Jordan, came together at Mizpah to ask the Lord what to do. Now Mizpah was in the territory of Ephraim only a few miles north of Gibeah. ²When the leaders of the tribes got there they found over four hundred thousand battle-hardened men from all over Israel, all armed with swords. ³When the Benjamites heard about this, so they sent some of their leading men there to find out what was going on. Then the leaders of Israel, including those from Benjamin, called for the Levite and said, "Tell us again what happened so everyone can hear it."

⁴The Levite said, "I and my servant wife were on our way home from Bethlehem when we decided to stop and stay overnight at Gibeah. ⁵While we were waiting in the town square for someone to invite us home, an Ephraimite living there came by and took us to his house. We had just finished eating when there was a loud knock on the door. The young men of Gibeah had come to the house and wanted me to come out so they could have sex with me and maybe even kill me. Instead, they sexually abused my concubine all night long until she died. ⁶So I took her body and cut it into twelve pieces according to her bones, and sent one piece to each tribe to show my utter horror at such behavior in Israel by the people of Benjamin. ⁷What are you going to do about this? You're the leaders of Israel. I want to hear what you have to say."

⁸All the leaders, including those from Benjamin, spoke as one man and said, "Not one of us will go home until this thing is settled. ⁹This is what we'll do. We'll draw lots to determine which troops will go to Gibeah to demand that the city

fathers hand over those who were involved. If they refuse, our men will attack.

¹⁰We also need to draw lots for one man out of every ten to get food for the troops. This means ten out of every hundred, a hundred out of every thousand and a thousand out of every ten thousand are to keep the troops fed. This way when the troops get to Gibeah, they'll be well supplied and ready to fight if they have to. Those who did this terrible thing in Gibeah must be brought to justice." ¹¹All the leaders were of one mind and agreed to confront the city fathers for allowing such a thing to take place.

¹²But before they used force, the leaders sent messengers throughout the tribe of Benjamin and said, "Do you people know what crimes are being committed in Gibeah? Things like this should never happen in Israel. ¹³You need to hand young men like this over to us to be tried for murder so it won't happen again."

But the people and their leaders wouldn't listen. ¹⁴Instead, they called up their fighting men and prepared for war. Their troops assembled at Gibeah and got ready to defend the city, even if it meant fighting their fellow Israelites. ¹⁵Benjamin was able to call up twenty-six thousand trained men from their cities, including seven hundred expert marksmen from Gibeah. ¹⁶These marksmen were left-handed and could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. They could sling it with such force that it would pierce an enemy's shield or battle helmet. ¹⁷Now the rest of the tribes of Israel had over four hundred thousand troops and all of them were warriors.

¹⁸Then the leaders went to Bethel where the Ark of the Covenant was, to ask the Lord whether they should fight their brothers over this or not, and, if so, which tribe should go first. The Lord answered, "The tribe of Judah."

¹⁹The leaders returned to Mizpah and told the men of Judah what the Lord had said. The next morning the men of Judah led the way, and the army of Israel

marched over to Gibeah and pitched camp. ²⁰The following day, they prepared to attack the army of Benjamin and set up battle stations to take the city. ²¹But the men of Benjamin came charging out of the city of Gibeah, attacked the Israelites and drove them back, killing over twenty-two thousand men. ²²The next day the Israelites came back with renewed courage and a fresh supply of troops ready to take up the same battle stations. ²³But after the loss of all those men the day before, the leaders of Israel went back to Bethel and wept before the Lord until nearly sunset. Then they asked Him whether they should continue to fight their brothers from Benjamin or not. The Lord said, "Yes, go ahead."

²⁴With this encouragement they returned to Mizpah. The next morning the troops took up their battle stations a second time. ²⁵The men of Benjamin came charging out of the city and attacked the Israelites again. By the time the day was over they had killed another eighteen thousand of them. ²⁶So the leaders of Israel went to Bethel for the third time. Again they wept before the Lord and fasted and prayed until nearly sunset. They offered whole burnt offerings to the Lord and asked Him what to do. ²⁷They offered these sacrifices at Bethel, because the Ark of the Covenant had been brought there from Shiloh. ²⁸These were the days when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron, was in charge of the Sanctuary and carried on the high priestly ministry before the Ark in the Most Holy Place. So the leaders asked the Lord what to do, and the Lord said, "Go back and attack the city of Gibeah again because this time I will go with you and give the Benjamites into your hands."

²⁹The leaders went back and again sent fresh troops in to man their stations and get ready to attack. But this time they also stationed men around the city to prepare for an ambush. ³⁰The main force did as the men had done the day be-

fore. They took up their battle stations and got ready to attack the Benjamites and go against the city of Gibeah. ³¹Once more the Benjamites came out of the city of Gibeah and attacked them, and again, the Benjamites were winning. They killed about thirty men, some in the field, some on the road that goes to Bethel and others on the main road coming into Gibeah. ³²This encouraged the Benjamites, and they said, "This time let's go after these Israelites and really slaughter them so they won't dare attack us again." But the Israelites purposely retreated to draw the Benjamites as far from the city as possible, and the Benjamites went after them.

³³While the main force of the Israelites retreated and were regrouping at Baal Tamar for a counterattack, the troops that were part of the Israelite ambush came out of hiding from all around the city. ³⁴These were ten thousand of the finest troops Israel had who attacked the city, and the fighting between them and the Benjamites who had stayed behind was awesome. But the Benjamites didn't know that the Lord was with Israel and that disaster would soon strike. ³⁵By the time the fighting for the day was over, both in the field and in the city, the Israelites had killed over twenty-five thousand Benjamites.

³⁶After the battle, there was no longer any doubt in the minds of the Benjamites that they had been defeated. ³⁷The main force of the Israelites had purposely retreated to draw as many of the Benjamites away from the city as possible and in that way split up their troops. This allowed the Israelite men waiting in ambush to surprise the Gibeonites, attack the city and take it. Once inside, they killed everyone they could find and set it on fire.

³⁸Meanwhile, Israel's main force at Baal Tamar waited until they saw smoke in the distance. This was the signal for them to turn and attack the Benjamites who had come out after them. ³⁹These Benjamites were part of the force that

had killed forty thousand Israelites during the previous two days of fighting. They had decided that this time they would inflict such heavy casualties on Israel that they would never come back. ⁴⁰But when they saw the column of smoke on the horizon, they knew that Gibeah had been taken and the troops left there had been defeated.

⁴¹Then the main Israelite force decided to strike. They came at the men of Benjamin with such fury that it threw them into a panic. ⁴²They turned and ran from the attacking Israelites toward the open country but couldn't escape because they were caught between the main army and the troops that had been in ambush which were now coming at them from the city. ⁴³The Israelite troops surrounded the Benjamites and began to overrun them at a point east of Gibeah, killing them as they went. ⁴⁴There alone, eighteen thousand of the best men in Benjamin were killed. ⁴⁵The rest fled across the field heading in the direction of the Rock of Rimmon about eight miles away. It was a huge limestone rock with caverns that served as hiding places for refugees. But the Israelites killed five thousand along the roads, and later another two thousand. ⁴⁶Altogether, over twenty-five thousand Benjamites were killed that day, all of them brave men. ⁴⁷About six hundred of them made it across the open country to the Rock of Rimmon and stayed there in the caverns for four months. ⁴⁸Then the men of Israel turned back and killed everyone in the villages along the way, including the animals, and set the villages on fire.

Wives for the Tribe of Benjamin

21 When the men of Israel got back to Mizpah, they took an oath never to give their daughters in marriage to a Benjamite. ²Then the leaders went up to Bethel again and sat before the Lord until sunset, lifting up their voices in prayer and weeping bitterly. ³They said, "O Lord, God of Israel, why did this have

to happen? Now one of our own tribes is nearly wiped out."

⁴The next morning the Israelites built a stone altar and offered whole burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord. ⁵Then they said to each other, "Was there a tribe that didn't send some fighting men to Mizpah?" They had taken an oath to punish any tribe that did not send some troops. But all the tribes had willingly responded. ⁶The leaders of Israel continued to grieve over their Benjamite brothers and said, "We have lost almost one whole tribe. There are so few Benjamite men left that foreigners could come in and take over, and Benjamin would no longer be part of Israel. ⁷We must do something to help them now that we've killed over twenty-five thousand of their men, not counting the women who died. We've also taken an oath not to give our daughters in marriage to the men who are left."

⁸As they discussed the problem, they said, "Isn't there at least a part of a tribe that didn't send men to Mizpah and didn't take this oath?" Then they went over the tribes again and found that no one from Jabesh Gilead had come because they were on the side of the Benjamites. ⁹To make doubly sure, they took a roll call, and no one from Jabesh was there. ¹⁰So the men sent twelve thousand troops to Jabesh Gilead with instructions to punish the city for not having sent some men to Mizpah. They said to the troops, "Take the city and kill everyone there, including women and children. ¹¹Kill all the men and every woman except those who are virgins." ¹²So the troops headed for Jabesh. They carried out their orders and when it was all over, about four hundred young women were left. They brought them down to Shiloh.

¹³Then the leaders sent a message to the six hundred Benjamite troops still hiding in the caverns of Rimmon and offered to make peace with them. ¹⁴The Benjamite men agreed, so the Israelites

sent them the four hundred girls from Jabesh as wives, but there weren't enough to go around. ¹⁵The leaders of Israel were still grieving over the possibility of losing Benjamin as one of their tribes, and though they tried to solve the problem, they didn't have enough young women for every man at Rimmon.

¹⁶The leaders said, "As far as we know, all the Benjamite women were killed, and the girls we brought from Jabesh fell short of what was needed. Now what do we do?" ¹⁷We have to find another two hundred young women to give as wives to the rest of those men so Benjamin can flourish and continue to be part of Israel. ¹⁸We took an oath not to give our daughters in marriage to any Benjamite, and we can't go back on our oath, even if it's a bad one. ¹⁹Look, here's an idea. In a few days we'll have our annual festival at Shiloh, and Shiloh is just north of Bethel. It's east of the road that goes from Lebonah to Shechem. There are lots of unmarried young women there." ²⁰They said to the Benjamite men who still needed a wife, "Go and hide in the vineyards along the main road to Shiloh. ²¹Watch for the

young women as they come out of Shiloh to join the dancing. Then each of you catch a wife and take her home with you to Benjamin. ²²When the fathers and brothers of these young women complain, we'll say to them, 'Be kind to us because of the situation we're in. We don't want to lose one of our tribes to foreigners. We weren't able to get enough young women for the men who needed a wife, and you didn't break the oath, because you didn't give your daughters to the Benjamites—they took them.' The parents will understand."

²³The Benjamite men who still needed a wife agreed. So they hid themselves in the vineyards along the main road to Shiloh, and when the young women came out of the city dancing and singing before the Lord, the men rushed out and each one took one. Then they went home to rebuild their cities and settle there. ²⁴The men of Israel left Shiloh and went home to their cities and tribes.

²⁵That's how things were in those days, because there was no central government and no king to guide the people or settle disputes between tribes. Everyone did what he thought was right.

RUTH

Elimelech's Family Moves to Moab

1 Before Israel had a king, judges maintained law and order. During their rule there was a terrible famine in the land. A man named Elimelech from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, decided to move to the country of Moab. ²His wife's name was Naomi, and they had two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. Elimelech was a native of Bethlehem Ephratha but went to live in Moab because of the famine. ³Later, Elimelech became sick and died, and Naomi was left alone with her two sons. ⁴Even though the famine back home had ended, Naomi decided to stay in Moab, which was inhabited by Lot's descendants. Her two sons married Moabite girls, Orpah and Ruth. ⁵About ten years later, both men died. So Naomi was left alone with her two daughters-in-law, without a husband and without her two sons to support her.

Naomi and Ruth Return to Bethlehem

⁶So she decided to return home. The famine had long ended there and the Lord was blessing His people with plentiful harvests. ⁷She left the place where she lived, followed by her two daughters-in-law, and started back toward Bethlehem in the land of Judah. ⁸On the way, she talked to Orpah and Ruth, urging them to stay in Moab and live among their own people. After she had talked with them for a while, she prayed with them and said, "May the Lord bless you and be as kind to you as you have been to me and to my sons. ⁹May He grant that each of you find another husband and establish another home." Then she kissed each of them good-bye.

¹⁰The young women started crying and said, "But we don't want to live among our own people." ¹¹In spite of their pleas, Naomi insisted, "Go home, my daughters. Why would you want to come with me? You'd be living in Judah as foreigners, so

what security would you have in coming with me?" ¹²You need to go back to your home where you'll be better off. I'm too old to marry again, but even if I did and could raise two more sons, ¹³would you wait until they were grown just so you could be part of my family? No, my daughters, you need to go back home and find a husband among your own people. It's hard to say good-bye, even harder for me than for you because you're still young. I'm old and all alone, but this is what the Lord has allowed to happen."

¹⁴They all started crying again, then Orpah decided to take Naomi's advice and return home. She kissed her mother-in-law and said good-bye. But Ruth clung to Naomi and would not let her go. ¹⁵Naomi said to Ruth, "Look, your sister-in-law is going back home and you need to go with her. Return to your people and to the gods you are familiar with. Don't come with me to live as a foreigner in a strange country with a different culture."

¹⁶Ruth answered, "Don't ask me to leave you. I want to go wherever you go and live where you live. Your people will be my people and your God, my God. ¹⁷Where you die, I want to die. May the Lord punish me severely if anything but death separates you and me." ¹⁸When Naomi heard that commitment and saw how determined Ruth was, she stopped urging her to go back home and let her come along.

¹⁹So the two women made their way to Bethlehem. When they arrived, the whole village became excited and the women said, "Is this Naomi? It is! She's come back!" ²⁰She said to them, "Don't call me Naomi anymore, for that means, Pleasant. Call me, Mara, which means Bitter, because since I left you the Lord has allowed my life to become very bitter. ²¹When I left here I had everything, but the Lord has brought me back with nothing. So why should I be called Naomi? The Lord let sickness and death strike down my husband and my two sons."

²²So Naomi returned home and brought her daughter-in-law, Ruth from Moab, with her. They arrived in Bethlehem at the time of the barley harvest.

Ruth Works in Boaz's Field

2 Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a man of wealth and high standing in the community, whose name was Boaz. ²One day Ruth said to Naomi, "Let me go out to the fields to pick up grain that the harvesters drop and leave for the poor. I'm sure I can find someone who will let me work in his field." Naomi said, "Yes, you need to go because we're nearly out of food. The Lord be with you." ³So Ruth went and found a field that was being harvested and walked behind the harvesters, picking up the grain that had been dropped and left behind. It happened to be the field of Boaz, the relative of Naomi's deceased husband, Elimelech.

⁴Later that day, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem to see how the harvesters were doing. He greeted them by saying, "God bless all of you." They greeted him, "The Lord bless you, Boaz." ⁵Then Boaz asked the man in charge, "Who is that woman over there picking up leftovers?" ⁶The foreman said, "She's the Moabitess who came back with Naomi, the widow of Elimelech." ⁷She asked if she could follow our workers and pick up grain that was left, and I told her she could. She's been here since early this morning and has worked steadily all day long, except for brief periods when she went under our canopy over there in the field to rest for awhile."

⁸Then Boaz went over to Ruth and said to her, "Young lady, let me give you some advice. This is a huge field. Be careful you don't end up in some corner off by yourself, and don't go to another field alone to get more grain. Stay close to my servant girls for safety. ⁹Watch where they go to tie up grain and stay close to them. I've told my men not to touch you, even though you're a foreigner. When you get thirsty, go and get a drink from the jars of

water the men have drawn." ¹⁰Ruth knelt and bowed with her face to the ground and then looked up at him and gratefully said, "Why should you be so kind to a foreign woman?"

¹¹Boaz replied, "I've heard how kind you've been to Naomi, your mother-in-law, since the death of your husband and how you were willing to leave your father and mother and your own land to come to live in Israel with a people you don't even know. ¹²May the Lord repay you for your kindness to Naomi. And may the God of Israel whom you have chosen to serve and under whose wings you have come for safety, watch over you and richly bless you." ¹³Ruth said, "You are a very kind man, sir. You have spoken gently to me even though I'm not one of your servants. You have made me feel safe. I do thank you."

¹⁴At mealtime Boaz called to Ruth, "Come over here under the canopy with the rest of the workers. Have some bread and dip it into the pickled relish." Ruth came and sat down, and Boaz also gave her some roasted grain. She ate until she was satisfied and saved some she had left over for Naomi. ¹⁵After she went back out to the field, Boaz spoke to his men and said, "If she gathers grain close to where the bundles are, don't scold her. ¹⁶If she gathers close to where you're harvesting, leave some stalks for her to pick up. Don't stop her."

¹⁷So Ruth gathered grain the rest of the day until late that afternoon. Then she beat out the kernels from the stalks and had enough to fill a twenty-five pound sack. ¹⁸She carried it back to town, and when Naomi saw it, she couldn't believe that Ruth had gathered all that in just one day. Then Ruth gave her the food that was left from the lunch that Boaz had given her. ¹⁹When Naomi saw that, she said, "Where did you say you gleaned today? Whose field did you work? Whoever's field it was, may the Lord bless the man who was so kind to you." Ruth told her where she had

worked and all about the kindness of the man who owned it. Then she added, "The workers said that the man's name was Boaz."

²⁰Naomi exclaimed, "Boaz! The Lord bless him for being kind to the living and the dead! He's a relative of Elimelech. The Lord has surely been kind to us to guide you to pick that field." ²¹Then Ruth said, "He told me to come back and stay close to the servant girls until all his fields are harvested." ²²Naomi said, "The Lord was watching out for you. So keep going back to that field. It is good to stay close to the servant girls who are working there, because if you go to someone else's field alone, the men might harm you." ²³So the next day Ruth went back to the same field to glean more grain and stayed close to the servant girls just as she had been told. She worked in different fields of Boaz every day until both the barley and the wheat were harvested. All this time she continued to live with her mother-in-law.

Boaz Attracted to Ruth

3 One day Naomi said, "Ruth, I need to find a husband for you so you will be provided for. You're still young enough to have a family of your own." ²Boaz, the man from whose field you have been gathering and who was so kind to you, is a relative of ours. He has the right to redeem you from widowhood and perpetuate the name and heritage of your husband. This evening he and his men will be threshing the barley they have harvested. So listen to me. Here is the way to respond to the kindness he has shown to us. ³When you come back from the field, bathe and put on your best clothes and perfume. Then go down to the threshing floor where Boaz is, but don't let him see you. When he and his men have finished working and are full from their meal, ⁴watch where he goes to lie down. After he's asleep, go quietly over to him, lift up the bottom of the blanket and lie down by his feet. Sooner or later his feet will touch you, and he'll

wake up. When he does, and he sees you, he'll know that I've sent you because you don't know our customs. He will tell you what to do." ⁵Ruth listened carefully, and then she said, "If you think that's the proper thing to do, I'll do it."

⁶She prepared herself as her mother-in-law had suggested and went down to the threshing floor. ⁷She got there just as the men had finished eating and had found a place to lie down. Soon they were all fast asleep. She noticed that Boaz had gone to the other side of the grain pile to lie down. After he fell asleep, she went over to where he was and quietly lifted the bottom of the blanket and lay down by his feet.

⁸During the night as Boaz turned and stretched, his feet touched something. Startled, he sat up and saw a woman lying at his feet. ⁹He whispered, "Who are you? What are you doing here?" Ruth raised up and answered quietly, "I'm Ruth. Naomi asked me to come here and according to your custom, let you know that I'm a widow of one of your relatives. She said that we need to know whether or not you're willing to redeem my widowhood, since you're our kinsman. If you're willing to care for me, just put the robe that's beside you over my shoulders."

¹⁰Boaz reached for his robe, gently put it around her shoulders, and whispered, "Ruth, the Lord bless you. You're showing even greater commitment to Naomi's family by doing this than when you first came to live in Israel. You had a perfect right to stay back home with your own people to find a husband, but you didn't. As beautiful as you are, you could have a much younger man for a husband than I, even a much richer man. But you came with Naomi to Israel to live in poverty.

¹¹Don't worry. I won't take advantage of you because of your commitment to Naomi's family. And don't worry about what others might say if they see you here with me, because this is something that relatives do. It is our custom. Besides, all the townspeople know that

you're a woman of noble character. ¹²However, you should know that even though I'm your relative by marriage, there's someone else who's even a closer relative than I. ¹³Stay here tonight. Here, use one of my blankets and cover yourself and get some sleep. In the morning, I'll go to the other relative to see what he says. If he wants to provide for you, that's good, because he's a very responsible person. If not, I promise the Lord that I'll take care of both you and Naomi. Lie down now and get some sleep."

¹⁴Ruth took the blanket Boaz gave her and lay down near his feet. Before the break of dawn, she got up to leave for home before anyone could recognize her. Boaz whispered, "Don't tell anyone that you spent the night here because they might think we had other women here also." ¹⁵Then he said, "Bring me the large shawl you're wearing and hold it out." So she held it out and Boaz poured about fifty pounds of barley into it. He tied it up and put it on her back, and she went home.

¹⁶When Ruth arrived back home, Naomi met her at the door, took the bundle of grain off her shoulders, and said, "Well, tell me. How did it go? What did he say?" Ruth told her everything that Boaz had said ¹⁷and added, "He told me not to go home without a gift for my mother-in-law. So he gave me about fifty pounds of barley as a present for you." ¹⁸When Naomi heard that, she said, "Let's praise the Lord! By this present, Boaz is saying that he will not rest until he's settled the matter with your other relative. My guess is that he'll settle it today."

Boaz Marries Ruth

4 That same day, still early in the morning, Boaz went to the town gate where the city fathers usually met and sat down. He waited until Elimelech's other relative came by. Boaz called out to him, "Come over here for a minute and sit down. I need to talk to you." So he came over and sat down. ²Boaz then

asked ten of the city fathers standing nearby to serve as witnesses. When they came over, he asked them to sit down and listen while he explained his situation. ³In their presence he said to Elimelech's relative, "As you know, Naomi has come back from Moab and put her husband's property up for sale. ⁴I thought you should know about it in case you wanted to buy it, because you're a closer relative to her than I am and you have a right to it first. If you want to buy it, the judges need to legalize the sale, but if you don't, then I would like to buy it." The man said, "I'll buy it."

⁵Then Boaz said, "All right, but you should know that Naomi is selling it on the condition that the buyer take care of Ruth, her daughter-in-law, by marrying her. That way the property will stay in her dead husband's family." ⁶The man answered, "If that's the case, forget it. I'll give up my right to buy it. If I bought it, I would have to manage the property for her daughter-in-law, and when her first son was born it would belong to him. I would be paying for the property, only to give it back. I can't afford to do that. So if you want to buy it and take care of Ruth and her descendants, that's up to you."

⁷In those days when someone bought or sold a piece of property, one man took off his sandal and gave it to the other in the presence of the city fathers to legalize the transaction. ⁸So the man took off his sandal and gave it to Boaz, saying, "I give up my right to buy the property." ⁹Then Boaz took the sandal and told the city fathers and the townspeople who had gathered, "You are my witnesses. Today I am buying all the property that belonged to Elimelech and his sons, Mahlon and Kilion. ¹⁰I will also take Ruth, the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, to be my wife. This will keep the property in their family and the dead man's name will not be lost from the family roster but will continue to be part of the tribe of Judah and of Israel." Then he gave the sandal back to the man.

¹¹The city fathers and the townspeople

who had stopped to watch the transaction said, "We are your witnesses. The property is now yours to buy, and after you reach an agreement with Naomi, may the woman who is to be your wife be like Rachel and Leah, who had many children and built the house of Israel. May you continue to have standing in the eyes of the community and be respected in Bethlehem. ¹²May the children the Lord gives you by Ruth be as numerous as the descendants of Perez, whom Tamar conceived by Judah."

Descendants of Boaz and Ruth

¹³So Boaz bought the property and married Ruth, and she was accepted by the townspeople as one of their own. The Lord blessed her and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. ¹⁴The women who were present at the circumcision said to Naomi, "Praise the Lord! He has given you a grandson. May

he become famous throughout Israel. ¹⁵Now your family line will not die out and he will care for you in your old age. Your daughter-in-law who loves you so much, who is worth more to you than seven sons, has given you this grandson."

¹⁶Naomi took the baby in her arms and loved it as if it were her own. ¹⁷The women of the neighborhood suggested they call him, Obed, which they did. Then they spread the news throughout Bethlehem, saying, "Naomi is a grandmother! The grandmother of a baby boy!" Obed became the father of Jesse, who became the father of David.

¹⁸These are the descendants from Judah to David: Judah was the father of Perez, Perez of Hezron, ¹⁹Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, ²⁰Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, ²¹Salmon of Boaz, and Boaz of Obed, ²²who was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

1 SAMUEL

Elkanah and His Family

1 A man named Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, lived in the city of Ramathaim Zophim on Mount Ephraim. His grandfather was Elihu, his great grandfather, Tohu, and his great-great grandfather, Zuph. His ancestry went back to Korah, a descendant of Levi who was the third son of Jacob. ²Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children but Hannah had none.

³Every year Elkanah and his family went to Shiloh to worship and offer sacrifices to the Lord. Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli the high priest, were helping their father at the Sanctuary when Elkanah arrived. ⁴When Elkanah's turn came to help with the sacrifices, he did so joyfully. He took portions of the meat that were his from the sacrifices and gave a portion to each member of his family, ⁵but he gave a double portion to Hannah because he loved her so much. He treated her as if she had a child even though she did not. ⁶Peninnah ridiculed Hannah for not having children, claiming that the Lord loved her more than He loved Hannah. Every chance she had, she would torment and humiliate Hannah. ⁷This went on year after year, especially when they went to Shiloh to worship the Lord. It got so bad at one festival that Hannah left the table and burst into tears.

Hannah and Eli

⁸Elkanah tried to comfort her. "Hannah," he said, "don't cry. You need to eat something. Why are you so sad? Am I not better to you than ten sons?"

⁹One day after the family had eaten, Hannah went to the Sanctuary to pray. Eli, the high priest, was sitting by the entrance to minister to the needs of the people. ¹⁰Hannah stood not far from where Eli was seated. In anguish she fell on her knees and silently cried to the Lord, telling Him that what Peninnah was doing to her was getting to be more than

she could take. ¹¹She made a vow to the Lord, "Almighty Lord, please look down on my misery and help me. Please open my womb and let me bear a son. If you do, I'll give him to you and he'll be yours forever. I promise to carefully raise him and not to cut his hair as a sign that he belongs to you."

¹²Eli, the high priest, saw Hannah's mouth moving. ¹³Her eyes were closed, and though her lips moved, he heard no sound. So he decided that she had been drinking, and he scolded her, saying, ¹⁴"How long are you going to stay here and attract attention to yourself? You need to go home and sleep off your wine and stop drinking."

¹⁵Hannah got up off her knees and said to Eli, "Sir, I'm not drunk. I'm grieving. I've not touched one drop of beer or wine. I was pouring out my problems to the Lord hoping He would hear my prayer. ¹⁶I'm not the kind of woman you think I am. I've been praying to the Lord, telling Him all my troubles."

¹⁷Eli didn't know exactly what to say at first. Then he replied, "I'm sorry. Go in peace and may the Lord, the God of Israel, answer your prayer and give you what you have asked for." ¹⁸Hannah smiled through her tears and said, "I hope you will think kindly of me and remember me in your prayers." Her sadness seemed to lift, and she returned to Elkanah. At the next meal she was able to eat without being despondent.

Samuel's Birth and Dedication

¹⁹Early the next morning the family worshiped the Lord and then went back home to Ramah. The Lord remembered Hannah and answered her prayer. ²⁰In the course of time she conceived and gave birth to a son. She decided to name him Samuel, meaning Asked of God.

²¹The next year when Elkanah went to Shiloh to perform his duties and to offer the special sacrifices he had promised to

bring to the Lord, Hannah stayed at home. ²²She said to her husband, "Once the boy is weaned and old enough to take care of himself without my help, I'll go with you again, but not now. When I return to Shiloh I will give him to the Lord. Then he will stay there with Eli and serve our God for the rest of his life."

²³Elkanah agreed, "Whatever you decide. Take care of the little fellow, and once he's weaned so he can take care of himself, we'll go to Shiloh together and give him to Eli. I only pray that Eli and the boy will agree so that you can keep your vow to the Lord." So Hannah stayed home and cared for the boy.

²⁴About five years later when it was time for Elkanah to make his annual trip to Shiloh, Hannah decided to go and take young Samuel with her. She also took a three-year-old bull, a measure of flour and a leather bag of fresh unfermented wine as offerings to the Lord. ²⁵When they reached Shiloh, they gave these offerings to the priest and took Samuel to Eli.

²⁶Hannah said, "Sir, I'm the woman who, a few years ago, stood near the entrance of the Sanctuary and fell on my knees and prayed for this child. ²⁷At that time, you said that the Lord would answer my prayer, whatever it was. Well, He did! He gave me a son whom I have named Samuel. ²⁸I promised the Lord that if He gave me a boy, I would give him back to the Lord to serve Him forever." Eli was deeply moved and bowed with them in prayer as they worshiped the Lord together.

Hannah's Prayer

2 Hannah prayed, "My heart is full of joy in the Lord! My strength and happiness come from Him. I can laugh again as a youth because God has given me a child. He has silenced my enemies.

²"No one is holy like the Lord. There is no other God, O Lord, but you. There is no Rock like our God. ³No one should boast about himself, for the Lord God knows all about us. What counts with the

Lord are deeds, not talk. ⁴The bows of proud warriors break, but the Lord gives strength to those who stumble in their weakness. ⁵Those who were once well-fed must now work for their food. But those who were hungry now have all they want to eat. The wife who was unable to have children is hoping for seven, but the wife who had many grieves because she cannot get pregnant again.

⁶"The Lord is the source of life. He gives it and takes it away. He sends people to the grave; He also gives life. ⁷The Lord controls poverty and wealth. He humbles people, and He makes people great. ⁸He raises the poor and lifts the needy from the ash heap. He seats them with princes and gives them a throne of honor. The earth is the Lord's and its foundations are in His hands.

⁹"He guides the feet of His saints and watches over His people. He will take the wicked away to disappear into darkness. Man does not succeed by his own strength. ¹⁰Those who fight against the Lord will be destroyed. He will thunder against them from heaven. He will judge the whole world. He will give all power to His chosen King and exalt the One whom He has anointed."

¹¹So Elkanah and Hannah left young Samuel with Eli at Shiloh and went back home to Ramah. The boy stayed with Eli and helped him in his ministry for the Lord.

The Wicked Sons of Eli

¹²Eli's sons had no respect for the things of God. Their father had not disciplined them for their wicked ways. ¹³Nor were they satisfied with their share of the offerings as stipulated by the Lord. After the people had offered their sacrifices and were preparing for the sacred feast, Eli's sons would send their servants to take whatever meat they could get. ¹⁴The servants would jab their three-pronged forks into the boiling pots and take whatever stuck to their forks, whether there was enough left for the

family who brought the sacrifice or not. This is how Eli's sons treated everyone who came to Shiloh.

¹⁵To make matters worse, before a sacrifice was placed on the altar, one of Eli's sons' servants would say to the man who brought the sacrifice, "Remember that part of this sacrifice belongs to my master, the priest, and he wants his share now before it is given to the Lord."

¹⁶If the man refused and reminded Eli's sons' servant that the Lord had already chosen which parts were His and which parts should go to the priests, the servant would say, "My master wants me to take the best part for him now because he wants it raw, not cooked. If you don't let me have it, I'll get the other servants and we'll take it by force." ¹⁷This was greatly against what the Lord had told the priests, and the people knew it. And Eli's sons still simply laughed about it, showing contempt for the Lord.

Samuel's Childhood Ministry

¹⁸While all this was going on, Samuel continued to stay by Eli's side, helping him as he could. He wore a little ephod made out of finely woven white linen just like the priests wore. ¹⁹Every year when his parents came to Shiloh with their sacrifices, Samuel's mother would bring him a larger robe she had made. ²⁰Eli would bless them and say, "May the Lord give you many more children to take the place of the one you gave to Him." After Elkanah carried out his duties at the Sanctuary, he and Hannah would return to their home in Ramah.

²¹As the years went by, the Lord blessed Hannah and gave her three more sons and two daughters. And Samuel stayed with Eli, learning about the services of the Lord. As he grew up he refused to follow the example of Eli's sons and the other wicked priests.

Prophecy Against Eli's Household

²²Over the years Eli had heard about the wicked things his sons were doing,

but he shrank from crossing their wills. As time went on, they became more wicked. They even forced the women who served at the entrance of the Sanctuary to sleep with them. Finally, when Eli was over ninety years old, he said to his sons, ²³"Why do you keep doing such wicked things? Over the years I've heard all about what you've been doing, but I kept praying that you would come to your senses. ²⁴What I hear is not good. Everywhere I go the Lord's people are talking about you. ²⁵If a man sins against another person but makes restitution, he may be pardoned. But when a man sins against the Lord, he's solely responsible to Him. No one else can help him." But his sons didn't pay any attention to his rebuke. But God would put an end to their wickedness.

²⁶Young Samuel began to restore confidence in the priesthood, and as he grew in stature, he also grew in favor with God and with man.

²⁷About this time, a prophet of the Lord came to Eli and said, "The God of Israel has given me a message for you. He said, 'Wasn't your ancestor Aaron a slave in Egypt? ²⁸I chose him out of all the men in Israel to be my priest, to minister at my altar, to burn incense before me and to wear the garments of the high priest. I also gave him and his family a share in all the offerings to be burned on the altar. ²⁹Why then are your sons so greedy? Aren't these sacrifices and offerings mine? They are stealing what belongs to their God. And what have you done about it? How long are you going to let them do this? How long will you allow them to steal from me to satisfy their greed and fatten themselves on my sacrifices?'"

³⁰"Therefore, the Lord, the God of Israel says, 'I promised that your family would always serve me. But your sons have ignored the conditions of this promise. I will not honor those living in sin and creating disrespect for the priesthood, no matter who their ancestors are. I will only honor those who honor me.'

³¹Over the years I will cut your family off from the priesthood. Your descendants will die in the prime of life, and not one will become old. ³²In spite of the good things that I will do for Israel, there will be trouble in your family. No one in your family will live as long as you have. ³³Some of your descendants will die by the sword and those who escape will grieve in their hearts and cry bitter tears over what is happening to them.

³⁴Hophni and Phinehas will die on the same day as a sign to you that what I have said will come to pass. ³⁵I will raise up a faithful young man to serve me as high priest who will also be my prophet and will govern Israel for me. He will listen to me and do what's in my heart. I will establish his family, and his descendants will continue to serve as priests, even after Israel turns the government over to a king. ³⁶Those left in your family will come to him begging for money and food. They'll ask for any job helping the priests, just to get something to eat."

The Lord Calls Samuel

3 During the days when the boy Samuel was serving the Lord and helping Eli, messages from the Lord were few and prophetic dreams were rare.

²Eli was now very old and almost blind. One night he was asleep in his usual place near the Sanctuary, ³and the boy Samuel was also asleep. Before dawn, as the lamps in the Sanctuary began to burn low, ⁴the Lord called Samuel by name. The boy answered, "I'm here. I'm coming." ⁵He got up and ran to Eli, asking, "Did you call me?" Eli said, "No, son. I didn't call you. Go back to bed." So Samuel went back and lay down. ⁶Again the Lord called Samuel by name and the boy got up and ran to Eli, saying, "I'm here. Do you need me?" Eli said, "My son, I didn't call you. Go back and lie down."

⁷The Lord had not spoken directly to young Samuel before, so the boy didn't recognize His voice. ⁸A third time the Lord called Samuel by name and again he

got up and ran to Eli, saying, "I'm here. I know you called me." Then Eli realized that the Lord had been calling the boy. ⁹So he said, "I believe the Lord is calling you, Samuel. Go, lie down and when He calls again, say, 'Yes, Lord, your servant is listening.'" Samuel went back to his cot and lay down.

¹⁰This time the Lord came close to Samuel, and the boy could sense His presence. Once again God called Samuel by name. The boy answered, "Yes, Lord, your servant is listening." ¹¹The Lord said to him, "I'm about to do something in Israel that is so strange that everyone who hears about it will be in shock. ¹²I will do everything against Eli's family that I told him I would; nothing will be overlooked. ¹³I told him I will no longer uphold his family in the priesthood because the behavior of his sons has brought contempt on the ministry and destroyed the people's respect for their God. Eli knew what his sons were doing and did nothing about it, nor did he put them out of the ministry. ¹⁴I have told Eli that I will step in and take things in hand. No amount of sacrifices, offerings or tears will change my mind. He and his family will have to face the consequences of allowing these things to go on."

¹⁵After the Lord had spoken, Samuel lay back down until it was time to get up and open the Sanctuary for the morning sacrifice. He was pained for Eli and was afraid to tell him what the Lord had said. ¹⁶Soon Eli called to him, "Samuel, my son!" The boy answered, "I'm coming." ¹⁷When he came, Eli said, "What did the Lord tell you last night? Don't hold anything back. God will be very displeased with you if you don't tell me everything He told you."

¹⁸So the boy told Eli everything the Lord had said, holding nothing back. Eli said, "The Lord is our God and He will do what is best for His people." ¹⁹And the Lord continued to bless young Samuel as he grew into manhood, and everything He had told him about Eli and his family came true.

²⁰As time went on, all Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, knew that Samuel had been called to function as a prophet, and they listened to what he had to say. ²¹The Lord continued to speak to him at Shiloh through visions and dreams. Through Samuel the word of the Lord came to all Israel.

The Ark of God Captured

4 About this time Israel decided to attack the Philistines without consulting the Lord. They called up their men and camped at a place later named Ebenezer, across from the Philistine army camped at Aphek, a fortress west of Shiloh. ²The Israelites attacked, and after a long and difficult battle, they were defeated, and about four thousand of their men lay dead. ³The rest of the troops withdrew, and as they came back to camp, the leaders of Israel asked, "Why did the Lord let this happen? Why did He favor the Philistines and let us be defeated?" They decided if they brought the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh to Ebenezer, it would help them defeat the Philistines. ⁴They sent men to Shiloh who carried the Ark back with them to the Israelite camp. Hophni and Phinehas came also. God had often spoken to Israel from between the cherubim and saved them from their enemies.

⁵When the troops saw the Ark coming into the camp, they shouted with such joy that the ground shook. ⁶The Philistines heard this shouting coming from the Israelite camp and said, "Listen! What does that mean?" When they learned that the Ark of the Lord had come into the camp of the Israelites, ⁷they were afraid and said, "The Hebrews brought their God into their camp to help them fight against us. We're done for! We've never had to fight them like this before. ⁸What are we going to do? This is the God who brought all the plagues on Egypt in order to free His people and bring them out into the wilderness so they could worship Him. ⁹We need to

fight as we've never fought before or we'll be defeated and will have to be subject to the Hebrews as they are to us. So let's go and show them the kind of fighting men we are!"

¹⁰Then they attacked the Israelites and slaughtered them. When the battle was over, thirty thousand Israelites lay dead and the rest scattered and ran home. ¹¹Hophni and Phinehas were also killed, and the Ark of the Covenant was captured and carried off to Philistia.

Death of Eli

¹²When that happened, a young Benjamite left the battlefield and ran the fifteen miles to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dust on his head to show his grief. ¹³He got to Shiloh late that day. Eli was sitting at the gate of the Sanctuary waiting for some news from the front because he was worried that something might happen to the Ark. The young man ran past Eli into the city. He told the people what had happened, and they all cried out in anguish and fear. ¹⁴When Eli heard them, he asked, "What is this uproar all about?" Then they had the young man come back to tell Eli the bad news. ¹⁵Eli was ninety-eight years old and nearly blind, so he had to depend on people to tell him what was going on. ¹⁶The young man said to Eli, "I've just come from the front lines and ran all the way home to tell the people what happened." Eli asked, "What did happen?" ¹⁷The young man answered, "Israel was defeated by the Philistines and thousands of our men are dead. They also killed your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, and captured the Ark of God!" ¹⁸When Eli heard that his sons were dead and the Ark had been taken, he fell backwards off his seat, broke his neck and died. He was old and very heavy. He had served Israel as high priest for forty years.

Wife of Phinehas Dies in Childbirth

¹⁹His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and it was almost

time for the baby to be born. When she heard that her husband and the other priests had been killed, that the Ark had been taken and that her father-in-law had just died, she went into premature labor. All this was too much for her and her life forces began to ebb away. ²⁰The women attending her tried to encourage her by telling her that she had given birth to a son, but she didn't answer. ²¹Then, with her dying breath, she whispered, "Name the boy, Ichabod, meaning God's Glory Has Departed From Israel." She said this because the Ark had been taken from Israel, her father-in-law, the high priest, was dead, and her husband had been killed in battle. ²²She said, "God's glory is gone from Israel because the Ark has been taken away."

The Ark of the Covenant Among the Philistines

5 After the Philistines had captured the Ark of God, they took it from the final battle at Ebenezer to the city of Ashdod by the Mediterranean as a trophy of victory. ²They placed it in the temple of Dagon, a god they had made whose upper body was that of a bearded man and the lower body that of a fish. They considered this idol to be the father of Baal, the god of the harvest. ³The next morning when the leaders and priests went to the temple to worship, Dagon had fallen over and lay face down in front of the Ark of the Lord. So they picked him up and put him back in place. ⁴The following morning when they went to their temple to worship, not only had Dagon fallen on his face again, but his head and hands had broken off and were lying in the doorway. Only the trunk of his body was left. ⁵So they took the Ark of God out of the temple and put it in a building by itself. From then on whenever the leaders and priests of Ashdod would go into Dagon's temple they would step over the threshold where his head and hands had lain.

⁶All the time the Ark was with the

Philistines, Israel made no attempts to reclaim it. It was not a blessing to the Philistines as their leaders had thought it would be. In fact, the Lord caused the men of Ashdod and the surrounding territory to break out with tumors in the groin, a symptom of the bubonic plague. ⁷They remembered what the God of Israel had done to the people of Egypt and said, "We can't keep the Ark of the Lord any longer. Look at what has happened to our people and to Dagon!" ⁸So they called all five Philistine kings together and asked them what to do. They agreed to move the Ark out of Ashdod to the city of Gath. ⁹After it was moved, the same thing happened in Gath as had in Ashdod, causing everyone in Gath to panic. The Lord caused the men, both young and old, to break out with tumors.

¹⁰Then the people of Gath sent the Ark north to the city of Ekron in another Philistine territory, but the people there didn't want it either. They heard what had happened to the men of Ashdod and Gath and as it came into Ekron, they said, "Why are you bringing the Ark of God here? Are you trying to kill us?" ¹¹So they called the five Philistine kings together and said, "Send the Ark of God back to Israel. We don't want it. If it stays here any longer we'll all die." They said this because many of their men had already died, ¹²and many others had the tumors. The people of Ekron demanded that the Ark be sent back to Israel and cried out to their gods to help them.

The Philistines Return the Ark to Israel

6 The Ark of God was with the Philistines for seven months. ²By then the people decided that they had had it long enough and called for their priests and diviners to help solve the problem. They said, "What should we do with the Ark of God? We don't want it! Tell us how to send it back to Israel." ³The priests and diviners said, "Whatever we do, let's not send the Ark of the God of Israel back empty. We need to send an offering of

some kind with it. If these tumors go away, then we'll know we were punished for the sin of taking the Ark away from the Hebrews."

⁴The Philistines asked, "What kind of appeasement shall we send with it?" The priests and diviners said, "Gifts of gold, shaped like the tumors we have and like the rats that have overrun our gardens and fields. Make five of each to represent our five territories, because even though the Ark has been in only three of them, men in all our territories are suffering from these tumors. ⁵So let's make gold copies of the tumors and of the rats that are destroying our crops and carrying the plague. We'll give these as a guilt offering to the God of the Hebrews. Maybe this will stop Him from giving us these tumors, embarrassing our gods and destroying the country. ⁶Let's not be stubborn like the king of Egypt and make fools of ourselves as he and his people did. The God of the Hebrews did not stop until the Egyptians let His people go. ⁷You must return the Ark of Israel on a new cart. Get two cows that have just had calves and hitch them to the cart. Take their newly born calves away from them. ⁸Put the Ark on the cart and place the gold copies of the tumors and rats in a box beside it as a guilt offering. Then send it off and see what happens. ⁹If the cows stay in their yoke without struggling to get back to their calves and pull the cart toward Beth Shemesh, then we'll know that we displeased the God of the Hebrews and that He is the One who brought all these troubles upon us. But if the cows fight to be free and want to run back home to their calves, then we'll know that our troubles happened by chance."

¹⁰The people did what their priests and diviners told them. They took two cows, hitched them to a new cart and took their calves home. ¹¹Then they put the Ark of God on the cart and next to it in a box they placed the gold tumors and rats as an offering to the Lord. ¹²The cows pulled the cart straight toward

Beth Shemesh, lowing as they went. They did not struggle to return to their calves. The five Philistine kings followed them as far as the border and watched to see what would happen.

¹³The people of Beth Shemesh were out harvesting their crops, but when they heard the cows, they looked up and saw the Ark of the Lord on a cart. They stopped their work and with joy ran to meet it. ¹⁴The cows pulled the cart into a field owned by a man named Joshua who lived in Beth Shemesh. They stopped beside a large rock. The people ran to get the Levites who took the Ark off the cart and set it on the ground. Then they chopped up the cart and sacrificed the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. ¹⁵The Levites set the Ark on the rock, along with the gold copies of tumors and rats. Word quickly spread and soon people came from all around bringing their burnt offerings to be sacrificed to the Lord.

¹⁶When the five Philistine kings saw all this, they were convinced that they had made the right decision and returned to Ekron. By the time they reached home, their men's tumors were gone, and rats had stopped eating their crops. ¹⁷The five gold tumors that the Philistines had given to the Lord as an offering represented their five capital cities: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron. ¹⁸And the five gold rats represented the five territories of the five kings in which the rats were destroying the crops. The large rock in the field of Joshua where the cows stopped was a witness for years as to what had happened there. However, the Levites did nothing to prepare a suitable place for the Ark of the Lord but left it sitting out in the field.

¹⁹But the people of Beth Shemesh continued their wicked ways. Some of the men became curious about the Ark and went out and opened the cover to look inside. The Lord immediately punished them for their disobedience and seventy of them from fifty families died right there beside the Ark. The people of Beth

Shemesh were stunned by what had happened and mourned their great loss.

²⁰The survivors said, "We can't touch the Ark. We need to get rid of it before more of us die. What should we do with it?" ²¹They decided to send messengers to the city of Kiriath Jearim about ten miles up in the mountains. The messengers said, "The Philistines have returned the Ark of the Lord. Come down and take it to your city, as it will be safer there."

7 The people of Kiriath Jearim loved the Lord and knew that His presence would be a blessing. So they took the Ark to the house of a Levite named Abinadab. He willingly agreed to care for it and put Eleazar his son in charge of it.

Samuel Governs Israel

²It took twenty more years of oppression from their enemies before the people of Israel realized that idolatry doesn't pay. The Ark was left at Kiriath Jearim during this time. Through Samuel's ministry the Israelites began to return to the Lord.

³He sent word out to all of Israel, "If you have decided to turn to the Lord with all your heart, then you must get rid of the idols like Baal and the figurines of the nude goddess Ashtoreth that you have in your homes. Dedicate yourselves to serving the Lord and Him alone and He will free you from the domination of the Philistines." ⁴Finally the Israelites got rid of their idols and served the Lord only.

⁵When Samuel saw this, he sent word to the representatives of the tribes and asked them to come to Mizpah to dedicate themselves and their people to the Lord. "I will intercede with the Lord for you there," he said. ⁶When the leaders came together at Mizpah they drew water from a well and poured it out before the Lord in recognition of their unworthiness. They fasted and prayed and confessed, "We have sinned against you, Lord. Please forgive us and help us not to forsake you again." Then, as evidence of their determi-

nation to serve the Lord, they made Samuel their judge and governor and invested him with authority to act as their country's leader. ⁷The Philistines learned what had happened at Mizpah, and their five territorial kings called out their troops and joined forces to attack Israel. The Israelites heard that the Philistines were coming and were afraid. They said to Samuel, ⁸"Please don't stop praying for us, because we need the Lord to protect us from the Philistines."

⁹So Samuel offered a lamb to the Lord and asked Him to protect Israel from the oncoming armies of the Philistines. The Lord heard Samuel's prayer, accepted the sacrifice and answered him. ¹⁰In fact, the sacrifice was still burning on the altar when the Philistines advanced for the attack. Then the Lord sent a terrible thunderstorm which threw the Philistines into a panic, and they began to withdraw in confusion. ¹¹The Israelite men who were at Mizpah rushed after the retreating army, pursuing them all the way to Beth Car and killing a great number of them along the way.

¹²Then Samuel had the people set up a large stone between Mizpah and Shen and they called it Ebenezer, meaning: "The Lord helped us before and He will help us again." ¹³So the Philistines were subdued and didn't attack again for years. All through the rest of Samuel's life the Lord kept the Philistines away from His people. ¹⁴All Israelite cities between Ekron and Gath that the Philistines had taken and controlled they now gave back to Israel. So Israel recovered all its territory and there was peace between the Israelites and the Philistines. Also, there was peace also between Israel and their neighbors the Amorites.

¹⁵Samuel was recognized as the official governor of Israel for the rest of his life. ¹⁶Every year he made his rounds to Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpah to hold court and settle disputes. ¹⁷But he always came back to his home in Ramah where

he had built an altar to the Lord. Samuel also set up two schools of the prophets, one in Ramah where he lived and one in Kiriath Jearim where the Ark of the Lord was kept.

Israel Asks for a King

8 As Samuel grew older he turned over more and more of the responsibilities of governing Israel to his two sons. ²The name of his firstborn son was Joel and the second was Abijah. They lived in Beersheba at the southern end of the country. ³They didn't follow their father's example, but became more interested in making money dishonestly than in serving the Lord. Soon they were accepting bribes and perverting justice.

⁴So the leaders of the tribes came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, ⁵"You're getting up in years and your sons are not at all like you. We need a strong central government with a king like the other nations around us instead of being only loosely-knit tribes." ⁶When Samuel heard this, he was deeply hurt that his leadership was no longer appreciated and that he was being asked to step aside. He said nothing, but took it to the Lord in prayer. ⁷The Lord rebuked him and said, "You're not listening to what they're really saying. They're not rejecting you, they're rejecting me. They don't want me to be their king because they want someone they can see and show off. They want to be like the people around them. ⁸This has been their attitude off and on ever since they left Egypt. This is the problem Moses had at the foot of Mount Sinai when they made a golden calf. That's why they turned to other gods and worshiped them instead of me. Now they're doing to you what they've done to me. ⁹But go ahead and listen to them. If they insist on having a king, then warn them what it will be like and what a king will do to them."

¹⁰So Samuel told the leaders and the people everything the Lord had said to him. ¹¹He warned them about having a

king, saying, "Have you ever thought what is involved and what it costs to support a king? He'll take your sons and turn them into professional soldiers. Some will drive his war chariots, others will serve in his cavalry and still others will be his foot soldiers. ¹²Some will become officers in charge of fifty, a hundred or a thousand men. Others will be used as laborers to work the king's fields and reap his harvests. Still others will make his weapons of war and build his chariots. ¹³He'll also take your daughters to work for him as bakers and cooks to feed his staff and all his troops. Others will clean his palace and make decorations and perfumes for his various state occasions.

¹⁴"He'll take the best of your fields, vineyards and olive groves which the Lord gave you and claim them for himself. He won't even ask you if he can have them. ¹⁵On top of that he will tax you a tenth of your increase so he can live in luxury and provide for the families of his officials and staff. ¹⁶He'll take the best of your servants, your cattle and your donkeys for himself without even asking, and you won't be able to do a thing about it. ¹⁷You'll end up being his slaves and there will be no court of appeal. One tenth of everything you own will be his. ¹⁸When that happens you'll cry to the Lord for help and wish you had never asked to have a king. But the Lord will not help you solve your problems then because you must learn the consequences of relying on your own wisdom."

¹⁹The leaders would not listen to Samuel's counsel. "We have thought about all this, but we still want a king," they said. ²⁰"He'll not only be our governor but will lead our men into battle as kings of other countries do." ²¹When Samuel saw that they were determined to have their way, he told the Lord what they had said. ²²The Lord replied, "Give them what they want. Let them have a king." Then Samuel returned to the leaders and told them that they could have a

king, but they must go back home. The Lord would choose one for them.

Saul and Samuel Meet

9 There was an influential and wealthy man named Kish from the tribe of Benjamin. His father was Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah, a descendant of Benjamin who was a son of Jacob. ²This man had a son named Saul, a handsome man in the prime of youth. He was head and shoulders taller than anyone in Israel and had a very commanding presence.

³One day some donkeys belonging to Saul's father wandered away and got lost. So Kish called in his son and said, "Take one of our servants and the two of you see if you can find the donkeys." ⁴Saul did as his father asked, and he and the servant searched throughout the local area and then over into the hill country of Ephraim around Shalishah, but without success. They went on to Shaalim and looked around there but still didn't find them. Then they decided to go through the territory of Benjamin and look around, but the donkeys were nowhere to be found.

⁵When they reached the area of Zuph, Saul said to the servant, "Come, let's go back, or my father will stop worrying about the donkeys and start worrying about us." ⁶The servant answered, "There's a man of God near here in Ramah who is highly respected because everything he says comes true. Let's go into town and see him. Maybe he can tell us where the donkeys are." ⁷Saul said, "If we go, what can we give him? We don't have any money, and we ate all the bread and fruit we had. We don't have a gift to offer." ⁸The servant replied, "Look, I have a tenth of an ounce of silver. It's not much, but if he accepts a quarter of a shekel and tells us where the donkeys are, it'll be worth our time to go to see him." ⁹It was the practice in Israel that if a man wanted to have a direct answer from God, he would go to see the prophet

(also called a seer, meaning the one who sees and understands God's will). ¹⁰Saul said to his servant, "All right, let's go." So they went to Ramah where Samuel lived. The town was situated on a hill.

¹¹As they made their way up the hill they met some girls coming out of town to draw water from the city well. They asked, "Is the seer in town?" ¹²The girls answered, "Yes, in fact he came into town today just ahead of you. If you want to talk to him, you'd better hurry because he'll soon be offering a sacrifice over on that high point." ¹³You shouldn't have any trouble finding him because he's in town inviting people to the service. He must first conduct the service and bless the sacrifice. Then afterwards there will be a sacred meal and everyone will eat." ¹⁴So Saul and his servant went into town to look for the man of God. As they approached the town, Samuel was coming out to go up the hill which the girls had pointed out, to offer sacrifices to the Lord and to have the sacred meal.

¹⁵Now the day before, the Lord had spoken to Samuel about Saul and had said to him, ¹⁶"About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the tribe of Benjamin whom I want you to anoint as prince over Israel, who will eventually become their king under my authority. I have seen what the Philistines are doing to Israel and I have heard their cry. So I have chosen this man to deliver my people from their oppression." ¹⁷When Samuel saw Saul coming toward him, the Lord said to him, "This is the man I told you about yesterday. He will lead my people." ¹⁸Saul stopped Samuel on the road and said, "Sir, could you tell us where we can find the seer's house?" ¹⁹Samuel said, "I'm the seer. I've been expecting you. Go to that high point over there and after the sacrificial service I want you to join us for the sacred meal. After that we need to talk some more about what's really on your heart, and then tomorrow morning you can be

on your way. ²⁰Don't worry about the donkeys you've been looking for the last three days. They've been found. You are the kind of man the people's hearts are longing after to be their leader." ²¹Saul said, "But I'm only a Benjamite, one of the smallest and least important tribes in Israel. My family isn't even looked up to within my own tribe. So why are you even saying such a thing?"

²²Then Samuel walked with Saul and the servant to the place of worship. After the service he invited them to join him for the sacred meal and asked them to sit next to him at the head of the table. There were about thirty guests there that day. ²³As the cook was getting ready to serve, Samuel went over to him and said, "Take the piece of meat I told you to set aside for me and give it to the tall young man sitting next to me." ²⁴So the cook returned with the choice thigh and set it in front of Saul. Samuel said, "I've saved this especially for you, so enjoy it. The Lord told me you would be coming, and I want you to feel at home with me and the people I've invited." So Saul and his servant relaxed and enjoyed the meal together with the other guests.

²⁵After the meal Samuel took Saul back to town to his own house. There they went up on the flat roof to enjoy the evening breeze and talk together about Israel. In his heart Saul had been very much concerned about his country and Samuel told him that the Lord knew it. ²⁶Early the next morning Samuel called up to Saul who was sleeping on the roof, "Get up. You should be on your way." Then Saul and the servant got up and prepared to leave. Samuel walked with them to the edge of town.

Samuel Anoints Saul as King

²⁷As they were walking along Samuel said to Saul, "Tell the servant to go on ahead because I have a personal message for you from the Lord."

10 Then Samuel took a small clay bottle from inside his robe. He asked Saul to bend down, and he poured some oil on his head. Then he kissed him on both cheeks and said, "With this oil the Lord has anointed you to rule over Israel, to lead his people and deliver them from their enemies. The Lord will give you three signs that He has called you to rule over His inheritance. ²On your way home, as you pass Rachel's tomb near Zelzah on the border between Ephraim and Benjamin, you'll meet two men. They'll tell you that the donkeys you were looking for have been found and that your father is now worried about you. He's been asking, 'What about my son? Has anyone seen him?'"

³"When you get to the great oak at Tabor, you'll meet three men on their way to worship the Lord at Bethel. One will be carrying three baby goats, another three loaves of fresh bread and the other a leather bag full of fresh unfermented wine. ⁴After they greet you, they'll offer you two of the loaves, which you should accept.

⁵"When you reach the Hill of God near your home in Gibeah where the Philistine garrison is, you'll meet some students from the School of the Prophets coming down the hill singing praises to God, accompanied by lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps. They'll be dramatizing the various duties of a prophet and the words they sing will be sacred truth set to music. ⁶Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you and you will join them and sing songs you've never sung before. As you do this, the Lord will open your mind, and you'll understand things about God and His claim on you. He'll give you the gift of leadership and you'll be a changed person.

⁷"After these experiences, return home and go about your regular work, but don't think that the Lord has forgotten you. He's still with you. ⁸Not long after that, the Lord will impress you to go to Gilgal. I'll be going there to sacrifice

both burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord. You'll get there about a week ahead of me, and then I'll come and tell you what the Lord wants you to do next."

⁹As Saul left Samuel, the Lord gave him a new heart and he became a converted man. All the things that Samuel had predicted happened to Saul that same day. ¹⁰When he got to Gibeah the ministerial students were coming down the hill and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he joined them in praising the Lord with songs he hadn't known before. ¹¹People who knew him said, "Isn't that Saul, the son of Kish? You mean he has decided to attend the School of the Prophets?" ¹²A man standing nearby overheard their conversation and said, "Does it make any difference who he is, or who his father is or who the father is of any of these young men? The important thing is that they've been called by the Spirit of the Lord!" From that day on the people accepted Saul as one preparing to work for the Lord. ¹³After they stopped singing, Saul decided to go back up the hill with them and join them in worship.

¹⁴When he and the servant finally reached home, his uncle greeted them, "Where have you two been?" They answered, "Looking for the lost donkeys. But when we couldn't find them, we went to Samuel to see if he could help us." ¹⁵His uncle said, "What did Samuel say?" ¹⁶Saul replied, "He told us that the donkeys had already been found and that we should go home." But Saul didn't tell him all the other things that Samuel had said or that he had anointed him to lead Israel.

Saul Proclaimed King

¹⁷The time finally came for Samuel to let the people know that the Lord had chosen Saul to be their leader. So he called the leaders of all the tribes to meet him at Mizpah. ¹⁸When they assembled he said to them, "This is what the Lord God of Israel said: 'I led you out of Egypt and delivered you from Pharaoh's army. I

brought you into this land and subdued your enemies. ¹⁹I am the God who helps you get out of trouble and who stands by you when you have problems. After all this, you've rejected me and asked for a king to fight your battles for you. Because that's what you want, I will give you what you ask for. Arrange yourselves by tribes, by clans and by families.'" The people did so and then waited in silence.

²⁰Samuel presented before the Lord the leaders of each tribe. Lots were cast in a solemn ceremony, and the tribe of Benjamin was chosen. ²¹From the tribe of Benjamin, the clan of Matri was chosen and then the family of Kish. From the family of Kish, the Lord chose Saul. But when the leaders and the people looked for him, he could not be found. ²²They inquired of the Lord, "Do you suppose he's not here yet?" The Lord said, "Saul is here. He's hiding behind the supplies and equipment." ²³They ran over and brought him out. When he stood up, he was a head taller than anyone else. ²⁴Samuel said, "This is the man the Lord has chosen! There is no other man like him in all of Israel—tall, strong and handsome." They all shouted, "Long live the king!"

²⁵Samuel explained to the leaders the rights and duties of a king. After that he dismissed them and sent them home. Later he wrote all these things down in a book and placed it in the Holy Place of the Sanctuary for future reference. ²⁶Saul, too, went home and the Lord impressed some of the most powerful leaders of Israel to accompany him. ²⁷But others objected, each faction having its own candidate, and they refused to accept the Lord's choice. They did not give Saul the customary gifts people give a new king. They said, "He was hiding in the supplies. How is he going to lead us?" Saul said nothing to all this. When he got home, he sent away the leaders who had come with him and quietly went about his work as a farmer, leaving his future in the hands of the Lord.

Saul Defeats the Ammonites

11 About a month later, Nahash, king of the Ammonites, marched against the city of Jabesh in Gilead. He had oppressed the people of Gad and Reuben and gouged out the right eyes of all the men of war he had captured, but seven thousand had escaped and fled to Jabesh for protection. The city fathers said to Nahash, "Make a peace treaty with us, and we'll turn these men over to you and submit to your rule." ²Nahash said, "I'll make a peace treaty with you on the condition that you'll let me gouge out everyone's right eye so you'll remember who's over you."

³The city fathers said, "Give us seven days to think about it. We want to see if any of our other tribes will come and help us. If not, we'll accept your terms." Nahash was so confident of Israel's weakness that he said, "All right, one week only, but no more." ⁴Then two messengers went to Gibeah where Saul lived and told the people about the terms of the peace treaty that Nahash was asking for. When the people of Gibeah heard this, they wept in despair.

⁵Just then Saul came in from the field with a pair of oxen and asked, "Why are all the people crying? What has happened?" They told him what the men from Jabesh had said about the terms of the peace treaty. ⁶When Saul heard that, the Spirit of the Lord came on him, and he was filled with righteous anger. ⁷He killed his two oxen, cut them in pieces and sent parts of them to the leaders of all the tribes with this message: "This is what will happen to the oxen of anyone who refuses to come and help Saul and Samuel in the battle against the Ammonites." When the people heard this, they knew it was a call from the Lord, and they responded willingly. ⁸Thirty thousand troops from Judah and three hundred thousand from all the other tribes of Israel met Saul at Bezek.

⁹Then Saul sent messengers to the people of Jabesh telling them that by

noon the next day they would be free. When the people of Jabesh heard this, they gave a shout of joy. ¹⁰Then the city fathers sent this message to Nahash, "Tomorrow evening the week is up and if no help comes by then, we'll surrender the city to you and accept your terms of peace." ¹¹The next morning before dawn Saul divided his troops into three groups and launched his attack from three sides. He ordered his men to show no mercy. So they went after the Ammonites with fury and slaughtered them. By noon they had scattered them everywhere so that no two were found together.

¹²When the battle was over Saul's men said, "Where are those who didn't want Saul to be our king? Bring them here and we'll execute them." ¹³Saul heard about their plan and said to his men, "No one will be killed who didn't want me to be king. Today is a day of victory! This is a day to praise the Lord for what He has done for us!" ¹⁴News of the victory reached Samuel and he sent word throughout Israel to send their leaders to Gilgal for the coronation of Saul. ¹⁵So they came, and there before the Lord and all Israel, they accepted Saul as their king. Then they joined Samuel and Saul in bringing peace offerings to the Lord, and all Israel celebrated.

Samuel's Farewell Address

12 Then Samuel said, "I've set a king over you as you asked me to. ²Now he's your leader. As for me, I'm old and gray and my sons are now on their own. I've served the Lord since I was a boy and I've been your leader all my adult life. ³So here I am. If I have done anything wrong, I want you to tell me. I want you to say it publicly in the presence of the Lord and your king who's standing here beside me. Have I taken anyone's ox or donkey? Is there anyone here whom I have cheated? Have I been unfair or have I oppressed any of you? Have I ever accepted a bribe from any of you or shut my eyes to your wrongdoing? If so, you

need to tell me because I want to make it right with you.”

⁴The leaders said, “We don’t know of anyone who has complained about you. No one has ever told us that you cheated them, oppressed them or took anything from them.” ⁵Samuel said, “The Lord is witness to what you just said, as is your king, that you have found me to be innocent of any wrongdoing.” The leaders said, “The Lord is our witness.”

⁶Then Samuel continued, “Let me remind you of a few things. It was the Lord who chose Moses and Aaron to be our leaders and brought our ancestors out of Egypt. ⁷Listen to what I have to say because I’m going to tell you about some of the wonderful things the Lord has done for you and your fathers. ⁸After Jacob came to Egypt, our ancestors were made slaves. They cried to the Lord for help. He heard their cries and sent Moses and Aaron to help them. He brought them out of Egypt and into this land. ⁹But soon our fathers forgot what the Lord had done for them. So He allowed Eglon, king of Moab, and Sisera, who commanded Jabin’s army at Hazor, and also the Philistines and others to come against the children of Israel. ¹⁰Our people cried to the Lord, ‘We have sinned! We have turned away from the Lord and made Baal and Ashtoreth our gods. Please forgive us our sins and deliver us from our enemies. We promise to love and serve you.’

¹¹“The Lord heard their cries and sent men like Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, Samson and others to save them from their enemies. The Lord also has come to your rescue, as you well know. ¹²But when you heard that Nahash, king of the Ammonites, and his troops had subdued Gilead, you panicked and demanded a king. You said, ‘Give us a king like the other nations have,’ and you completely ignored the fact that the Lord was your King. Some of you wanted to be king yourselves, so you pushed the idea as hard as you could.

¹³“So here is your king. This is the kind

of king you asked for—tall, strong, good-looking and now an outstanding general. The Lord selected him for you and gave you the kind of man you wanted. ¹⁴You need to repent of your sin of losing confidence in the Lord as your King. You must honor Him by accepting His counsel and obeying Him. You must not rebel against His commands. Then all will go well with you and your king. ¹⁵But if you don’t listen to the Lord and you rebel against Him and don’t do what He asks you to do, He’ll turn away from you and stop protecting you, just as He did with your ancestors. ¹⁶To let you know that I’m speaking for the Lord, watch and see what He will do. ¹⁷It is now the dry season and the time of the wheat harvest. I’m going to ask the Lord to send a violent thunderstorm and heavy rains today, but not on your crops. This should impress on your minds the wicked thing you have done in turning away from the Lord’s leadership and asking for a king.”

¹⁸Samuel prayed, and the Lord sent a violent thunderstorm and heavy rains, but not on the crops. The leaders of Israel stood in fear as the rains came and violent thunder shook the earth. ¹⁹Then they cried out to Samuel, “We have sinned against God! Pray that He won’t strike us with lightning and kill us all! We’ve added to our sins by asking for a man to be our king in place of the Lord! We admit that we’ve done wrong!”

²⁰The Lord heard their cries and accepted their repentance and the rains stopped. Then Samuel said to them, “Don’t be afraid. You won’t die. You’ve confessed and repented of your sins and the Lord has forgiven you. Now don’t turn your backs on Him but serve Him with all your hearts and souls and minds as you should. ²¹Don’t go back to worshipping your useless idols. They can’t help you. They can’t rescue you from your enemies because there are no other gods. They’re useless. ²²You belong to the Lord. For the sake of His own integrity and because He loves you so much, the Lord won’t turn

against you. He's the One who has chosen you to be His special people.

²³“As for me, I'm not going to stop praying for you. I won't sin against the Lord and His people by brooding in disappointment over what you have done. I love you and will do all I can to help you and to teach you what is right. ²⁴Just be sure to stay close to the Lord. Respect Him and do what He asks you, and do it with all your heart. Never forget what He has done for your ancestors and for you. ²⁵But if you lose faith in the Lord and turn back to your idols, both you and your king will be conquered and destroyed.”

Saul Attacks the Philistines

13 Saul was over thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for forty years. He had completed his first year as king of Israel and was in his second year when he began to subdue the Philistines.

²He took three thousand troops and went against the Philistines because they still controlled some large sections of Israel. Two thousand troops were under his personal command at Michmash and another thousand under command of his son Jonathan in the hill country about three miles from Gibeah. The rest of the troops, he sent home. ³Jonathan attacked and defeated the Philistine outpost at nearby Geba. Word quickly spread and the Philistines called for reinforcements. Then Saul sent messengers with rams' horns throughout the land of Israel declaring all-out war on the Philistines. ⁴The messengers told the people that Saul had defeated the Philistine garrison at Geba (though it was really Jonathan who had done it). The people of Israel knew how much the Philistines hated them and that what Saul had done was a declaration of war. So they answered the call to arms and joined Saul at Gilgal about twelve miles east of Michmash, where he had retreated from the advancing Philistine army.

⁵The Philistines consolidated their

forces. They had three thousand chariots of war, six thousand horsemen and so many foot soldiers, they could hardly be counted. They marched toward Michmash where they hoped to meet Saul's army. ⁶News of the advancing Philistine forces terrified the Israelites. They remembered their defeat at Shiloh when the Ark had been taken. So now, many of their troops went to hide among the rocks or in caves, pits, thickets and wells. ⁷Others crossed the Jordan River into the territory of Gad in Gilead just to get away. Saul stayed at Gilgal with his handpicked troops, but even they were desperately afraid of the Philistines.

⁸When Saul called for Samuel, he was told to wait at Gilgal for seven days, then Samuel would come and offer sacrifices to the Lord and pray for God's help against the Philistines. This delay was a test of Saul's obedience and faith. During that week of waiting, Saul did not encourage his men or strengthen their faith by reminding them of what the Lord had done in the past. ⁹As he watched more and more of his men leave, he became frantic and decided to quiet their fears. He said, “Bring me some animals for a whole burnt offering and a peace offering.” Then, dressed in his armor and weapons of war, he offered these animals to the Lord.

¹⁰Just then Samuel arrived. Saul went to meet him and welcomed the old prophet with open arms. ¹¹Samuel already knew what was happening, and he said to Saul, “What have you done? Couldn't you have waited a little longer?”

Saul excused his disobedience, saying, “When I saw that so many of my men were leaving, that this was the seventh day of waiting and you still hadn't come to offer the morning sacrifice, and also that the Philistine army was camped just a few miles away ready to attack us, I got desperate. ¹²I said, ‘The Philistines will attack me here at Gilgal and I haven't even asked the Lord to help me.’ That's when I decided to offer the sacrifices myself.”

¹³Samuel replied, "That was a very foolish thing for you to do. The Lord explicitly said that no one but priests are to offer sacrifices, and they must be dressed for worship. You've publicly disobeyed the Lord's instructions. If the Lord were to permit your family to continue to rule Israel, it would look as if He approved of what you have done. He would be excusing your sin. If you had held on just a little longer, I would have been here and things would have turned out differently. The Lord would have blessed you, and you and your descendants would have always ruled Israel.

¹⁴But now He can't do that because you not only disobeyed His command, but you led your men to look to you for direction instead of to God. So the Lord has no choice but to take the kingdom from your descendants and give it to someone who will do what He says, a man after His own heart, one who will make Him first in everything he does."
¹⁵Then Samuel left Gilgal and went to Gibeah. And when Saul counted his men, he found that only six hundred were still with him.

Israel Without Weapons

¹⁶So he tried to make up in heroics what he lacked in obedience and marched his men west toward Geba just across the valley from Michmash where the Philistines were. ¹⁷In the meantime, the Philistines sent out three raiding parties to ravage the country for food. One detachment turned toward Ophrah in the area of Shual, ¹⁸the other toward Beth Horon, and the third toward the Valley of Zeboiim facing the Judean desert.

¹⁹There were no blacksmiths in all of Israel because the Philistines controlled the flow of iron and other metals that came inland from the coast in order to keep the Israelites from making swords or spears. ²⁰When Israel wanted metal farming tools they had to buy them from the Philistines. They even had to go to them to have them sharpened. ²¹The

charge for sharpening plowshares and hoes was two small silver coins. For sharpening axes and repairing oxen goads, it was one small silver coin. ²²So at this time the Israelites had neither swords nor spears, except Saul and Jonathan. The rest of the men had only bows and arrows and sling shots. ²³When the Philistines heard that Saul and Jonathan had joined forces, they immediately sent a reinforcement of troops to defend the Michmash Pass.

Jonathan's Faith

14 The Lord impressed Jonathan to attack the main Philistine camp at Michmash. Jonathan said to his armor bearer, "Let's sneak over to this Philistine garrison and take them by surprise." But he didn't tell his father. ²Meanwhile, Saul had set up his tent under a huge pomegranate tree by the threshing floor of Migron, between Gibeah and Geba, not far from Michmash. With him was the reduced force of six hundred men who had marched there from Gilgal. ³Among them was a priest named Ahijah, the grandson of Phinehas. Phinehas was one of the sons of Eli killed in the battle of Shiloh when the Philistines had taken the Ark. Ahijah had the holy breastpiece with him. No one noticed that Jonathan and his armor bearer were gone. ⁴On either side of the Michmash Pass, which Jonathan had to go through to get to the Philistines, were two huge overhanging cliffs, one called Bozez and the other Seneh. ⁵One was on the north side toward the city of Michmash, and the other was on the south side toward Geba.

⁶Jonathan said to his armor bearer, "Let's go down through the pass underneath those overhanging rocks so that no one will see us until we get near the Philistine garrison. Pray that the Lord will be with us because He can give victory to many or to few." ⁷His armor bearer agreed, "Let's put our trust in the Lord and go on ahead. I'm with you."

⁸Then Jonathan said, "All right, let's

go. We'll make our way down the gorge and when we get near the Philistine camp, we'll let them see us. ⁹If they challenge us by saying, 'If you want to fight, stay where you are and we'll come down and teach you a thing or two,' then we'll slip into the shadows and make our way back here. ¹⁰But if they challenge us by saying, 'If you want to fight, show your courage and come on up here,' that will be a sign from the Lord that He'll fight for us and give us the victory." The armor bearer agreed.

¹¹So when they got near the outpost they let the Philistine guards see them climbing around the rocks down in the gorge. The guards laughed and said, "Look! The Hebrews are scared of us and are crawling out of the holes they've been hiding in." ¹²Then they shouted to Jonathan, "If you want to fight, come on up here and we'll teach you how!" Jonathan turned to his armor bearer and said, "That's the sign we've been praying for. Follow me and we'll go up to meet them as they've asked us to do. The Lord has already given us the victory."

¹³So they slipped back into the shadows, went a little farther down the pass and crawled on their hands and knees up the other side to where the Philistines were. Since Jonathan and his armor bearer had not answered them, the guards assumed that the two Hebrews had slipped back home. Jonathan took them by surprise, killed them and then attacked the garrison. Jonathan took the lead, and his armor bearer, who now had one of the Philistine swords, was close behind him. ¹⁴The Lord protected them, and in a small area of less than half an acre, Jonathan and his armor bearer killed twenty men.

¹⁵Then the earth began to shake and the Philistines realized that the God of Israel was against them. Suddenly, the troops in the camp, those nearby and those who had raided the area for food, all began to panic. In confusion, they thought their buddies were enemy troops, and

they began to slaughter one another. ¹⁶Saul's men also felt the earthquake and when his sentries looked over to the Philistine side, they saw them running in all directions and knew something had happened. ¹⁷By Saul's order they quickly took count of their own men and found that Jonathan and his armor bearer were missing. ¹⁸Saul said to Ahijah, "Put on the holy vest that you wear before the Ark and ask the Lord what we should do. While you're praying, we'll get ready for battle."

¹⁹While Saul was still talking to Ahijah, the noise from the Philistine camp got louder and louder. So he said, "Forget it! There's no time to pray now!" ²⁰So he took his men and rushed over to the other side of the pass. When they got there, they found the Philistines in utter confusion. Their troops were killing each other left and right. ²¹Some of the local Hebrews had joined the Philistine army, but when they saw what was happening they deserted and joined Saul and Jonathan. ²²When news of the battle reached the troops that had left Saul at Gilgal, those who had hidden in caves, pits and wells in the mountains of Ephraim came out and also joined forces with Saul and Jonathan. The Philistines were now on the run, with the Hebrews in hot pursuit. ²³So the Lord turned the tide of battle, and that day the Israelites defeated the Philistines and pursued them all the way to their homeland beyond Beth Aven and Aijalon.

Saul's Rashness

²⁴By day's end, Saul's men were worn out, because he had made them take an oath that they would not eat until they had gained complete victory over the Philistines. If they had, they would have been executed—so none of his men had eaten. ²⁵As they were passing through the woods, they came across a wild bee's nest with honey oozing from it. ²⁶They didn't dare taste it because of the oath Saul had made them take. ²⁷But Jonathan hadn't been there when they took the oath, so he

stopped and jabbed the tip of his sword in the nest and pulled out a honeycomb. He raised it to his mouth and licked off the honey, which renewed his energy. ²⁸One of the men saw him and told Jonathan about the oath his father had made the troops take before they went into battle. Then he added, "That's why the men are so weak and can't keep going."

²⁹Jonathan said, "That was a foolish thing for my father to do. It will spell trouble because the victory will not be as complete as he would like it to be, simply because the men won't have enough energy to keep going. ³⁰It would have been much better if the men could have picked up some food to eat with the other plunder they stripped from the dead Philistines. That way we could have kept up with the Philistines and killed more of them than we have."

³¹When the day was over and the Israelites had defeated the Philistines from Michmash to Aijalon, a distance of more than twenty miles, they were utterly exhausted. ³²When evening came, they killed the animals they had taken from the Philistines and ate the meat with the blood still in it. ³³Someone said to Saul, "Look! The men are sinning by eating meat that still has blood in it!" Saul shouted to his troops, "You're traitors to the faith! Find a big stone and roll it over here to me, now! ³⁴Bring your sheep and calves and slaughter them over here! Don't sin against the Lord by eating meat with blood still in it!" So that night everyone brought their animals and killed them in the presence of Saul and did as he said. ³⁵Then Saul built an altar to the Lord out of stones and asked Ahijah to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving on it. This was the first time Saul had ever built an altar to the Lord to express his thanksgiving.

³⁶After the service Saul said to his men, "Tonight, let's go down and invade the main camp of the Philistines and kill the rest of them, even if it takes us all night. In the morning we can enjoy the

spoils of war." The troops said, "Do whatever you think is best." But Ahijah the priest said, "Let's ask the Lord what to do." ³⁷So Saul prayed, asking the Lord whether or not he should attack the Philistines that night and if he did, would the Lord give him the victory. But the Lord didn't answer him. ³⁸Then Saul thought that maybe the Lord didn't answer because someone had broken the oath he had made his troops take earlier that day. So he said, "We need to find out who has sinned against the Lord by eating something while we were in battle. That's why the Lord isn't answering us. ³⁹Let me tell you that whoever sinned against the Lord will pay for it with his life, even if it's my own son!" But no one said a word.

⁴⁰Saul said, "All right, let's draw lots. You men stand over there, and my son and I will stand over here." The officers replied, "If that's what you want to do, that's fine."

⁴¹Saul prayed to the Lord again, "Lord, why didn't you answer me the first time and let us know whether or not we should attack the Philistines tonight? If the fault is in me or my son, let me know." So they drew lots and the lot fell on Saul and Jonathan, but the officers and their men were cleared. ⁴²Then Saul said, "Let's draw lots between me and my son." And the lot fell on Jonathan.

⁴³Saul turned to him and said, "What did you do? Tell me!" So Jonathan told him, "I just licked a little honey from the tip of my sword. Must I die when I didn't even know about the oath?" ⁴⁴Saul said, "There's no excuse! May God strike me dead if I don't make you pay for this with your life. This is jeopardizing my final victory over the Philistines!"

⁴⁵But the officers and their men defended Jonathan. They said, "Should we execute someone whom the Lord used to defeat the Philistines and give us victory? Never! No one will touch a hair of Jonathan's head!" So the troops saved Jonathan from being executed by his

own father. ⁴⁶Then Saul decided not to invade the camp of the Philistines as he had planned. Instead he withdrew his men from the area and first thing in the morning took them back home.

Saul's Other Wars

⁴⁷But Saul didn't stop fighting. He continued to attack Israel's enemies such as the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, the kings of Zobah and the Philistines. In all those battles he and his men were victorious. ⁴⁸He even fought off the fierce Amalekites when they attacked Israel and prevented them from plundering the land. ⁴⁹Saul's other sons were: Ishvi, also called Ishbosheth, and Malchishua. He also had two daughters: Merab and Michal. ⁵⁰His wife was Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaaz. The commander of his army was his cousin Abner, the son of his uncle Ner. ⁵¹Saul's father Kish and Ner were brothers, both sons of Abiel. ⁵²All the rest of his life Saul had to fight off the Philistines because he didn't pursue them the day the Lord blessed Jonathan. Whenever Saul saw a strong or brave man, he took him into his army.

Saul's Second Chance

15 One day Samuel went to Saul and said, "When the Lord told me to anoint you king over Israel, I did. Now listen to this message from the Lord and this time do exactly what He tells you to do. He's giving you another chance to redeem yourself. ²The Lord Almighty said, 'I want you to go and drive out the Amalekites who have come back into the land and pursue them until you totally defeat them so they won't attack Israel again. When my people came out of Egypt, the Amalekites showed them no mercy and tried to keep them from going into Canaan. So show them no mercy. ³Go and attack them and completely destroy everything they have. That's the only way to stop them from attacking my people again. Let nothing live. Put to

death men, women, infants, children, cattle, sheep, oxen, camels and donkeys. That will make a statement to other nations to leave Israel alone.'"

⁴Then Saul called out his army and assembled them at Telaim in the southern part of Judah close to the Amalekites. More than two hundred thousand men came from all over Israel, ten thousand from Judah alone. ⁵He marched his men to the city of Amalek where Agag the king lived and set up an ambush in a dry river bed. ⁶He sent a message to the Kenites, descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, who had joined the children of Israel when they first came out of Egypt and settled in the southern part of Judah. He said to them, "You need to move your families out of the area so no one gets killed when the fighting starts. You were kind to our people, and we haven't forgotten that." So the Kenites moved their families out of the area away from the Amalekites.

⁷Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to the wilderness of Shur just east of Egypt. ⁸He took the city of Amalek and ordered his men to kill everything that moved except King Agag. They were to capture him and bring him back alive. ⁹So all the Amalekites in that part of the country were destroyed, except King Agag. But the best of the sheep, cattle, young bulls and lambs, plus anything else that was of value, they kept for themselves. And Saul did nothing to stop them. But they did destroy everything else.

God Rejects Saul as King

¹⁰Then the Lord said to Samuel, ¹¹"I'm disappointed with Saul as king because this is the second time he has openly disobeyed me. I must stop blessing him or the people will think that it doesn't matter if their king obeys me or not." When Samuel heard this, he broke down and cried all night, praying that somehow the Lord would find another way to deal with the problem. ¹²Early the next morning he went to meet with Saul. The people told

him that he and his men had been camped near the city of Carmel where Saul had set up a monument to honor his victory over the Amalekites, but he and his men had moved on down to Gilgal.

¹³So Samuel went to Gilgal. When he reached the camp, Saul came out to meet him and said, "Samuel, blessings on you. I'm glad you've come. I've got some good news for you. I've defeated the Amalekites and have done everything the Lord asked me to do." ¹⁴Samuel said, "What's all this mooing of cattle and bleating of sheep that I hear?" ¹⁵Saul said, "The troops brought these animals back with them to give to the Lord. That way they don't have to sacrifice their own sheep and cattle, and yet the Lord will have a good supply for Himself. That seemed like a good idea, so I let them do it. Everything else we destroyed." ¹⁶Samuel said, "Stop! Don't tell me any more. Let me tell you what the Lord said." Saul said, "Tell me, what did He say?"

¹⁷Samuel said, "The Lord is very disappointed with you. The authority He gave you as king has gone to your head. Once, you were very humble and dependent on Him. That's when He anointed you king over Israel. All this time He has watched over you and blessed you with victories. ¹⁸Then He sent you on a mission and said, 'Go and completely destroy the Amalekites. They're a heartless and cruel people. Make war against them until you totally destroy them.' By asking you to do this, the Lord gave you a chance to redeem yourself in the eyes of the people by carefully obeying Him this time. ¹⁹So why didn't you do it? Why did you let your troops bring all these animals back with them? Didn't you know that by doing nothing to stop them you were disobeying the Lord?"

²⁰Saul said, "But I did obey the Lord! I went to war against the Amalekites as He told me to and destroyed everything that moved and even captured their king.

²¹The soldiers were the ones who took

the sheep and the cattle. They saved the best for the Lord so when they came back to Gilgal they would have something to sacrifice."

²²Samuel said, "Do you know what makes the Lord happy? It's not the sacrifices and offerings we bring to Him. No! It's our love and obedience that pleases Him, because that shows that we trust Him. Sacrificing animals doesn't make Him happy. ²³Rebellion is as much a sin as consulting demons. Arrogance is as evil as worshiping idols. Since you have openly disobeyed the Lord twice, He now rejects you as king." Then Samuel turned to leave.

²⁴When Saul realized the consequences of his disobedience, he pleaded, "Samuel, don't leave me! I realize now that I have sinned. I have disobeyed the Lord and didn't listen to you as I should have. I was afraid of my troops and gave in to them. ²⁵Forgive me! Please, come back and stay with me here at Gilgal and give me your support! The people respect you, and we can worship the Lord together."

²⁶Samuel said, "I will not go up to the altar and worship the Lord with you because the people will think that I approve of what you have done. You have disobeyed the Lord and everybody knows it. He has rejected you as the rightful king of Israel. Don't you understand that?" ²⁷As Samuel stepped forward to leave, Saul grabbed the edge of Samuel's robe to keep him from going and it tore. ²⁸Then Samuel said, "Just as you have torn my robe, so the Lord will tear the kingdom of Israel from you and give it to one of your neighbors who is more trustworthy than you. ²⁹God is not like us. He doesn't lie, and He doesn't change His mind once He tells you to do something. So don't get the idea that you can persuade Him to change His mind about this."

³⁰Saul said, "I admitted that I did wrong. What else can I do? Don't humiliate me in front of my troops and the leaders of Israel by turning your back on me. Have some compassion." ³¹So Samuel

turned and went back with Saul in front of the troops and others who were there, and they worshiped the Lord together. ³²Then Samuel said to Saul, "Let me see King Agag." So they brought Agag, the Violent, to Samuel. Agag stood there trembling and said, "Surely all bitterness between our people is now over."

³³Samuel answered, "Your cruelty has made many a woman childless, so your mother also will be childless." Then Samuel took a sword, killed Agag and cut his body in pieces before the Lord right there at Gilgal. ³⁴Afterwards, Samuel went home to Ramah, and Saul dismissed his troops and returned with his special unit to Gibeah. ³⁵Samuel never went to see Saul again, but the rest of his life he grieved over him and what he had done. The Lord also grieved over Saul and the people's desire to have a king.

God Chooses David

16 Soon afterward the Lord said to Samuel, "How much longer will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him as king and there's no turning back. So fill your horn with olive oil and go to Bethlehem to worship. Stay at the house of Jesse for I have chosen one of his sons to be king."

²Samuel said, "How can I do this? Saul will hear about it and send some of his men to kill me. He's so caught up with his own importance he would kill his best friend." The Lord said, "Take a young calf with you to Bethlehem for a worship offering. When you get there, assure the people that you've come in peace to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. This will put them at ease. I will protect you. ³Invite Jesse and his family to the service and from that point on, I'll tell you what to do. You must anoint the young man I will show you."

⁴Samuel did what the Lord said, and when he got to Bethlehem, the city fathers came out to meet him. They were somewhat frightened over what his visit might be about. They said, "Is this a

peaceful visit or have we done something to displease the Lord?" ⁵Samuel answered, "It's a peaceful visit. The Lord told me to come here and conduct a religious service and sacrifice this young calf. So get ready and come join me for worship." Then Samuel stopped at Jesse's house and invited his family to the service.

⁶When the worship service was over but before they ate the sacred meal, Samuel told Jesse to introduce his sons. Jesse started with Eliab, his firstborn. Samuel thought to himself, "This must be the one the Lord wants me to anoint. He's good-looking, well built, the picture of a king. And he's the firstborn."

⁷But the Lord said to Samuel, "Don't judge a man by his appearance. That's what the people did before when I showed them Saul. Don't look at how good looking or strong or tall he is. That's what men look for. The Lord looks at the heart—at his attitude, his willingness to obey and his dependence on me. Eliab is not the one." ⁸Then Jesse introduced Abinadab. Again the Lord said to Samuel, "This is not the one." ⁹Next, Jesse introduced Shammah, but the Lord told Samuel to pass him by.

¹⁰Jesse introduced seven of his sons, and the Lord didn't choose any of them. ¹¹Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" Jesse said, "Well, there's one more, but he's out in the field watching the sheep." Samuel said, "Send for him, because we can't sit down to eat until everyone is here." ¹²Jesse sent for David and introduced him to Samuel. The young man was suntanned, rugged and handsome. But what Samuel noticed most was the sparkle in his eye as he talked with him about the Lord.

Then God said to Samuel, "This is the one. Anoint him." ¹³After the meal Samuel took David aside and, unknown to his family, Samuel quietly anointed him. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon David with added power from that day on. Then he went back to take care of his father's

sheep, and Samuel returned to his home in Ramah.

David Calms Saul's Spirit

¹⁴Meanwhile, Saul continued to withdraw himself from the influence of the Spirit of the Lord by brooding over losing his crown. At times he acted as if an evil spirit controlled him. ¹⁵His servants would say to him, "We can see that God is not stopping the evil spirits from tormenting you. ¹⁶Why don't you let us find someone who can play a lyre and sing to you? When the evil spirits come, he can sing songs about the Lord, and the evil spirits will stop bothering you."

¹⁷Saul agreed, "All right, let's try it. Find someone who can play well and bring him to me." ¹⁸His counselors said, "Jesse of Bethlehem has a son who is a skillful musician. He composes songs about the Lord. He's a brave young man and would make a good soldier. He's also nice-looking and speaks sensibly. There's no doubt that the Lord is with him." ¹⁹Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me your son David, the one who watches sheep."

²⁰Jesse called David in from the field and loaded a donkey with gifts of bread and fresh unfermented wine. He gave David a young goat and sent him off to see Saul. ²¹When Saul met David he was very pleased. He had him play, and the heaven-inspired music charmed the king. So he decided to keep David and make him one of his armor bearers. ²²He sent word back to Jesse, "I'm impressed with your son, the young man you sent. Do let him serve me." ²³So whenever Saul became depressed and the evil spirits began bothering him, he would call David. David would play songs of praise to the Lord, and Saul would find relief and feel better again.

David and Goliath

17 The Philistines decided to get even with Saul after their defeat at the hand of Jonathan, so they mobilized

their troops for war. They set up camp at Ephes Dammim between Socoh and Azekah inside the borders of Judah. ²Then Saul called up his troops and set up camp on the edge of the Valley of Elah just across from the Philistines. ³So the Philistines occupied one hill, and the forces of Saul, the opposite hill, with a valley between them.

⁴One day, Goliath, the Philistine champion fighter from Gath, came out and challenged Israel to a fight. He was a giant of a man, over nine feet tall. ⁵He wore a bronze helmet and had on a bronze battle vest that weighed over a hundred pounds. ⁶He also wore bronze leg guards and had a short bronze javelin slung over his back. ⁷His spear was like a weaver's beam, and its iron tip weighed almost fifteen pounds. A powerful soldier walked ahead of him carrying his shield.

⁸Goliath stood on the Philistine side of the narrow valley and shouted to the Israelites, "Why are you lined up for battle? Why do we need a whole army to settle our differences? I'm a Philistine, and you're the servants of Saul, so send a man over here and the two of us will fight it out. ⁹If he wins and kills me, we'll be subject to you. If I win and kill him, you'll be subject to us." ¹⁰When no one took up his challenge, he cursed and shouted, "I defy Israel and their God! Give me a man so we can fight it out!" ¹¹Saul was the only man in Israel who even came close to Goliath's stature. Among his own people, he, too, was a giant of a man and had a bronze helmet and a bronze battle vest. But when Saul and his men saw Goliath, they were afraid of him and lost their courage.

¹²Jesse of Bethlehem had eight sons, one of whom was David, and they all lived with their father. In the days of Saul, Jesse was already up in years. ¹³His three oldest sons had joined the army to go to war against the Philistines. The oldest was Eliab, the second, Abinadab, and the third, Shamamah. ¹⁴David, Jesse's youngest, and his three oldest brothers were all serving Saul. The rest of Jesse's sons were at

home. ¹⁵When David wasn't needed to play his lyre for Saul he would go home to be with his other brothers and to watch his father's sheep. ¹⁶Every morning Goliath, the Philistine, came from his camp to challenge the Israelites to a fight. He did this day after day for forty days, but no one took up the challenge.

¹⁷About this time Jesse said to David, "I want you to take half a bushel of roasted wheat and ten loaves of bread to your brothers who are with Saul. Leave early in the morning and go quickly to their camp. ¹⁸Take these ten fine cheeses along and give it to the officer in charge of your brothers' thousand-man unit. Then go to see your brothers and bring back word from them so I'll know they're all right."

¹⁹Saul and David's brothers and all the men of Israel were by the Valley of Elah across from the Philistines. ²⁰David made arrangements for the care of his sheep, and early the next morning he took the food and left. About four or five hours later, he arrived at camp just as the men were running out to the battle line shouting their war cry. ²¹The two armies drew up battle lines on either side of the valley and faced each other, waiting for the signal to charge. ²²David asked the supply officer to watch his baggage and ran to find his brothers. ²³It wasn't long before he found them and told them about the food he had brought for them. As they were talking, Goliath stepped out from the Philistine battle lines and shouted another challenge. When no one responded, he cursed the Israelites and their God, and David heard it.

²⁴When the Israelites saw how defiant Goliath was, they shrank back in fear and lost all courage to go into battle. ²⁵They said, "Just look at his size! Did you hear how he curses us? King Saul said he will give a big reward to anyone who can kill him. He'll give him his daughter in marriage and exempt his father's family from paying taxes."

²⁶David said to his brothers and the

other men standing near, "Why are you letting this man defy the God of Israel? He's nothing but an uncircumcised Philistine! He can't speak like this against the living God!" David hadn't heard everything that had been said earlier, so he asked his brothers, "What reward will be given to the man who kills him?" ²⁷They repeated what had been said, including what the reward would be for the one who killed Goliath.

²⁸Eliab thought David was only interested in the reward, and he became very angry. He said to David, "Why did you come out here to the front lines? By the way, who is taking care of your little flock of sheep? I know how proud and evil you are. You just came to watch the battle, didn't you?" ²⁹David replied, "What have I done to make you so angry? I only asked a question. There's a reason to be concerned—God's honor is at stake." ³⁰Then he turned to some of the other men and asked them the same questions and they gave him the same answers.

³¹When word of this got to Saul's tent, he sent for David. ³²David greeted Saul and then said, "No one should be afraid of this Philistine. If no one else will fight him, I will." ³³Saul laughed, "You can't go out and fight this Philistine giant! You're just a boy and without any battle training. This fellow has been fighting since he was a youth."

³⁴David said, "Your Majesty, I've been watching my father's sheep since I was a little boy. Whenever a lion or a bear came and tried to carry off a lamb, I would go after it with my staff and sling. ³⁵When it dropped the lamb and turned on me, I would use my staff and sling to kill it. ³⁶I have killed both lions and bears, and I'll do the same thing to this godless Philistine. He cannot curse my God and defy the armies of Israel. ³⁷The Lord who delivered me from the lion and the bear will do the same for me now."

Saul marveled at David's courage and said, "All right. Go, my son, and may the Lord God be with you." ³⁸But before Saul

let him go, he insisted that David put on his personal armor. Saul's servant put the heavy bronze helmet on David's head and the bronze vest on his body.³⁹The king's sword was strapped to his waist, and he tried walking around.

Then he turned to Saul and said, "Your Majesty, I can't wear these. They're much too big for me, and I'm not used to things like this." David took the armor off and thanked the king for his kindness.⁴⁰Then he took his shepherd's rod in his hand, ran past the front lines and then down into the valley. At the brook he carefully chose five smooth stones for his sling and put them in the little bag around his waist. With his sling in one hand and his shepherd's rod in the other, he made his way up the other side to meet the Philistine giant.

⁴¹Goliath saw him coming, and as David reached the top of the hill, Goliath started out to meet him. The man carrying Goliath's shield was in front as they approached David.⁴²Drawing closer, Goliath saw that the approaching enemy was only a boy, well-tanned and handsome, carrying his shepherd's rod. He felt that Israel was making fun of him by sending a child out to fight him, and he flew into a rage.⁴³He shouted at David, "Do you think I'm a dog that you come over here to fight me with a stick?" Then he called down curses from all his gods on David and said, ⁴⁴"Come on, you little fool! I'll make mincemeat out of you and feed your body to the birds and the beasts."

⁴⁵David replied in a clear voice that could be heard across the valley, "You've come to fight me with a sword, a spear and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the mighty God of Israel, whom you have defied.⁴⁶Today the Lord will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Then birds will eat the bodies of the whole Philistine army and beasts will chew on your bones, and all the world will know that there is a God in

Israel.⁴⁷Everyone here will see that the Lord does not need a sword or a spear for victory. The battle is the Lord's, and He will give all of you into our hands."

⁴⁸When Goliath heard that, he became enraged, pushed back his helmet and headed for David. David ran to meet him.⁴⁹Then he reached into his bag, took out a smooth stone, put it in his sling and slung it with all his might at the Philistine. The stone whizzed through the air and struck Goliath in the forehead so hard that it cracked his skull. The giant staggered and fell facedown on the ground.

⁵⁰So David defeated the Philistine champion with a sling and a stone. And he didn't even have a sword!⁵¹He ran over to the giant and with both hands, pulled Goliath's sword from its sheath. With one swift blow, he cut off Goliath's head. When the Philistines saw that Goliath was dead, they turned and ran.⁵²The men of Israel and Judah let out a war cry and chased the Philistines as far as Gath and Ekron. Bodies of dead Philistines were everywhere along the road of Shaaraim.⁵³When the Israelites returned from battle they plundered the camp of the Philistines.⁵⁴After David killed Goliath, he picked up the giant's head and gave it to Saul. Praising the Lord for what He had done for Israel, he was ready to go back home. Later, when he was king, he had Goliath's head brought to Jerusalem. The sword he sent to the high priest at Nob, but he kept the armor in his home town of Bethlehem.

⁵⁵As Saul had watched David go out to meet Goliath filled with courage from the Lord, he had turned to Abner his commanding general and said, "Who did you say his father is?" Abner said, "I really don't know."⁵⁶Saul said, "Then go, find out more about his family and let me know."⁵⁷So Abner went looking for David and found him just as he was returning from the other side of the valley carrying Goliath's head. Abner took him to Saul, and Jonathan was there with his father.⁵⁸Then Saul said to David, "Young man,

we're proud of you. The Lord has used you to gain a mighty victory. But you have never told me much about your father or your family." David said, "I'm the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem."

Saul Jealous of David

18 After Saul talked with David, Jonathan's heart went out to him, and he loved David as much as he loved himself because they were so much alike. ²From that day on, Saul kept David with him and didn't let him go back home to watch sheep. ³Jonathan made a friendship pact with David because they loved each other like brothers. ⁴To seal this new friendship, Jonathan took off his royal robe and gave it to David. He also gave David his uniform, including his sword with its belt and his battle bow with all its arrows. ⁵Saul tested David by sending him to fight the Philistines, and each time, David came back successful. Then Saul put him in charge of a section of his army which greatly pleased the people. David behaved himself wisely and depended on the Lord in all he did.

⁶After Goliath had been killed and Saul and his men were returning home from battle, women from surrounding cities and towns came out to greet them with tambourines and lyres. They danced and sang songs of victory and joy, ⁷singing, "Saul, the king, has killed thousands, and David, the shepherd, has killed tens of thousands."

⁸This made Saul very angry and he said to himself, "They're giving me credit for only thousands and they're giving this stripling shepherd credit for tens of thousands. The next thing I know, they'll be making him king!" ⁹Even though Saul was polite to David he was very jealous of him and had him carefully watched from that day on.

¹⁰The day after the women praised David, Saul became very depressed and God did not prevent the evil spirits from troubling him. So Saul called David to come and play for him, which David did.

But it wasn't long until Saul flew into a rage and began pacing the floor with a spear in his hand, shouting like a mad man. ¹¹Then he quietly mumbled to himself, "I'm going to pin David to the wall if it's the last thing I do." Suddenly he turned and threw his spear at David, but he dodged it. Then Saul picked it up and threw it at him again, but David dodged it the second time.

¹²Saul was afraid of David because he knew that the Lord was no longer blessing him, but was blessing David. ¹³The next thing Saul did was to ask David to take command of a thousand men and go to fight the Philistines. ¹⁴Everything David did was successful because the Lord was with him. ¹⁵When Saul saw David's success and wise conduct, he became even more afraid of him. ¹⁶The people of Israel and Judah loved David more and more because they could see that the Lord was with him.

David Marries Saul's Daughter

¹⁷One day Saul said to David, "I would like to offer you my oldest daughter, Merab, in marriage so you'll be part of the royal family. But this is on the condition that you stay loyal to me and fight the battles of the Lord for Israel." Saul thought to himself, "Why should I kill him? Let the Philistines do that." ¹⁸David responded to Saul's offer by saying, "Who am I and what standing does my father's family have that I should become the king's son-in-law?" ¹⁹But Saul insisted. Yet when the time came for him to give Merab to David, he suddenly changed his mind and gave her to Adriel of Meholah instead.

²⁰Saul's youngest daughter, Michal, had fallen in love with David the first time she had seen him. When Saul found out about this he was pleased. ²¹He said to himself, "Good! I can still carry out my plan. I'll give her to David to show everyone that I like him, and then I'll send him out to fight the Philistines, and they will kill him for me." So he called for David and said, "I'm sorry about Merab,

but my daughter, Michal, is in love with you. I'll give her to you in marriage, and you can still become my son-in-law." But David hesitated. ²²So Saul asked his servants to talk to David and urge him to take advantage of the marriage offer. He said, "Tell David how much I like him, how much my attendants and officers like him and that everyone wants him to become the king's son-in-law."

²³Saul's servants talked to David and urged him to accept Saul's offer. But David always gave the same answer, "It's a heavy responsibility to become the king's son-in-law, especially for a nobody like me. Besides, even if I married her, what dowry would I give the king for his daughter? I'm only a poor man." ²⁴Then Saul's servants went back to him and reported everything that David had said.

²⁵Saul said, "Go back and tell David that all he needs for a dowry is to circumcise a hundred dead Philistines and bring me their foreskins." Of course, Saul was secretly hoping that David would be killed in the process. ²⁶When the servants took word back to David, he felt encouraged about the marriage offer. So he agreed to marry Michal and become the king's son-in-law on the condition that Saul had laid down and by the date he had set for David to come up with the dowry.

²⁷Then David took a handful of his best men and went out and killed over two hundred Philistines. He circumcised them and brought their foreskins back to Saul as dowry for Michal. So Saul gave him his daughter in marriage and David became the king's son-in-law and part of the royal family. ²⁸When Saul saw how the Lord protected David everywhere he went and how much his daughter Michal loved him, ²⁹he was still more afraid of David and decided that he would not rest until David was put out of the way.

³⁰The Philistines did not let up on Israel and there were constant battles between them. Every time Saul sent David, he would defeat the Philistines and come back victorious. He was more

successful than any of Saul's officers and in a relatively short time, he became a respected commander, not only at home, but also among Israel's enemies.

Saul Determined to Kill David

19 Saul became so jealous over David's continued success that he bluntly told his son Jonathan and his officers to kill David the first chance they had. But Jonathan loved David as if he were his own brother. ²So he warned David, "My father has just given his officers orders to kill you, and if he gets a chance, he'll kill you himself. So be careful. You had better find a place to hide. ³Tomorrow morning my father will go out to the field to practice. When he does, I'll go along and appeal to him on your behalf. Then I'll let you know what he says."

⁴The next day Jonathan went with his father out to the field and said to him, "Father, don't do anything to hurt David. He hasn't harmed you. Actually, he's been a great blessing to you and to Israel. ⁵He risked his life when he went out to fight Goliath. The Lord blessed him and gave Israel a great victory because of him. You saw all that and were glad at the time. God would hold you accountable for murdering someone who saved our country. Why would you want to kill an innocent man?"

⁶Saul listened to Jonathan and changed his mind about David. Then he swore to the Lord, "As surely as the God of Israel lives, David must not be killed." ⁷Later that morning Jonathan met with David and told him everything his father had said. Then he took him to Saul and he accepted David as before.

⁸Once again war broke out between Israel and the Philistines, and Saul sent David to fight them. David and his men hit them with such force that they turned and ran. ⁹After David's victory Saul lapsed into a state of depression. Evil spirits took advantage of him, and God did nothing to stop them. Saul was sitting in his palace one evening with a spear in his hand while David was playing his lyre.

¹⁰Suddenly Saul stood up and threw the spear at David, hoping to pin him to the wall. But David eluded the spear and it hit the wall with such force that it stuck there. He ran from the room and out into the night and made his way home.

¹¹Then Saul ordered some of his men to follow David and keep an eye on his house so when he came out in the morning they could kill him. But David's wife, Michal, urged him not to stay at home that night, because she had visited her father earlier and knew that he would stop at nothing to kill David. She said, "If you don't leave tonight, you'll be dead by tomorrow. When father's men see you, they will kill you." ¹²So Michal tied some bed sheets together and helped David lower himself out a window to escape. ¹³Then she took a statue, laid it in David's bed, put black goats' hair on its head to look like hair and covered it up so it looked like David asleep.

¹⁴The next morning when Saul's men got there and asked to see David, Michal told them that he was sick in bed. ¹⁵The men went back to Saul and told him that David was sick. Saul didn't care. He said, "Go back and get him, bed and all, and bring him here so I can kill him myself." ¹⁶When the men went back and forced their way into the house, they found a statue in David's bed, its head covered with goats' hair. ¹⁷They returned and told Saul. He immediately called for Michal and said, "How could you do this to your own father? You helped my worst enemy escape and then lied and told my men he was sick." She lied and said, "I had no choice. David told me that if I didn't help him escape, he would kill me." And Saul believed her.

¹⁸After David escaped through the window during the night, he made his way to Samuel's place in Ramah and told him everything that had happened. Samuel welcomed David and invited him to join the students from the School of the Prophets who were with him. ¹⁹But someone told

Saul that David was with Samuel in Ramah at the School of the Prophets. ²⁰So he sent some of his men over to get David and bring him back. But when they got there, the students were in the midst of worship and the Spirit of the Lord came upon Saul's men, and they, too, started to sing and praise the Lord.

²¹Saul heard about this. So he sent another group of men to Ramah to get David. But they, too, joined the students in worship. Again word got back to Saul, and he sent a third group of men to get David, and the same thing happened to them. ²²Saul's rage became uncontrollable. He started for Ramah himself. When he came to the large well at Secu, he asked the people if they knew where he could find Samuel and David. They directed him to the prophet's house. ²³But before he even got there, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he started to sing and praise the Lord. ²⁴When he met Samuel he took off his royal cloak and his armor and wore only the ordinary garment he would wear at home. He joined the students in worship and stayed there overnight praising the Lord. When the people heard about this, they asked, "Does this mean that the Lord has called Saul into the ministry?"

Jonathan and David

20 David quickly left Ramah and made his way back to Gibeah to see Jonathan. When he got there he said, "Your father is still trying to kill me! What have I done? What crime have I committed for him to hunt me down like this to kill me?" ²Jonathan said, "No, no! My father took an oath and swore to the Lord that he wouldn't kill you. Besides, there's nothing he doesn't tell me. If he were planning to kill you, I would be the first to know about it." ³Then David said to Jonathan, "I swear by the living God that your father is planning to kill me. You don't know because you've been away. He knows we're close friends.

That's why he didn't tell you because it would hurt you and you would warn me. As surely as the Lord lives, I'm only a step from death." ⁴Jonathan said, "What do you want me to do for you?"

⁵David said, "Tomorrow evening begins the Festival of the New Moon. I'm supposed to have dinner with your family but I should really go to Bethlehem to be with my father. So let me go, and I'll be back after sunset the next day and will hide in the field until you come and tell me what to do. ⁶If your father asks about me, tell him the truth, that I asked your permission to go to Bethlehem to be with my family. Say, 'This is the time of the year when they get together to offer a special sacrifice to the Lord for what He has done for them. So I let him go.' ⁷If he says, 'Fine,' then you'll know I'm safe and you can come out and get me and I'll be happy to eat with the king again. But if he goes into a rage, you can be sure he's out to kill me. ⁸Now if I'm guilty of some crime or if I've hurt your father in any way and deserve to die, then I'd rather have you kill me. You made a covenant before the Lord accepting me as your brother. So I know you would not want to turn me over to your father to kill me." ⁹Jonathan said, "Stop talking like that! If I had the least suspicion that my father wanted to kill you, wouldn't I have told you?"

¹⁰David said, "Who is going to tell me whether your father hates me or not? You're the only one I can trust." ¹¹Jonathan said, "Come, let's go out to the field where we can talk some more." So the two of them walked out to the field together.

¹²Jonathan said, "I promise the Lord that sometime during the festival I'll find out how my father feels about you. If he feels good about you, I'll let you know. ¹³If he's determined to kill you, may the Lord punish me severely if I don't tell you and help you get away. I pray the Lord will continue to be with you as He was with my father when he first became king. ¹⁴I

know God has called you to rule Israel, so when you take over, if I'm still alive, be merciful to me. ¹⁵If I get killed before then, take care of my family as long as they live. I know the Lord will help you defeat every one of your enemies, but don't forget to be kind to my loved ones. ¹⁶So let's keep the covenant we made with each other because there's no doubt in my mind that the Lord will remove your enemies." ¹⁷Then Jonathan asked David to seal the covenant they had made with each other with an oath, which David did. And Jonathan did the same thing because he loved David as much as he loved himself.

¹⁸Jonathan said to David, "Tomorrow at sunset the Festival of the New Moon begins, and it will last until sunset the next day. It will be obvious that you're not there, because your seat will be empty. If Father asks me where you are, I'll tell him what you said and watch his reaction. ¹⁹When you come back from your family visit, come here and hide by the stone Ezel while it's still dark. Some time the next morning I'll come out and tell you what happened. Stay until you hear from me. ²⁰I'll come out for target practice and shoot three arrows in the direction of the boulder. ²¹I'll bring a young boy with me to run after my arrows. If I say to him, 'The arrows are this way, closer to me,' then you'll know that everything's all right, and you can come home to the palace. ²²But if I say to the boy, 'The arrows are way over there beyond you,' then you had better run, because my father is out to get you, just as you have said. This will mean that the Lord wants you to go. ²³Remember, God knows what we have talked about. He brought us together and will keep us close as long as we live."

²⁴So David went to Bethlehem, came back after the festival when it was dark, hid in the field and waited all that night and on into the morning. ²⁵At the dinner for the Festival of the New Moon, Saul sat in his usual place at the head of the table

with his back to the wall. Abner, his commander-in-chief, sat on Saul's right, and Jonathan sat at the other end of the table, but David's place on Jonathan's right was empty.

²⁶At first Saul didn't say anything because he thought that maybe David had done something to make himself ritually unclean and that was why he wasn't there. ²⁷But if David had become ritually unclean, he could have washed, and by sunset would have been considered clean. Yet he didn't come that evening nor the next day. At the close of the festival, Saul said to Jonathan, "Where's David? He didn't show up yesterday evening, all day today, and he's not even here for the final meal." ²⁸Jonathan said, "David asked my permission to go to Bethlehem to be with his family. ²⁹He told me that they all get together once a year to offer sacrifices to the Lord and that his brothers wanted him to be there. So he asked me to let him go, which I did."

³⁰When Saul heard that David showed more respect to his father than to the king, he flew into a rage and said to Jonathan, "You son of an evil and disobedient woman! Now I know that you've taken sides with David! You've disgraced both me and that mother of yours!" ³¹Don't you know that as long as the son of Jesse is alive you can never be the next king—your kingdom will never be. So get him and bring him here and I'll kill him myself. Go!"

³²Jonathan said, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" ³³Then Saul stood up and threw his spear so hard at Jonathan at the far end of the table that it would have killed him, but Jonathan was quick enough to dodge it. Now he knew for sure that his father hated David so intensely that he would kill him and anyone connected with him. ³⁴Then Jonathan got up from the table and left the room. He couldn't eat or sleep that night for grieving over his father's violent temper and shameful attitude toward David.

³⁵The next morning he went to meet David as they had agreed. He took a young boy with him to run after the arrows he would shoot for target practice.

³⁶Jonathan told the boy to start running and then shot some arrows way beyond him. ³⁷As the boy came close to the first arrow, Jonathan called out, "There's another arrow beyond you!" ³⁸Then to impress David with the gravity of the situation, he shouted as loud as he could, "Hurry! Keep going! Don't waste any time!" The boy ran and found all the arrows and brought them back to Jonathan. ³⁹But only David and Jonathan knew what all this meant. ⁴⁰Then Jonathan gave the boy his bow and his other arrows and said, "Take these back to the palace. I don't feel like practicing today. I think I'll stay out here and rest a while."

⁴¹After the boy was out of sight, David came out from behind the big boulder and ran toward Jonathan. As he came close he fell on his knees and bowed three times out of respect for Jonathan. They hugged each other and cried, especially David. ⁴²Then Jonathan said to David, "God be with you. We're committed to be friends forever. You promised to watch over my family and I promised to watch over yours, and the Lord will help us keep our promises." So David and Jonathan parted with the peace of God between them, and Jonathan went back to the palace.

David Flees for His Life

21 David decided to go to the city of Nob where the Sanctuary was. Ahimelech, the high priest, was surprised to see David and said nervously, "Why are you by yourself? Is something wrong?" ²David's faith in God began to waver, and he lied to Ahimelech, "I'm on a secret mission for the king. But I'm in a hurry because I told my men to meet me at a certain place at a certain time, so I have to keep going. ³Do you have some bread you could let me take? I could use about five loaves or even more if you have it."

⁴Ahimelech said, "I don't have any ordinary bread here but I do have the Lord's consecrated bread, those twelve flat loaves that sit on the little table in the Sanctuary. I'm sure the Lord would not object if I gave you those to keep you and your men from going hungry. But you need to know that if any one of you has had sex today, he's ritually unclean until this evening and can't eat this bread until then. That's the same rule that the priests have to follow." ⁵David answered, "We haven't touched a woman for days, so the men are ritually clean. We make sure of that whenever we go on ordinary missions for the Lord. How much more this time!" ⁶So Ahimelech gave him the twelve flat loaves of bread from the Lord's table because there was no other bread available. Then he ordered more bread to be baked to replace the loaves.

⁷Saul's chief herdsman Doeg, happened to be there that day. He was an Edomite who had accepted the Jewish faith. He had become ritually unclean and was waiting there until evening so he could pay his vow to the Lord. He saw and heard everything that was going on.

⁸When David saw Doeg, he decided to ask Ahimelech if he had a sword on hand. He said, "I was in such a hurry to leave that I didn't even think about bringing one along until I got here." ⁹The high priest said, "The only sword I have is Goliath's sword that you gave us as a trophy in remembrance of what the Lord had done for Israel. If you want it, you may have it." David said, "Thank you, I'll only borrow it. There's no sharper sword in all of Israel." So Ahimelech gave him the sword.

David Goes to the Philistines

¹⁰Without asking the Lord, David made his way to the Philistine city of Gath, about thirty miles away, hoping to find safety among his enemies. When he got there he asked to see King Achish. ¹¹The king's officials said to Achish, "Isn't this

David, the future king of Israel? Isn't he the one the Israelite women sang about when they said, 'Saul killed his thousands and David his tens of thousands?'"

¹²David was greatly admired and respected, even by his enemies, for his prowess and skill in battle. Achish welcomed David and took such an unusual interest in him that David became afraid. He didn't trust Achish. ¹³So David decided to act out a lie and pretended to have a seizure. He jerked his arms and legs back and forth, ran into the wall, scratched on the doors and let saliva run down his beard. ¹⁴When Achish saw this he said to his officials, "Look at this man! He's possessed! And you bring a man like this into my presence? ¹⁵Don't I have enough people like this in my own country? Do I have to sit here and watch something like this in my own palace? Get him out of here!" So the king's officials removed David from the king's presence and told him to leave the city.

David Returns to Israel to Hide

22 David was glad to leave Gath, and he hurried back to Israel and hid in a cave near the city of Adullam. When his brothers and other relatives learned where he was, they joined him for their own safety. ²Everyone who had lost confidence in Saul, those who were in debt and those who wouldn't compromise their faith, joined David and accepted him as their leader. Soon he had over four hundred men with him, not counting their families.

³Then David decided to leave the cave and go to Mizpah, one of the mountain strongholds in the land of Moab not far from the capital city of Kir. From here he sent word to the Moabite king asking him if he would be so kind as to care for his elderly parents who had also joined him until God showed him what to do next. ⁴The king gladly agreed since David's great-grandmother, Ruth, was from Moab. So David's parents stayed with the Moabite king all the time David was in

hiding. ⁵Now the prophet Gad also joined David. One day the Lord gave him a message for David. He said, "Don't stay here any longer but leave at once and go back to the land of Judah." So David left Mizpah, and he and his men hid in the forest of Hereth.

Saul Slaughters the Priests

⁶One day Saul was sitting under a tamarisk tree on a hill overlooking Gibeah. He had a spear in his hand and was surrounded by his officers. Someone came and told him that David had left Adullam and was now in the forest of Hereth. ⁷When Saul heard this he said to the officers, "Listen, you Benjamites! Who told David that I was planning to attack him at Adullam? Do you think David will reward you with fields and vineyards? If he became king, would he keep you as his officers and put you in charge of hundreds or thousands of troops? ⁸Why are you plotting against me by telling David my plans? No one told me that my son Jonathan made a pact with David. I had to find out from someone else. None of you seem very concerned that David, who was supposed to be my personal aide, is looking for a chance to kill me and that my own son is encouraging him to do so! The man who names the traitor will be rewarded handsomely."

⁹Doeg, the Edomite, happened to be there to give Saul a report on his sheep. When he heard the offer and saw a chance to get even with Ahimelech for reproving his sins, he said, "Your Majesty, I saw Ahimelech, the high priest, help David. ¹⁰He prayed for David, gave him food from the Sanctuary and even gave him Goliath's sword."

¹¹Then Saul sent for Ahimelech and all his male relatives who were serving as priests in the Sanctuary. ¹²When they all arrived Saul spoke to the high priest, saying, "Listen to me, Ahimelech." The high priest replied, "Yes, Your Majesty." ¹³Saul said, "Why did you conspire against me by helping David? I've heard

that you prayed for him, gave him bread from the Sanctuary and even gave him Goliath's sword. Now he and his men are just waiting for a chance to kill me."

¹⁴Ahimelech replied, "David is one of your most loyal subjects. He's your son-in-law, the captain of your bodyguard and highly respected by your whole family. ¹⁵That's not the first time I have prayed for David. Was it wrong for me to give someone bread and a sword who was on a secret mission for the king? I don't know anything about a conspiracy against you, nor does my father's family."

¹⁶When Saul heard Ahimelech's defense, he flew into a rage and said, "Ahimelech! You're going to pay for this! Not only will you and your sons die, but so will your father's entire family!" ¹⁷So he ordered his bodyguards to draw their swords and kill Ahimelech and then go and kill all his family back home because he had stood up for David and had not told the king that David had run away or where he was hiding. But Saul's men refused to touch the Lord's priests. ¹⁸So Saul ordered Doeg and his sons to do the job, and they didn't hesitate. They pulled out their knives, surrounded the priests and killed all eighty-five of them.

¹⁹Saul then had all the other inhabitants of Nob, the city of priests, killed. He also killed all the cattle, donkeys and sheep in the village. None of the animals were spared.

²⁰Now young Abiathar, one of the sons of Ahimelech and the grandson of Ahitub, had not gone with his father to see Saul, because he was sick. He was able to escape the slaughter at Nob and joined David. ²¹He told David how Saul had killed all the priests, including his father, and all the people in Nob. ²²David said to Abiathar, "That day when I stopped to see your father, I noticed Doeg the Edomite was there and something told me he would tell Saul. So I am responsible for the death of your family and the deaths of all the people in Nob." Then David broke down and wept.

²³After he regained his composure, he said to Abiathar, "Stay with me. Don't be afraid of Saul, because he wants to kill me too. You'll be safe here."

David Saves the City of Keilah

23 When David was told that the Philistines had surrounded the walled city of Keilah and were taking the newly harvested grain from the farmers, ²he asked the Lord, "Should I go and fight the Philistines? Will you go with me if I do?" The Lord answered, "Yes, go help the farmers and I'll go with you." ³But David's men didn't want to go. They said, "We're not strong enough to face the forces of Saul right here in Judah. That's why we have to hide. What do you think will happen if we go out in the open and attack the Philistines? Suppose Saul attacks us? Then we'll have two enemy forces to worry about."

⁴So David asked the Lord again whether or not he should go and fight the Philistines, particularly since Saul's forces also were camped in that general area. The Lord said, "Go to Keilah and fight the Philistines. Don't worry about Saul. I'll go with you and give you the victory." ⁵David told his men what the Lord had said. So they quickly marched the few miles to Keilah and attacked the Philistines, and the Lord gave them victory. They killed a large number of enemy troops, and returned to the farmers the cattle and grain which the Philistines had taken. They also saved the townspeople from being killed.

⁶It was about this time that young Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, joined David, after escaping from Saul's men who had attacked his hometown. He brought with him the high priestly vestments that his father had worn. ⁷When Saul heard that David had left his hideout in the forest of Hereth, he said to himself, "Now I've got him. God has finally given me the chance to kill him. He's gone to the walled city of Keilah and put himself in a trap." ⁸Then Saul called

up his troops and marched to Keilah to surround the city and wipe it off the map, with David and his men inside.

⁹When David got word that Saul and his men were coming, he said to young Abiathar, "Quick, put on the priestly garments of your father and the holy breastpiece with its Urim and Thummim gems, and ask the Lord what we should do!"

¹⁰David prayed, "O Lord, mighty God of Israel, we have heard that Saul and his men are coming to attack us here in Keilah. We know he'll not hesitate to kill everyone here just to get me. If that happens, I'll be the one to blame for their deaths. ¹¹Is Saul really coming here? If he does, will the people of Keilah turn me over to him to save themselves? Will Saul kill them because of me? O Lord, please tell me what's going on!" The Lord said, "Yes, Saul and his men will come."

¹²Again David prayed, "Lord, will the people of Keilah really turn me over to Saul if I stay here?" A light encircled the large gem on the right of the breastpiece indicating, "Yes." ¹³Then David with his men, who now numbered six hundred, left Keilah as fast as they could and didn't stay in any one place very long. When Saul heard that David had gone, he turned his troops around and marched them back home.

David Hides in the Mountains

¹⁴When David reached the wilderness mountains near Ziph, he positioned his men at certain lookout points from which they could see large areas of the open country. Saul didn't give up. Every day he went looking for David, but the Lord always protected him from Saul. ¹⁵David kept moving from place to place in the mountains to keep Saul from finding him. One day David and some of his men went to the city of Horesh on the road to Engedi to get some food. There he learned that Saul was after him again.

¹⁶While he was there, Jonathan came to encourage him and strengthen his faith in the Lord. ¹⁷Jonathan said to him,

"Don't be afraid. My father won't be able to find you; the Lord won't let him. Everyone back home knows that the Lord has chosen you to be the next king of Israel and that I'll be standing by your side. Even my father knows that." ¹⁸The two of them renewed the covenant they had made with each other. Then Jonathan went back home and David stayed at Horesh.

¹⁹Some of the people from Ziph went to see Saul at Gibeah and said to him, "Your Majesty, as you know, David is hiding in the mountainous region near Horesh. Right now he's camped on Mount Hachilah just south of Jeshimon. ²⁰If you and your men come down, we'll find David so you can capture him." ²¹Saul said, "Bless you for your willingness to help. I won't forget your kindness. ²²I want you to go back to make sure David is where you say he is and keep an eye on him, because he's very clever. ²³Learn all his hiding places and then come and tell me. I'll come down with my men and we'll finish him off. If he's in the area, we'll find him, if we have to track him down across the whole land of Judah." ²⁴So the Ziphites went to locate David. They found that he was still in the same general area south of Jeshimon in the wilderness east of Maon, in the southern part of Judah called Arabah. ²⁵When Saul got word, he and his men went after him.

But David heard that Saul was coming so he took his men deeper into the Maon wilderness and up one of the ridges overlooking the Valley of the Rocks. Saul continued to pursue David. ²⁶As Saul and his men were going along a ridge on one side of a deep narrow gorge, David and his men were trying to escape along the other side, but Saul kept closing in on him. ²⁷Suddenly a messenger ran up to Saul, and reported, "Your Majesty, the Philistines have taken advantage of your absence and are invading the country!" ²⁸So Saul ordered his men to turn around and they headed back to fight the

Philistines. That's why this ridge is now called, Sela Hammahlekoth, or The Rock of Parting or Separation Hill. ²⁹Then David took his men and headed east to the region of Engedi and hid in the protected places of that area.

David Spares Saul's Life

24 After Saul defeated the Philistines, he was told that David was hiding in the area of Engedi. ²So he took three thousand of his best men and went after David. They started looking for him east of the Wild Goat Rocks. ³When they came to a large cave on the mountainous road beside some sheep pens, Saul went into the cave to attend to his needs. This happened to be the same cave where David and his men were hiding, only they were way in the back where it was dark. ⁴David's men whispered to him, "Remember, the Lord promised that if we're faithful to Him, He would give our enemies into our hands. This is your chance to get rid of your enemy and kill him."

Saul had removed his cloak and sword and laid them off to the far side. David could see Saul, but Saul couldn't see him. David cautiously crawled along the edge of the cave, reached out and picked up Saul's cloak and cut off one corner of it. ⁵Then he crawled back to his men. But his conscience bothered him for having done even that much to Saul. ⁶He whispered to his men, "May the Lord forgive me for having done this, for being in the presence of the king and cutting off a corner of his cloak to prove to him that I was here. Saul is still the Lord's anointed king of Israel. God forbid that I should do anything to embarrass him." ⁷Then he told his men not to get any ideas about attacking Saul or killing him, because he was still their king.

⁸After a while, Saul picked up his cloak and sword and left the cave to join his troops. When he was some distance away David stepped out of the cave and shouted, "My lord, the king!" Saul looked

back to where David was and saw him standing in full view. David respectfully bowed low and said, ⁹“Why do you listen to those who tell you that I’m trying to kill you? ¹⁰If I had wanted to kill you, I could have done so in this cave where you relieved yourself. My men urged me to do so, but I told them that you were the Lord’s anointed king and that I would do nothing to hurt you, much less kill you, even though I could have. ¹¹See this piece of cloak in my hand? I cut it off while you were relieving yourself but I didn’t kill you. I pray this convinces you that I’m not starting a rebellion against you. I haven’t done anything to hurt you, yet you keep hunting me as if I were a common criminal, hoping to kill me. ¹²May the Lord be our judge. He will decide which one of us has done wrong. He knows how you’ve been chasing me. He also knows that I’m not out to hurt you. ¹³As our old saying goes, ‘Evil things come from evil people!’ Let me assure you that I will never lift up my hand against you. ¹⁴But look who the king is chasing! It’s as if he’s going after a dead dog or a flea. ¹⁵The Lord will decide who’s wrong and who’s right. He will take my case in hand and vindicate my cause and protect me because of my innocence.”

¹⁶When David finished, Saul asked, “David, my son, is that really you?” Then he broke down and wept. Through his tears, he said, ¹⁷“You’re a good man, David, much more committed to doing right than I am. You’ve been good to me, but I’ve treated you badly. ¹⁸What you did just now shows the kind of righteous man you are. The Lord gave me into your hands, and you could have killed me, but you didn’t. ¹⁹When a soldier catches his enemy off guard, does he let him go? Yet you let me go. May the Lord reward you for what you have done for me today. ²⁰I know that the Lord has called you to be the next king of Israel and that the kingdom will prosper under your rule. ²¹Now promise me before the Lord that you will be good to my descendants and not view them as a threat or order them killed.

Promise me you won’t wipe out our family name from Israel.” ²²So David took an oath before the Lord as Saul requested. Then Saul returned to Gibeah, and David and his men went back to their hiding place.

The Death of Samuel

25 About that time Samuel died and the leaders of Israel gathered together and mourned for him. He was buried at his home in Ramah. While David also mourned the prophet’s death, he felt that Saul would now come after him again, so he moved his men back to the wilderness of Maon.

David and Abigail

²There was a wealthy landowner in the area who had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was about a mile away in Carmel shearing his sheep. ³The man’s name was Nabal. He was mean and violent tempered. His wife, Abigail, was a wise and intelligent woman and was also very beautiful. ⁴All the time that David and his men had been in the area they had protected Nabal’s flocks from raiders. When David heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep, ⁵he chose ten young men and said to them, “Before we move again, we need to make sure that we have enough food for our men. I want you to go to see Nabal who’s with his sheep at Carmel and say to him, ⁶‘Greetings from David and good health to you, to your family and to all those who work for you. ⁷David heard that you were shearing your sheep and he’s happy for the way the Lord has blessed you. When your shepherds were near us in the field watching over your flocks, God asked us to protect them. The whole time your shepherds were in the area of Carmel, not one sheep was taken nor was anything else of theirs. ⁸Ask your shepherds about this, and they’ll tell you that it’s true. Please be kind to David, especially since this is a festive time for all shepherds, and give him and his men whatever you can to meet their needs.’”

⁹So the young men went to see Nabal, greeted him and gave him David's message. Nabal was busy, so they patiently waited for his answer. ¹⁰Finally, he interrupted his work and said, "Who is David? Who does this son of Jesse think he is? There are many rebellious servants breaking away from their masters these days. ¹¹Why should I give my bread, my fresh water and the meat from my own sheep to a stranger coming in from the desert?"

¹²The young men said nothing but turned around, went back to David and told him everything that Nabal had said. ¹³David was upset. By now his little army had grown to six hundred experienced fighters. He called them together and said, "Is this what we get for our services to Nabal? Strap on your swords! We're going to pay Nabal a visit!" Then he strapped on his own sword, took four hundred men with him and left two hundred behind to guard the supplies.

¹⁴Meanwhile, one of Nabal's servants ran to tell Abigail, Nabal's wife, what had happened. He said to her, "David sent a kind greeting to our master and asked for help, but our master insulted his men and sent them away empty-handed. ¹⁵These men have been very good to us, protecting us and our flocks the whole time we were out in the fields. We didn't lose one of our sheep or anything else as long as they were there. ¹⁶They were like a wall of protection around us day and night while we were herding our sheep. ¹⁷See what you can do because something awful could happen not only to our master, but to his family and to all of us. None of us can talk sense into him, for he won't listen to anyone."

¹⁸Abigail didn't have to think twice. She took the two hundred loaves of bread she had prepared for the shepherds, two large leather bags of fresh unfermented wine, five dressed sheep, five bushels of roasted wheat, one hundred pressed cakes of fresh raisins and two hundred pressed cakes of figs, and had her servants load all of this on donkeys.

¹⁹She said to them, "Go on ahead of me. I'll catch up with you." She did all this without telling her husband. ²⁰She then mounted her donkey, caught up with the small caravan and went on ahead of them to meet David. ²¹On his way to attack Nabal, David said to himself, "We watched over this man's flocks day and night so that not one of his sheep was missing, and what do we get? We gave him kindness, and he gives us nothing but insults! ²²May the Lord strike me dead if by tomorrow morning one of his men is still alive!"

²³About this time David saw a woman coming down the hill on a donkey, heading straight for him and his men, and not far behind her was a small caravan of donkeys. So he ordered his men to stop to see what it was all about. When Abigail reached David she quickly slid off her donkey, bowed with her face toward the ground, ²⁴and then fell to her knees in front of him, pleading, "My lord, let the blame of my husband, Nabal, fall on me. Please listen to me and hear what I have to say. ²⁵Nabal has nothing against you personally. He's always saying things he doesn't mean and then he reaps the consequences. He has a reputation of living up to his name which means A Fool. I wasn't there, so I didn't have a chance to explain things to your young men when they came. ²⁶Please don't be angry with my husband. The God of Israel has been kind to you and has kept you from a revengeful spirit and from killing your worst enemy. I know that the Lord will take care of your enemies for you in His own way, and He'll decide how to handle Nabal. So please don't harm anyone. ²⁷Let these gifts that I have brought for you and your men be acceptable in your sight. ²⁸Please forgive any wrong that my husband has done. There's no doubt that the God of our fathers will make you and your descendants rulers over Israel forever because you fight the Lord's battles. You are not the kind of man who would seek revenge for personal wrongs. ²⁹If some-

one tries to kill you, the God of Israel protects you. He watches over you like a precious treasure. He picks up your enemies as a man picks up stones for his sling and whirls them into the air.³⁰ When the God of our fathers places you on the throne of Israel and gives you all the good things He has promised,³¹ you should not have a guilty conscience to take with you or a bad memory of having killed innocent people because of one man's foolishness. Please sir, remember my kindness when the Lord has dealt well with you."

³²David's heart melted as he listened to Abigail. He asked her to get up from her knees and then said, "Praise be to the God of Israel who sent you to meet us.³³ May He bless you for your good judgment and for stopping me from shedding innocent blood.³⁴ If you hadn't come quickly, by tomorrow morning not one male who works for Nabal would have been left alive."³⁵ Then David accepted the gifts Abigail had brought for him and his men and said, "Go in peace, and may the God of our fathers bless you. I have listened to what you have said and you are right. We will return to our camp."

³⁶When Abigail returned home with her servants and donkeys, Nabal was already there. He had ordered his servants to prepare a banquet fit for a king for his neighbors and friends. He had enjoyed a great harvest of wool and was in good spirits but very drunk. So Abigail didn't say anything to him that night about where she had been.³⁷ In the morning, Nabal had sobered up so Abigail told him about David's intentions and how she had helped him change his mind. When Nabal heard this, he went into shock, suffered a massive stroke and was unable to move.³⁸ The Lord did not intervene, and ten days later he died.

³⁹When David heard what had happened, he said, "How thankful I am that the Lord kept me from shedding innocent blood. He took up my case against Nabal and let the evil thing he did return

on his own head." Then David decided to ask Abigail to be his wife. So he sent messengers to ask her if she would consent to marry him.⁴⁰ They went to her place in Carmel and said to her, "David has sent us to ask you if you would be willing to become his wife."⁴¹ Abigail listened respectfully, then bowed before them and said, "Yes, I'm willing to become his wife and do anything I can to help him, even to wash his servants' feet."⁴² So she got on her donkey and with her five maids went with the messengers to become David's wife.

⁴³David had also taken Ahinoam, a woman from Jezreel, to be his second wife. Michal, the daughter of Saul, was his first wife, and Abigail became his third wife. He was making the same mistake that other leaders made in his day, that of having many wives.⁴⁴ In David's absence, Saul had given Michal, David's first wife, to Paltiel, the son of Laish from Gallim, a city not far from Gibeah.

David Spares Saul's Life a Second Time

26 The Ziphites went to see Saul in Gibeah and said, "David is hiding on the mountain of Hachilah, opposite Jeshimon, near the edge of the Judean wilderness."² Then Saul took three thousand of his best men and went down to the Wilderness of Ziph to look for David.³ He set up camp by the side of the road that goes along the top of Hachilah facing Jeshimon. David was just south of there, toward the wilderness. When he heard that Saul had come into the area looking for him,⁴ he sent out scouts and learned that Saul himself was camped near Hachilah.⁵ So David took some of his men and got as close to their camp as he could. He saw Saul and Saul's cousin Abner, commander-in-chief of the army, sleeping in the middle of the camp with troops camped all around them.

⁶Then David talked to Ahimelech, the converted Hittite, and to Abishai, the son of David's sister Zeruiah. David asked

them, "Which one of you will go with me after dark to see how close we can get to Saul's camp?" Abishai answered, "I'll go with you." ⁷So David and his nephew Abishai made their way to Saul's camp that night and slipped past the guards. Quietly they crept right up to Saul who was sound asleep. His spear was stuck in the ground by his head and nearby were Abner and the king's special troops. All were sound asleep. ⁸Abishai whispered to David, "God has given Saul into your hands. It'll only take me two seconds to pull up his spear and pin him to the ground; one thrust will do it."

⁹David whispered back, "Don't you dare! You think you can kill the Lord's anointed and claim innocence? ¹⁰As surely as the Lord lives, He'll take care of Saul. Either he will die suddenly or be killed in battle. ¹¹But God forbid that we should touch him. Get his spear—and his water jug there by his head while you're at it. Then let's go!" ¹²Abishai pulled up the spear, took the water jug and they slipped past the guards back to their own camp. The Lord had caused Saul and his troops to fall into a deep sleep.

¹³David and Abishai reached the top of a hill after crossing the deep valley which separated them from Saul. ¹⁴Then David shouted, "Abner! Son of Ner! Wake up! Abner, can you hear me?" Abner got up, looked around and shouted back, "Who are you? How dare you wake the king!" ¹⁵David called out, "Aren't you the man who is supposed to protect the king? There is no one like you in all Israel! Then why didn't you do your duty? Someone came into your camp to kill the king and you didn't even know it!" ¹⁶That's not good. As the Lord lives, you and your men deserve to die because you didn't protect the Lord's anointed. Just look around—where is the king's spear and his water jug? Both were beside his head."

¹⁷By this time Saul was up and he recognized David's voice. He said loudly, "Is that you, David, my son?" David an-

swered, "Yes, it is, my lord. ¹⁸Tell me, why are you chasing me? What have I done? What am I guilty of? ¹⁹Listen to me, my lord. I am your servant. If God has sent you after me, then I must have sinned. If so, He will accept my sincere confession and heartfelt offering. But if men have caused you to be angry with me for no reason, let the Lord judge them. They have sent me away and said, 'Go live somewhere else and serve other gods.' ²⁰If you feel you have to kill me, don't do it so far from home and from the Lord's Sanctuary. Why should the king kill someone as harmless as a flea? Why should he come after me as if he were hunting a partridge in the mountains?"

²¹Saul shouted to David, "I have sinned! Come back, David, my son. You have spared my life, so I will spare yours. I will not hunt you again. I've acted foolishly and done a terrible wrong." ²²David shouted back, "Send one of your young men over here to get your spear and your water jug. ²³The Lord rewards right-doing and loyalty to Him. Last night He delivered you into my hands. But I would not touch you because He anointed you to be our king. ²⁴I spared your life. May the Lord spare mine and free me from all this trouble." ²⁵Saul answered, "May the Lord bless you, my son. I know you will do great things for the Lord and you will someday be the king of Israel." Then David went back into hiding, and Saul and his men returned home.

David Joins the Philistines

27 David thought to himself, "If I know anything about Saul, he's not going to give up. One of these days he'll succeed in killing me. The only thing left for me is to escape to the land of the Philistines. At least there I'll be safe from Saul, because he will be happy that I'm out of Israel and will stop chasing me."

²Without asking for divine guidance, David and his six hundred men went back to see King Achish in Gath. ³Achish was flattered to have David and his men

seek his protection. He decided that David must be over his seizures, so he gave him and his men political asylum in his own city. David also had his two wives with him, Ahinoam from Jezreel, and Abigail, Nabal's widow, from Carmel. ⁴When Saul heard that David had left Israel and was living in Gath, he was content and stopped looking for him.

⁵In time David realized that he and his men shouldn't live in that idolatrous city. So he went to see Achish and expressed appreciation for what the king had done for him and requested a place to live in one of the small country towns. He said to the king, "Why should we be so privileged as to live with you in the royal city of Gath?" ⁶Achish liked David's request and gave him and his men the country town of Ziklag, which had once belonged to the tribe of Simeon. Ziklag has belonged to Israel ever since Achish gave it to David. But the Lord was not pleased with David for exposing the weakness of Israel to others and showing a lack of faith in God's protection. ⁷David, his men and their families stayed in Ziklag for a year and four months.

⁸The people of Geshur, Girzi and Amalek inhabited the Wilderness of Shur all the way to the Egyptian border. These tribes were always raiding the villages of God's people and encroaching on their territory. So David had his men attack them. ⁹When David's forces attacked these tribes, they would kill all the men, women and children, but save the sheep, cattle, donkeys and camels and any expensive clothes they found. They would bring all the spoils back to Ziklag, and David would give some to Achish.

¹⁰Many times Achish would ask, "Where did you raid today?" David would say, "I raided villages in the southern section of Judah belonging to the Jerahmeelites and Kenites who are descendants of Hobab, brother-in-law of Moses." He said it in such a way that Achish thought he meant that he had raided Judean villages in the southern

section of the Negeb belonging to the territory of Judah. ¹¹David never brought survivors back with him, so no one could tell Achish what villages he had really raided. David and his men continued this for more than a year, the entire time they lived in Ziklag. ¹²Because Achish took David's answer to mean that he had raided his own people, the king thought he could trust David to be loyal. He thought, "David is making the Hebrews dislike him more and more. Soon he will be forced to serve me for the rest of his life because he'll have nowhere else to go." David's evasive answer made the Philistines think he was on their side, and they began to make plans to attack Israel.

28 Later the Philistines called up their troops and were soon ready to march against Israel. Achish said to David, "I want you to understand that I expect you and your men to join us in our attack on Israel." ²Again David gave an evasive answer, "As long as I'm here, I'm under your command, and you'll see for yourself how well my men can fight." Achish took what David said as a pledge of support, so he said to him, "Good! After we defeat the Israelites I'll reward you by making you my personal bodyguard, and you'll become a permanent member of my court."

Saul Consults a Spirit Medium

³Since Samuel the prophet had died, no one had had any messages from the Lord for Saul. The whole country had mourned over losing Samuel and had buried him in his hometown of Ramah. When Saul first became king, he had pleased the Lord by expelling from the country all spirit mediums, fortune-tellers and those who claimed they could channel voices of men from the past. ⁴When the Philistines set up camp at Shunem, on the north side of the Valley of Jezreel at the foot of Mount Moreh, Saul and his men set up camp about five

miles away on the south side of the valley at the foot of Mount Gilboa.⁵ Saul had used all his time and energy chasing David and had not kept up with what the Philistines were doing. So when he saw the huge forces that the Philistines had brought into Israel and knew that David was with them, a sense of doom filled his heart.⁶ He asked the Lord what he should do to defeat the Philistines, but the Lord didn't answer him. Saul had refused to listen to Samuel the prophet. He had killed Ahimelech and the other priests living at Nob. Ahimelech's son Abiathar had escaped, but he had joined David. He had taken with him the holy breastpiece with the Urim and Thummim which the Lord used to give direction to His people.

⁷Out of desperation Saul said to two of his closest officers, "Go and find a woman who is a spirit medium. I need help in knowing how to fight the Philistines." When they returned they said, "There's a witch at Endor, about eight miles from here."⁸ After it was dark, Saul disguised himself, put on other clothes and went with his two officers to see this woman who lived in a cave.

Saul said to her, "Consult the spirits for me. I'll give you the name of the man I need to talk to."⁹ The woman suspected who he might be because of his size and the rich gifts he had brought her. She said, "You know that Saul has forbidden us to practice witchcraft or we must leave the country. If we disobey, he said he would have us executed. Are you trying to get me into trouble?"¹⁰ Saul took an oath, "As the Lord lives, I promise that nothing will happen to you."¹¹ The woman said, "Whose spirit do you want me to bring up?" Saul said, "Samuel's spirit."

¹²She went through her incantations, and a spirit began to come up. The woman let out a cry, "Why did you try to deceive me? The spirit just told me you're Saul! Why didn't you tell me who you really were?"¹³ Saul said, "Never mind; nothing will happen to you. Tell me

what you see." She replied, "Now I see many spirits coming up from the ground and one of them is coming closer."¹⁴ Saul said, "What does he look like?" She answered, "An old man wrapped in a robe." Saul said, "That's Samuel!" and he fell on his knees and bowed with his face to the ground in front of the spirit which was now in full view.

¹⁵Then the evil spirit impersonating Samuel spoke to Saul, "Why did you bring me back to this land of trouble?" The spirit looked just like Samuel and sounded so much like him that Saul believed it really was the prophet. He answered, "I need your help. The Philistines are getting ready to attack and the Lord hasn't told me what to do. He doesn't answer my prayers anymore, and He hasn't sent a prophet to give me direction. So I've come here to ask you what to do."¹⁶ The spirit replied, "Why would you ask me what to do when the Lord doesn't answer you? If that's the case, He wouldn't give me a message for you either."¹⁷ The Lord is simply doing what He said He would when you disobeyed Him. He has taken the kingdom of Israel out of your hands and has given it to David.¹⁸ You didn't listen to Him when He told you to completely destroy the Amalekites. That's why He has left you alone just as you wanted. You need to decide for yourself how to fight the Philistines.¹⁹ The Lord will not protect you tomorrow but will hand you over to your enemies. The Philistines will win, and you and your sons will join me. The army of Israel will surrender to the Philistines." Then the spirit disappeared.

²⁰Saul fell to the ground as if he were dead. He was already faint from lack of food, and now fear and a troubled conscience drained his last ounce of energy.²¹ Finally he moved, and the woman and the two officers were relieved. The woman, still shaking from what had happened, said to Saul, "I listened to you and by doing so took my life in my hands."²² So sit up and let me get you something

to eat. I don't want anything to happen to you. You'll need all the energy you can muster to go back to your troops and be ready for tomorrow morning's battle." ²³But Saul just lay there and refused to eat. The two officers also urged him to get up and eat something. Slowly he got up and sat on the couch. ²⁴The woman quickly butchered the little calf she had been fattening. While the meat was roasting, she also baked some unleavened bread. ²⁵When it was ready she served the food to Saul and his two officers. After the meal, they got up and returned to their troops while it was still dark.

The Philistines Refuse David's Help

29 The Philistines moved their forces to Aphek, close to Israel's troops which were camped at the spring of Jezreel. Saul's special unit was nearby. ²As the Philistine kings were grouping their troops in units of a hundred and a thousand, they assigned King Achish and his men to guard the rear. ³When the commanders noticed David and his men waiting to be assigned, they asked Achish, "What are these Hebrews doing here?" Achish replied, "That's David, one of Saul's officers who defected to us. I've given him asylum in my territory. We can trust him to help us." ⁴But the Philistine commanders responded angrily and said, "Send these Hebrews home. Send David back! There's no way to know what will happen once the fighting begins and we don't want to take that chance. If those Hebrews are out of sorts with Saul, what better way for them to gain back his favor than by attacking us from the rear." ⁵Isn't that the same David the Hebrew women sang about when they said, 'Saul killed his thousands, but David killed his ten thousands?'"

⁶Then Achish went over to David and said, "The Philistine commanders don't trust you. As surely as the Lord lives, you've done nothing to show disloyalty. It would make me very happy if you could stay and fight alongside me. But

the kings and their commanders think otherwise. ⁷So you had better go back to Ziklag and wait there. We don't want to do anything to displease these kings." ⁸David acted hurt and said, "What have I done to deserve such treatment? Have you ever found me doing anything against you? Why can't I come along and fight against your enemies?" ⁹Achish said, "I know you've been as loyal to me as an angel from God. But that's the decision of the kings and their commanders, and that's final. I have no choice but to send you home. ¹⁰Tomorrow morning I want you to take your men and any other Israelites who have come with you and leave at the first light of dawn." ¹¹David did just that. He got up very early, and at daybreak, they started the long march back to Ziklag. He realized that God had intervened and was directing his steps. Then the Philistines marched their men south toward the Valley of Jezreel where Saul was.

David Defeats the Amalekites

30 After covering almost a hundred miles in less than three days, David and his weary men finally reached home. When they got there they were stunned by what they saw. While they had been away, the Amalekites, a desert tribe, had raided the Negeb in southern Judah including Ziklag. ²They had taken all the women and children out of Ziklag and then set it on fire. They hadn't killed anyone, but had taken them to sell as slaves and concubines. ³When David and his men reached home and found their families gone and Ziklag burned to the ground, it was almost more than they could take. ⁴They broke down and cried until they were too exhausted to cry anymore. ⁵David's wives, Ahinoam from Jezreel and Abigail from Carmel, were also gone. ⁶When the men recovered from the shock, they became angry with David and were ready to stone him for asking them to leave their families. Now their wives and children were prisoners.

David felt remorse for leaving Judah and coming to live in Ziklag. Out of desperation he turned to the Lord for an answer.

⁷He said to Abiathar, "Bring me the holy breastpiece so we can see what the Lord says for us to do." So Abiathar went and got the ephod. ⁸Then David prayed, "O Lord, please help me. Should we go after the Amalekites? Will we get our wives and children back?" The Lord said, "Yes, go after the Amalekites and overtake them. You and your men will rescue all your wives and children; not one will be missing." ⁹David and his six hundred men immediately pursued the Amalekites. When they reached the Besor Brook, some of them stayed there. ¹⁰They had already marched a hundred miles from Apek to Ziklag and then another fifteen to the Besor Brook near Gerar. Two hundred of the men were too tired and weak to go on. The other four hundred continued the pursuit.

¹¹They found an Egyptian boy in the wilderness on the verge of death due to exposure and dehydration. They picked him up and carried him to David where he was given food and water, and he revived. ¹²Then they gave him half a cake of pressed figs and two clusters of raisins, and he ate it all and regained some of his strength. He hadn't had anything to eat or drink for three days and nights. ¹³David asked him, "Where are you from? Who do you belong to?" The boy answered, "I'm an Egyptian slave of an Amalekite. Three days ago my master left me behind because I got sick. ¹⁴First we raided the villages of the Cherethites along the coast. Then we turned inland and raided the Calebites in the southern part of Judah. Finally, we raided and burned Ziklag. As we were leaving, I got sick, so my master left me to die." ¹⁵Then David said, "Do you have any idea where the Amalekites are now? Do you think you could take us there?" The boy answered, "Promise you won't kill me or turn me over to my master, and I'll take you to them."

¹⁶David promised, so the boy led them to the broad oasis where the Amalekites were camped. It was near sunset and the Amalekites were celebrating their victories. They were eating and drinking and rejoicing over the huge amount of plunder they had taken out of Philistia and Judah. ¹⁷When David saw this he ordered an immediate attack. In the evening twilight he and his men began fighting the Amalekites and kept on through the night until late in the afternoon the next day. The only Amalekites who got away were four hundred young men who mounted camels and escaped.

¹⁸All the women and children the Amalekites had taken from Ziklag were safe, including David's two wives. And everything that had been taken was recovered. ¹⁹God had restrained the cruelty of the Amalekites, and not one boy or girl, spouse, or older person was harmed or missing. David and his men had recovered everything. ²⁰They also recovered all the flocks and herds the Amalekites had taken from Ziklag, as well as the flocks and herds they had taken from the villages in Philistia and Judah. David's men drove these animals ahead of their own and called them David's loot.

²¹Then they returned to the Besor Brook where the other men were waiting. When these men saw them, they ran out to meet them and to embrace their families. David told them what had happened and everything the Lord had done for them. ²²But some of the men who had gone with David said to him, "Don't get any ideas about asking us to share this extra loot with them. Let each of them take his wife and children and whatever else belongs to him and be happy."

²³David said, "No, my brothers, you can't do that. We're not going to be selfish with what the Lord has given us. He protected us and our families and gave us the victory over innumerable odds. So let's be grateful. ²⁴We will give the same share to those who had to stay behind as to those who were strong enough to go on. We will

share and share alike. Those who stayed behind to protect the supplies are entitled to the same as those who went out to battle.”²⁵This became the rule for David’s men from then on. Eventually it became a rule for all of Israel, just as it had been in the days of Moses.

²⁶When David and his men got back to Ziklag with their families, he carried out the instructions of Moses by sending some of the captured animals as gifts to the elders of Judah with the message that this was the Lord’s portion from their recent victory over the Amalekites.²⁷In addition, he sent gifts from the captured herd to the people who had befriended him when he had to flee for his life and hide in the mountains. He sent these gifts of appreciation to those in the cities of Bethul, Ramoth in the Negeb, Jattir,²⁸Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa²⁹and Racal, to the Jerahmeelites and Kenites,³⁰to those in Hormah, Bor Ashan, Athach and Hebron,³¹and to the people in all the other places where he and his men had stayed.

The Death of Saul and His Sons

31 David and his men went to work rebuilding Ziklag while waiting for news about the battle between Saul and the Philistines. Meanwhile, the Philistines attacked the forces of Saul with such fury that they turned and ran. Many were killed and their bodies scattered all over Mount Gilboa.²The Philistines especially went after Saul and his sons and finally caught up with them. They killed all three of his sons, Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua.³Then fighting intensified around Saul. When the archers shot him, he was severely wounded but kept going, and they could not catch him.

⁴Saul realized he could not continue fleeing and that he would soon die, so he said to his armor-bearer, “Pull out your sword and run it through me. I don’t want these uncircumcised Philistines to find me wounded and abuse me before they kill

me.” But the young man was too scared to kill the Lord’s anointed. Then Saul pulled out his own sword, held it against his abdomen and fell on it.⁵When the young man saw that Saul was dead, he pulled out his own sword and fell on it and died beside him.⁶So Saul, his three sons, his armor-bearer and the men of his special guard were all killed the same day.⁷When the Israelites on the other side of the valley saw that their men were defeated and learned that Saul and his sons were all dead, they left their homes and fled. Then the Philistines took these villages and settled there. Soon that whole part of the country was under their control.

⁸The next day, as the Philistines went over the battlefield to strip the dead of any valuables, they found the bodies of Saul and his three sons lying not far from each other on the mountain of Gilboa.⁹They cut off Saul’s head, took his armor and sent messengers to carry the news of victory to their people. Then their priests called the people together to celebrate the victory of their gods over the God of the Hebrews.¹⁰They placed Saul’s armor as a trophy in the temple of Ashtoreth, the goddess of war, and his head in the temple of Dagon as trophies of their victory. The Philistines fastened the bodies of Saul and his three sons to the wall of Beth Shan for all to see.¹¹The people of Jabesh in Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul and his sons.¹²They remembered how Saul had saved their city from the Ammonites forty years before. So that same night they sent some of their bravest men across the Jordan River to Beth Shan to get the bodies and bring them to Jabesh. They took the bodies of Saul and his sons down from the wall and brought them back home to give them an honorable burial.¹³They buried their bones under a huge tamarisk tree just outside the city of Jabesh and fasted and mourned for Saul and his sons for a whole week.

2 SAMUEL

David Learns of Saul's Death

1 Saul was dead by the time David and his men returned to Ziklag after defeating the Amalekites. For two days they wondered how the battle was going between the Philistines and Israel. ²On the morning of the third day a young man from Saul's army came into town with torn clothes and dirt on his head. When they took him to David, he fell on his knees and bowed to the ground. ³David said, "Where did you come from?" The young man answered, "I was able to escape from the camp of Israel at the battle of Gilboa." ⁴David asked, "What happened? Tell me!" The youth answered, "The Israelites were defeated and ran from the Philistines. Many of them were killed, and Saul and Jonathan are dead."

⁵Then David asked him, "How do you know Saul and Jonathan are dead?" ⁶The young man lied, "I was running from the Philistines on Mount Gilboa when I saw Saul using his spear to support himself. The Philistine chariots and riders were closing in on him fast. ⁷He turned around and saw me and called to me. I answered, 'Yes, Your Majesty. What do you need?' ⁸He asked, 'Who are you?' I answered, 'I'm an Amalekite trying to get away from the Philistines.' ⁹Then he said, 'Come over here and kill me, because I'm critically wounded and about to die. I don't want the Philistines to capture me.' ¹⁰So I pulled out his sword and killed him as he requested because otherwise he would have been taken alive by the Philistines. Then I took the band of gold from his head and the gold bracelet from his arm and brought them to you as proof, my lord."

¹¹When David heard this, he tore his clothes in grief and broke down and wept and so did all his men. ¹²All day they mourned for Saul and his sons and for all the Israelites who had been killed in battle. They wept and did not eat because Israel had been defeated. ¹³After David and his men recovered somewhat, he

called the young Amalekite to him and asked, "Where did you say you were from?" He said, "I'm the son of an Amalekite, an alien living in Israel." ¹⁴David didn't trust him and said, "How come you didn't hesitate to destroy the king of Israel when you knew he was the Lord's anointed? You're as ruthless as the rest of your tribesmen who burned Ziklag." ¹⁵Then David turned to one of his men and said, "Take care of him." So David's soldier thrust his sword through the Amalekite and he died. ¹⁶David looked at the young man's body and said, "You deserved to die. You condemned yourself by your own testimony when you said, 'I killed the king of Israel, the Lord's anointed.'"

David's Song of Sorrow

¹⁷Then David wrote a funeral song of mourning for Saul and Jonathan. ¹⁸He called it, The Song of the Bow, and taught it to his men so they could sing it when they got back home and spread it throughout Judah. The song was later written in The Book of Jashar and goes like this:

¹⁹"The pride of Israel was killed on the mountainside. How are the mighty fallen. ²⁰Don't tell it in Gath or proclaim it in the streets of Ashkelon. Don't let the women of Philistia be glad or the daughters of our enemies rejoice. ²¹May the mountains of Gilboa receive no dew or rain in sorrow for Saul. May they produce no grain because there is where his shield lies in disgrace. It was defiled and is not rubbed with the oil of victory. ²²Jonathan's bow was deadly and the sword of Saul never returned empty. Their weapons were stained with blood as they pierced their enemies' bodies. ²³Saul and Jonathan were respected and loved. They were together in life and in death. They were swifter than eagles and stronger than lions. ²⁴Daughters of Israel weep for Saul! He returned from battle and shared with

you the spoils, ornaments of gold and scarlet cloth. ²⁵How are the mighty fallen in the middle of the fray! Jonathan lies dead on the heights of Gilboa. ²⁶I grieve for you, my brother, Jonathan. Your friendship meant so much to me. Our bond of brotherhood was wonderful, stronger than the love of women. ²⁷How are the mighty fallen! Their weapons are silent and abandoned in the field."

David Made King of Judah

2 Not long after this David prayed to the Lord, "Should I leave Ziklag and go back to Judah?" The Lord said, "Yes." David asked, "Where should I go?" The Lord answered, "Go to Hebron." ²So David took his two wives, Ahinoam from Jezreel, and Abigail, the widow of Nabal from Carmel, to Hebron. ³His men and their families with their possessions went also, settling in Hebron and in the surrounding villages. ⁴The leaders of the tribe of Judah welcomed David home after about twelve years of living in fear of his life, and anointed him king of Judah.

When they told David that the men of Jabesh in Gilead had rescued the bodies of Saul and his sons and given them an honorable burial, ⁵he sent some of his men there with this message: "The Lord bless you for your kindness and loyalty to Saul in burying him. ⁶May the Lord show His kindness and faithfulness to you. I, too, will be kind to you because of what you have done. ⁷So continue to be strong and brave even though Saul is dead. Judah has now made me their king."

Ishbosheth Made King of Israel

⁸After Israel's defeat at Gilboa, Abner, the commander of Israel's army, took Saul's son, Ishbosheth, and fled east across the Jordan to the Levitical city of Mahanaim. ⁹There Abner made Ishbosheth king over the northeastern territories of Gilead, Asher and Jezreel. Later Ishbosheth extended his rule over the tribes of Ephraim and Benjamin, and finally over all of Israel except for the tribe

of Judah. ¹⁰He was about forty years old when he became king east of Jordan and reigned there for two years. It was under Abner's direction that Ishbosheth began to extend his rule over Israel. Abner was determined to get rid of David, but the house of Judah was faithful to him. ¹¹David was content to wait for the Lord to direct events so he stayed in Hebron and ruled over Judah for seven-and-a-half years.

Israel and Judah at War

¹²One day, while David was still in Hebron, Abner took some of his men and came back across Jordan to Gibeon. ¹³Joab, David's nephew and one of his top officers, heard that Abner was in Gibeon. So he took some of his men and met Abner and his men by the city's small reservoir. Abner's men sat on one side and Joab's men sat on the other. ¹⁴Abner said to Joab, "Why don't we have some of our young men practice hand-to-hand combat in front of us?" Joab said, "Good idea! Let's do it!" ¹⁵So they chose twenty-four young men, twelve to fight in the name of Ishbosheth and twelve in the name of David. ¹⁶They lined them up, matching each one with his opponent and let them fight it out. Before the fight was over, they had pulled out their swords, grabbed each other by the head and plunged their swords into each other's sides. Then they all fell down and died. So the people named the place, Helkath Hazzurim, meaning The Field of Sharp Knives. ¹⁷Then a terrible fight broke out between the two sides. Abner and his men were defeated and they fled from David's men.

¹⁸Joab's brothers, Abishai and Asahel, were there that day. Asahel could run as fast as a wild deer, ¹⁹and he decided to pursue Abner and started after him without stopping for anything. ²⁰When Abner saw Asahel coming up behind him he shouted, "Asahel! Is that you?" Asahel shouted back, "Yes!" ²¹Then Abner shouted, "Go after one of the other men and take his weapons! Don't come after

me!" But Asahel paid no attention to what Abner said. ²²He kept after Abner. As Asahel began to gain on him, Abner shouted back again, "Stop coming after me or I'll have to kill you. If I do that, your brother Joab will never forgive me!" ²³But Asahel kept coming. When he caught up with Abner, Abner jabbed the butt of his spear into Asahel's stomach so hard that it came out through his back. Asahel fell over and died. Abner pulled out his spear and kept on going. As David's men caught up and saw that Asahel was dead, they stopped and stood silent for a moment.

²⁴But Joab and Abishai kept pursuing Abner. At sunset, they reached the hill of Ammah near the city of Giah on the way to the Wilderness of Gibeon. ²⁵All of Abner's men had scattered except for the Benjamites among them. They rallied around Abner and took their stand on a nearby cliff. ²⁶Then Abner called down to Joab, "How much longer will you keep chasing us? If you don't stop, it'll only create a lot of bitterness between men who ought to be brothers. Show some mercy." ²⁷Joab called up to Abner, "If you had not asked for mercy, I swear before the Lord that we would have kept after you until we got you. After all, it was your suggestion that you made this morning by the reservoir of Gibeon that started the whole thing." ²⁸Then Joab blew the ram's horn and called off the pursuit and they stopped fighting.

²⁹Abner took his men and left the area and marched all that night through the Jordan Valley. They crossed the Jordan River and arrived back home in Mahanaim at noon the next day. ³⁰When Joab called his men together and counted them he found that David had lost twenty men, including his own brother Asahel. ³¹But David's men had killed three hundred and sixty of Abner's men. ³²Then Joab and his men carried the body of Asahel with them to Bethlehem and buried it in the family tomb. After the funeral they marched all

night and arrived at Hebron at daybreak.

3 Fighting between the followers of Saul and the followers of David continued for a long time. Gradually David's side grew stronger and stronger and Saul's side grew weaker and weaker.

²While David lived in Hebron he had a number of wives, as the custom of kings was in those days, and they bore him six sons. The first was Amnon, son of Ahinoam from Jezreel. ³The second was Chileab, son of Abigail the widow of Nabal from Carmel. The third was Absalom, son of Maacah the daughter of King Talmai of Geshur. ⁴The fourth was Adonijah, son of Haggith. The fifth was Shephatiah, son of Abital. ⁵And the sixth was Ithream, son of Eglah. All these were born to David while he was in Hebron.

Abner Joins David

⁶Occasionally there were other fights between the forces of David and the forces of Saul, and each time Abner strengthened his leadership position among his followers. ⁷Then one day Ishbosheth, Saul's son, heard that Abner had slept with one of Saul's concubines. He confronted Abner, saying, "Who gave you permission to take Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, to be your concubine? ⁸She belongs to the house of Saul! Were you trying to make a statement that you'll be the next king?" This really upset Abner, who angrily retorted, "How dare you talk to me that way! I've been loyal to your father's house all my life. I didn't hand you over to David, but made you king over all of Israel except Judah. So this is what I get—all because of a woman! ⁹I've had it! The Lord help me if I don't make God's promise to David come true! ¹⁰I'll take the kingdom from you and give it to David, from Dan to Beersheba." ¹¹When Ishbosheth saw how angry Abner was, he didn't dare say another word because he was afraid of what Abner might do to him.

¹²Then Abner sent messengers to David at Hebron, saying, "I know that you'll eventually rule the whole country, so let's make an agreement and I'll help you become king over all Israel." ¹³When David heard Abner's offer, he said to the messengers, "Tell Abner that I'll be happy to renew our friendship. As a pledge of loyalty, I want him to bring Saul's daughter Michal to me when he comes." ¹⁴Then David sent messengers of his own to Ishbosheth, saying, "Send Michal, my first wife, back to me. I had to kill a hundred Philistines to marry her." ¹⁵So Ishbosheth asked Abner to take Michal away from her husband, Paltiel, the son of Laish, and give her back to David. This would make Saul's daughter the queen of Judah and later of Israel and show that David had no animosity toward Ishbosheth. ¹⁶But Michal's husband didn't want to let her go. He cried as he followed her from his home in Gallim all the way to Bahurim. Finally, Abner said to him, "Turn around and go home!" So he did.

¹⁷After Abner brought Michal to David, he sent word to the leaders of Israel and said, "All along you've been wanting to make David king but I objected. Well, I've changed my mind. ¹⁸Let's do it! We all know that the Lord told David that He would use him to save Israel from the Philistines and all our other enemies." ¹⁹Then Abner personally went to see the leaders of Benjamin, Saul's tribe who had been the most loyal to Ishbosheth. Abner convinced them that David should be king. After that he returned to Hebron and told David that all the leaders had agreed to make him king, even those from the tribe of Benjamin.

²⁰Twenty men went with Abner on the trip. David was so glad to see him after all these years that he ordered a special banquet for him and his men. ²¹Abner said to David, "Let me call all the leaders of Israel together and tell the people to get ready for your coronation. You'll be our king and unite the country, which is

something your heart has desired." David noticed Abner's sudden ambition to make him king, but dismissed it and sent him on his way with his blessing, in honor and in peace.

Joab Murders Abner

²²Just then Joab and his men came back from fighting the Amalekites and brought a huge amount of plunder with them. By then, David had already sent Abner and his men away. ²³Someone told Joab about the banquet David had given Abner, that Abner had offered to help David become king of all Israel and that David had accepted Abner's plan. ²⁴So Joab went to see David to report on his victory over the Amalekites and to question David's wisdom in letting Abner go. He said to David, "Do you realize what you just did? You let the man who's been trying to kill you all these years get away! How could you do that?" ²⁵You know you can't trust him. He came here to deceive you and get information on our future troop movements so he can set a trap for you and kill you."

²⁶Then, unknown to David, Joab immediately sent runners after Abner to tell him to come back to Hebron because David had something more to tell him. The runners caught up with Abner at the Well of Sirah about two miles north of Hebron. ²⁷When Abner and his twenty men got back to Hebron, Joab met him at the city gate, greeted him warmly and pulled him aside as if to tell him something. Then, Joab pulled out his knife and thrust it into Abner's stomach, and he slumped over and died. Joab did this to get even with Abner for killing his brother Asahel. He had also feared that David would appoint Abner as commander-in-chief and then he would have had to serve under him. ²⁸When David heard what had happened he said, "I'm innocent of the death of Abner, the son of Ner, and the Lord knows it." ²⁹Then he expressed his disapproval of what Joab had done and said, "May Joab and his

family be punished for his cowardly murder of Abner. May his descendants never be without someone who has leprosy, walks with crutches, is hungry or gets killed in a war.”³⁰Both Joab and his brother Abishai were involved in the plot to kill Abner. They felt that the family name had been dishonored by the way Abner had killed their brother Asahel at the battle of Gibeon.

David Mourns for Abner

³¹Then David ordered Joab and all his men to take part in Abner's funeral. He told them to put on sackcloth, tear their outer clothes and mourn as they walked in front of Abner's coffin while David walked behind it as chief mourner.³²That morning they buried Abner in Hebron. At the grave site David wept over losing him, as did all the people.

³³Then David sang a funeral song he had written for Abner which went like this: “Why should Abner die like a lawless one? ³⁴His hands were free to fight and his feet were free to move. He died without a chance to defend himself as one falls by the hands of wicked men.” Then all the people wept again.

³⁵David did not eat the rest of the day in honor of Abner. His people urged him to eat something but he refused, saying, “I have taken an oath not to eat and may God deal with me if I taste one crumb of bread until the sun has set.” This is how much David respected Abner.³⁶The people saw that David was a man with a heart, as well as a man of courage. And they were pleased with him.³⁷So all Israel knew that David had no part in killing Abner, who had been a respected commander and admired by all the tribes.

³⁸Then David said to his closest men, “Do you realize that Israel has lost one of its greatest generals? ³⁹And even though I'm your king I feel helpless to do anything against Joab and Abishai, the sons of my sister Zeruiah, because they, too, are respected generals and their influence is very strong. To punish them for

their cowardly deed would cause their troops to revolt and split the country even more. I have to leave this case in the Lord's hands. May He punish them for their wickedness.”

Ishbosheth Is Murdered

4 When Saul's son, Ishbosheth, heard that Abner had been killed by Joab at the gate of Hebron, he lost courage to rule Israel because he knew it was only a matter of time before his kingdom would fall. In fact, all Israel was alarmed.²Ishbosheth had two captains in his army who were particularly close to him, Baanah and Rechab. They were brothers who lived in the city of Beeroth which belonged to the tribe of Benjamin.³Years before, Saul had attacked this city and tried to wipe out all the Gibeonites, but many of them left the city of Beeroth and fled to Gittaim and stayed there.

⁴Besides Ishbosheth, no one else from the house of Saul had a right to the throne except Jonathan's son Mephibosheth who was crippled in both legs. He had been five years old when news of the death of Saul and Jonathan in the Valley of Jezreel came. His nurse had scooped Mephibosheth up in her arms and run from the house to get away and hide him. As she was running, she had dropped him and he broke both ankles.

⁵Baanah and Rechab, who were sons of Rimmon and trusted officers of Ishbosheth, went to visit him one day. They arrived at his house about noon while he was taking a nap.⁶The maid had been cleaning wheat, but she, too, had fallen asleep, so they slipped into the house and made their way to his bedroom. They quietly shut the door, and stabbed Ishbosheth in the stomach,⁷killing him as he was lying in bed asleep. When they were sure he was dead, they cut off his head, put it in a sack and slipped away, taking his head with them. They walked the rest of the day and all that night through the Jordan Valley to get to David.

⁸Early the next day they arrived in

Hebron and asked to see David. After they were ushered in they said to him, "We have in this sack the head of Ishbosheth, the son of your enemy Saul, who tried to take your life. The Lord has avenged you from Saul's household." Then they opened the sack, pulled out Ishbosheth's head and showed it to David, hoping to be rewarded.

⁹David said to them, "As surely as the Lord lives who saved me from the hand of Saul and kept me from hurting him, the two of you will pay for this!" ¹⁰Once a man came to Ziklag to tell me that Saul was dead and that the king had asked him to kill him. He, too, thought he was bringing me good news and would get a reward. But I had him executed for what he had done. ¹¹How much more you two deserve to die for killing an innocent man in his sleep, in his own house and on his own bed!" ¹²Then David ordered his men to take the murderers out and execute them. David's men also cut off the hands and feet of the two brothers and hung their mutilated bodies beside the city pool. Then they buried the head of Ishbosheth in Abner's tomb in Hebron.

David Becomes King of All Israel

5 The leaders of all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "We are all brothers, all descendants of Jacob, of the same flesh and blood as you. ²When Saul was king of Israel and you were one of his officers, you led Israel on many successful campaigns against our enemies. About twenty years ago, the Lord said that one day you would be the king and shepherd of His people. That day has now come." ³David was aware of what the Lord had said about him becoming king of Israel. He had seen God's providence in his life. So he made an alliance with the other eleven tribes, and Israel and Judah became one country again. Then the people anointed David in Hebron as king of all Israel. ⁴He was thirty years old when he became king and altogether he ruled

for forty years. ⁵He ruled over Judah from Hebron for seven-and-a-half years and over all of Israel from Jerusalem for nearly thirty-three years.

City of Jebus Named Jerusalem

⁶Soon after David was made king, he and his men set out to take the city of Jebus. Years before, the children of Israel had taken this city but had not driven out its inhabitants. When David and his men got there, the Jebusites said, "You can't take this city! We've built it back in such a way that even our lame and blind could hold you off." They didn't think David could get in because it was built like a fortress. ⁷But he did take the city, even though it had been built on top of Mount Zion. So the city of Jebus became the City of David.

⁸When the people of Jebus challenged David, he said to his men, "The Jebusites are the ones who are lame and blind, because they just close their eyes and pretend nothing can happen to them. We'll show them that their city can be taken." Joab and his men volunteered to crawl along the conduit, climb up the forty-foot water shaft and infiltrate the city. They killed the guards and opened the city gates, and David took the city from the Jebusites and made it his own. ⁹He moved his capital from Hebron to Jebus, which became known as the City of David (also called Jerusalem). In the northern part of the city was a fortification called Millo where David built a fortress and extended the city walls to the south. This part in particular was referred to as the City of David. ¹⁰As time went on, David's influence grew stronger and stronger because the Lord was with him.

¹¹Hiram, king of the city of Tyre on the Mediterranean coast, sent messengers to David in Jerusalem congratulating him on his coronation. He offered to provide David with cedar logs, carpenters and stone masons to build his palace. ¹²David accepted Hiram's offer to help him build a palace, because he knew that the Lord

wanted him to serve as king and had blessed him for the sake of His people. ¹³After David left Hebron and moved to Jerusalem, he took still more wives and concubines as was the custom of kings in those days. And he had many sons and daughters. ¹⁴The names of some of those born in Jerusalem were Solomon, Shammua (also called Shimea), Shobab, Nathan, ¹⁵Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, ¹⁶Elishama, Eliada and Eliphelet.

David Defeats the Philistines

¹⁷When the Philistines heard that David had become king of Israel and that he had made an alliance with Hiram king of Tyre, they mobilized their troops and came out in full force, hoping to draw David out of the city and capture him. But David heard about their plan and stayed behind the walls of the city until he could ask the Lord what to do. ¹⁸The Philistines had marched into the Valley of Giants southwest of Jerusalem and spread out to set up their camp. ¹⁹David asked the Lord, "Should I leave the city and attack the Philistines or should I stay here? And if I attack them, will you give me victory?" The Lord answered, "Go! Attack them and drive them from the land. I will definitely give you victory over them." ²⁰So David attacked the Philistines, breaking through their positions and driving back their entire line of defense. Then he named the place, Baal Perazim, meaning The Lord Broke Through. ²¹He defeated the Philistines so quickly that they left their idols behind which were supposed to have brought them victory. David and his men carried them away and burned them.

²²But the Philistines returned to the Valley of Giants with a larger army, expecting David to use the same tactics as before. ²³David again asked the Lord what to do. The Lord answered, "This time don't come straight at them, but circle around to the side and attack from where the mulberry and balsam trees are. ²⁴When you get there, wait until you

hear the sound of marching high in the trees, then launch your attack, because this means that I have gone ahead of you to defeat the Philistines." ²⁵David did just as the Lord had said and defeated the Philistines. He drove them from Gibeon all the way back to Gezer.

The Ark Brought to Jerusalem

6 After defeating the Philistines, David called together thirty thousand leading men from all over the country. ²They went to Kiriath Jearim, about nine miles northwest of Jerusalem, to bring the Ark of the Lord to the nation's capital. David wanted the Ark near him because between its angels would often appear a brilliant light indicating God's presence. ³The Ark had been at Abinadab's house since the Philistines sent it back during the time of Eli. Abinadab's grandsons, Uzzah and Ahio, drove the oxen which pulled the newly built cart on which the Ark was carried. ⁴Ahio walked in front guiding the oxen while Uzzah walked alongside. ⁵David, the priests and the musicians of Israel were celebrating the momentous occasion with joyful songs, using lyres, harps, tambourines and cymbals.

⁶They got as far as the threshing floor of Chidon when the oxen stumbled. The Ark shook, and Uzzah reached out to steady it. ⁷When he did, the Lord struck him, and he died right there beside the Ark. He had been living in open, unconfessed sin and had lost a sense of the Ark's sacredness, daring to touch the symbolic presence of God, which right had been given only to priests. ⁸When David saw that Uzzah was dead, he was alarmed and called the place Perez Uzzah, meaning The Punishment of Uzzah. ⁹David questioned the justice of God and was fearful for his own life. He said, "How can we bring the Ark into Jerusalem if the presence of the Lord does this to people?" ¹⁰So instead of taking the Ark to Jerusalem, he asked Obed Edom, a native of Gath Rimmon, if he could leave it at his house. ¹¹The Ark re-

mained there for three months, and while it was there, the Lord blessed Obed Edom and his entire family.

¹²David was told how the Lord was blessing Obed Edom and his family. He realized more than ever the sacredness of the law and the need for careful obedience. Knowing that the Ark was a symbol of God's favor, he again decided to bring it to Jerusalem. ¹³This time he ordered the Levites to carry the Ark on their shoulders as the Lord had originally told Moses. The priests were to carry it only six paces and stop. When nothing happened, they all rejoiced and David ordered a young bull and a fattened sheep to be sacrificed as expressions of thanksgiving. ¹⁴Then with music and songs the people made their way to Jerusalem. David was so happy that he took off his royal outer robe and leaped and danced for joy before the Lord in his long, white linen robe as the multitude sang praises to God. ¹⁵Watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem blew their trumpets and burst into song as the people approached, answered by other trumpets and singers. Hundreds in the procession joined the triumphal chorus. So Israel brought the Ark into Jerusalem with singing and the sound of trumpets.

¹⁶As the procession came through the gates into the city, David's wife Michal, Saul's daughter, looked out the window and saw her husband joyously leaping and dancing in front of the Ark. She was so disgusted that she later scolded him. ¹⁷The priests brought the Ark to the tent that David had set up and put it in place. Then David ordered whole burnt offerings and peace offerings to be sacrificed to the Lord as an expression of confession and thanksgiving. ¹⁸At the close of the service, after the animals had been sacrificed, David blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts. ¹⁹He gave each Israelite, both men and women, a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins, and the people went home rejoicing.

²⁰When David got home, Michal came

out to meet him. She said angrily, "The king of Israel surely made a fool of himself today! How dare you take off your royal robe in front of your officers' servant girls and wear only a thin linen robe? How vulgar to do something like that in public!" ²¹David said, "I did this in front of the Lord to show that He is our victorious king, and the people understood it that way. It was the Lord who chose me to be king of Israel above your father or any of his sons. I'm not ashamed to humble myself and dance in gratitude before the Lord for what He has done for me. ²²In fact, I'm ready to humble myself even more. This may be offensive to you, but my officers' servant girls understood it and respect me for it." ²³Because of her attitude toward David, the Lord did not allow Michal to have any children of her own.

Nathan's Message to David Changed

7 Later David moved out of the Millo fortress he had built and into his palace, for the Lord had given him peace from all his enemies. ²David called in Nathan the prophet and said, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar while the Ark of the Lord is sitting in a tent. That is not right!" ³Nathan said, "If you have in mind to build a temple for the Lord, go ahead and do it. God will surely be pleased and will be with you."

⁴That night the Lord said to Nathan the prophet, ⁵"Tomorrow morning go back to David and tell him that he should not build a temple for me. Both of you have good intentions, but that is not my plan. Tell David that the Lord asked, 'Why do you want to build me a house?' ⁶I've lived in a tent for hundreds of years, from the time I brought the children of Israel out of Egypt until now. ⁷Whenever my people have moved and wherever they have gone, I have gone with them. Did I ever ask any leaders of the people to build me a house?' ⁸Also tell David that the Lord said, 'I took you as a poor shepherd boy taking care of your father's flock and made you king over Israel. ⁹I've

been with you everywhere you've gone and helped you conquer all your enemies. I'm planning to make a name for you among the greatest men on earth. ¹⁰I'm also planning to make a permanent place for my people which they can call their own. They will no longer be oppressed by their neighbors or persecuted by violent men. ¹¹All through the time of the judges they've suffered, but I will give them peace from their enemies. I will build a house for you and for my people, a spiritual house which will rest on a sure foundation. ¹²After you die, one of your own sons will succeed you to the throne and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He will build a house for me, and if he is faithful, this city and that house will stand forever. ¹⁴I will be like a father to him and his descendants. The nation of Israel will be my son, and when he does wrong, I will correct him using other nations as a father uses a rod to discipline his son, ¹⁵but I will never stop loving Israel or withdraw my support from the house of David as I did from the house of Saul. ¹⁶Your house and lineage will last forever. And your kingdom is established forever.'" ¹⁷Nathan went to David and told him everything that the Lord had said and shown him.

David's Prayer of Thanksgiving

¹⁸Then David left his palace and went into the tent where the Ark of the Lord was and prayed, "O Sovereign Lord, who am I and who is my family that you should choose me to be king and do everything for me that you have done? ¹⁹As if this weren't enough, you have revealed your plan to build a spiritual house through One of my descendants. In this world, kings come and go and their lineage disappears. ²⁰What more can I say, Lord? I'm overwhelmed. You know me better than I know myself and yet you still love me! ²¹You have revealed all this to me because of your promise and your wondrous love. ²²O Lord, my God, no one else is like you! No god can do the things that you do. How

great you are! ²³There is no other nation like Israel, the only people who were ever delivered from slavery and set free to be special to you. You did great and awesome things to bring us out of Egypt into this land where we now live. ²⁴You have made us to be your own forever, and you are not ashamed to be our God.

²⁵"Now, O Lord, do as you wish. My will is lost in yours. Let my son build you a house and carry out your promise. ²⁶May your name be honored by what you do and may it always be magnified among all people of the earth. May they say, 'The Lord Almighty is the God who is worshiped in Israel.' May my lineage be established and my descendants serve you forever. ²⁷O mighty Lord, you are the great and loving God of Israel. You have promised to establish my house forever. That's why I have courage to pray the way I do. ²⁸O Sovereign Lord, you are God and there is none else. Your words are truth, and you have given me this wonderful promise. ²⁹That's why I ask you now to please bless my descendants and help them to be loyal and obedient to you. Then they will enjoy your presence and favor forever."

David's Additional Victories

8 Soon David's enemies mobilized their troops and again attacked Israel. But each time the Philistines came, David defeated them. He even took their mother city of Gath from them. ²Then the Moabites broke the pact they had made with David when they had given his parents asylum from Saul, and they attacked him. But David defeated them and ordered that two out of three of those captured be killed. The remaining Moabites submitted to David and signed an agreement to serve him and to be taxed.

³David also defeated Hadadezer, son of Rehob, who was king of Zobah, the most powerful of the Syrian states. Hadadezer had tried to gain control over the territories along the Euphrates River. ⁴David captured a thousand chariots,

seven thousand horsemen and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He ordered the hamstring to be cut on all the horses' hind hooves so they would be unfit for war, but spared enough for a hundred chariots which he kept for himself. ⁵When troops from the Syrian state of Damascus came to help Hadadezer, David counterattacked and killed twenty-two thousand of them, and the rest fled. ⁶David then stationed his troops in the Syrian states of Damascus and Zobah. He became their overlord, and they agreed to be taxed by him. So the Lord gave David the victory wherever he went. ⁷David took the gold-plated shields which he had taken from Hadadezer's men and brought them to Jerusalem. ⁸He also took many things made of bronze from the cities of Tebah and Berothai that belonged to Hadadezer.

⁹When King Tou of Hamath, the kingdom north of Zobah, heard that David had defeated Hadadezer's entire army, ¹⁰he sent a delegation to David headed by his son Joram. Toi's son congratulated David on his victory and expressed gratitude to him because Hadadezer had also been at war with his father. Joram gave David gifts of gold, silver and bronze. ¹¹David dedicated all these gifts to the Lord and to His future house, including the gold, silver and bronze that he had taken from others, ¹²the Edomites, Moabites, Philistines, Ammonites, the Amalekites and from Hadadezer, king of Zobah.

¹³David had now won a name for himself. After this, he also defeated the attacking Edomites in the Valley of Salt where his troops killed another eighteen thousand. ¹⁴He stationed troops in Edom, and the Edomites submitted to him and signed an agreement to be taxed by him. The Lord gave David the victory wherever he went.

David's Government

¹⁵So David ruled over all Israel and administered justice and equity to all the

people, including those nations who submitted to him. ¹⁶Joab, his nephew, was in charge of the army. Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahilud, was in charge of government records. ¹⁷Zadok, the son of Ahitub, and Abiathar assisted by his son Ahimelech, whose grandfather had given David the holy bread when he fled from Saul, served as high priests. Zadok served at the Sanctuary in Gibeon and Abiathar at the Ark in Jerusalem. Seraiah served David as secretary of state. ¹⁸Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, was captain over the Cherethites and Pelethites, the king's bodyguards made up of foreign mercenaries independent of the political tensions of the court. And David's sons held high positions as princes of the court.

David and Mephibosheth

9 One day David said to his staff, "Is there anyone left from the family of Saul to whom I can show kindness for the sake of my friend Jonathan?" ²A former servant of Saul named Ziba was told about David's inquiry, and the people urged him to go to see David. So he went. David said to him, "Are you Ziba, the former servant of Saul?" He said, "Yes, I am." ³David said, "Do you know of anyone from Saul's house that is still left? If there is, I want to show some kindness to him for the sake of my friend Jonathan." Ziba said, "Yes, there's one of Jonathan's sons. His name is Mephibosheth, but he can hardly walk because he's crippled in both legs." ⁴David said, "Where is he?" Ziba answered, "He's staying with Makir, the son of Ammiel, in Lo Debar on the other side of Jordan."

⁵Then David sent for him and had him brought to Jerusalem. ⁶Mephibosheth trembled in David's presence, but bowed before him to show that he accepted him as rightful king. David asked, "Are you Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan?" He answered, "Yes, I am. And I'm your servant, sir." ⁷David said, "Don't be afraid. I won't hurt you. I want to show you kindness for the sake of your father who was my very

best friend. I'll give you all the land your grandfather Saul personally owned and you can stay right here and eat with me at my table whenever you want to."⁸When Mephibosheth heard that, he bowed before David and said, "Who am I that you should even notice me? I'm of no more use to you than a dead dog."

⁹David ignored what Mephibosheth said, but called in Ziba, Saul's former servant, and said to him, "I am giving all the land that Saul personally owned to his grandson Mephibosheth. ¹⁰I want you, your sons and your servants to work for Mephibosheth, to farm his land and harvest the produce so that he and his family will be taken care of. He may bring his family to eat with me at my table any time he wants to." David knew that Ziba could handle this extra responsibility because he had fifteen sons and twenty servants. ¹¹Ziba said to David, "I'll be happy to work for Mephibosheth and take care of his land just as the king commands." So Mephibosheth stayed in Jerusalem and whenever he ate at the king's table, he was treated as part of David's family. ¹²All of Ziba's sons and servants worked for Mephibosheth and for his young son Mica, taking care of their land. ¹³Then Mephibosheth moved his whole family to Jerusalem, and they ate with David's family quite regularly. Both his feet were lame.

David Defeats the Ammonites and Syrians

10 Some time after this, Nahash, the aged king of the Ammonites, died and his son Hanun succeeded him. ²David said to himself, "Nahash showed kindness to me even though it was prompted by his hatred of Saul. I will show kindness to Hanun." So David sent a delegation with a message of sympathy to Hanun at the loss of his father. ³When they arrived, the Ammonite princes said to Hanun, "Do you think that David sent these men here to honor your father and express their sympathy? No indeed! He's sent them here as spies to check on our

fortifications. Then he'll know how to overthrow our country." ⁴Hanun believed them and ordered his men to take David's envoys and shave off half of each man's beard, cut off their robes at the hips and then send them away. ⁵When David heard that his ambassadors had been humiliated, he quickly dispatched messengers to tell them to stay in Jericho until their beards had grown back. Then they returned to Jerusalem.

⁶The Ammonites realized that they had insulted David and that this would most likely provoke him to war. That is what they wanted because they feared his growing strength. So they hired twenty thousand Syrian mercenaries from Beth Rehob and Zobah. They also hired a thousand men from Maacah and twelve thousand from the country of Tob. ⁷When David heard this, he ordered Joab to take all the forces of Israel and launch an immediate attack. ⁸The Ammonites marched out to meet the Israelites and took up positions at the entrance of Rabbah, the capital. The Syrian troops and those from Maacah and Tob took their positions about twenty miles southwest of Rabbah in the open country which was more suitable for their chariots.

⁹When Joab crossed the Jordan, he learned that not only were there troops in front of him, but off to his right were troops with chariots which could easily swing around and attack him from the rear. So he took his best troops to withstand them. ¹⁰He put the rest of his troops under the command of his brother Abishai and sent them against the Ammonites in front of him. ¹¹Before he sent Abishai away, he said to him, "Our forces will be close to each other, so if the Syrians and those from Maacah and Tob are too much for me, then send some of your troops to help me. If the Ammonites are too strong for you, I'll send some of my men to help you. ¹²But let's be strong and fight with courage. Remember, we're fighting for our people and for the God of Israel. Whatever the

Lord's will is for this day, may it be done!" ¹³Then Joab took his troops and attacked the men from Syria, Maacah and Tob, and defeated them.

¹⁴When the Ammonites saw that the Syrians and others had been defeated, they turned and ran from the forces of Abishai back into their city. Joab took his army and returned to Jerusalem. ¹⁵When the Syrians realized that Joab and his men were heading back to Jerusalem, they decided to regroup. ¹⁶Hadadezer, whose army had previously been defeated by David and was now threatened by Joab, brought a huge force from the other side of the Euphrates to the city of Helam. These troops were under the command of Shobach, Hadadezer's best general.

¹⁷When David heard about this, he took personal charge of the armies of Israel, crossed the Jordan River and set up his position near Helam to keep this new Syrian force from joining the troops farther south. The fighting began when the Syrians formed battle lines and attacked David. ¹⁸Soon they realized they were no match for David and his men, so they turned and ran. On the first day David and his men killed seven thousand charioteers and thousands of footmen. By the end of the conflict they had killed forty thousand troops. He also severely wounded Shobach, the Syrian general, who died on the battlefield. ¹⁹When the rulers of the territories under the control of Hadadezer saw that their joint forces were defeated by the Israelites, they made peace with David and transferred their allegiance to him by sending their taxes to Jerusalem. Then all the forces of Syria, Maacah and Tob withdrew, and never again did they help the Ammonites fight against Israel. So Israel's influence extended all the way to the Euphrates River just as the Lord had said it would.

David and Bathsheba

1 The following spring, the time of year when kings usually went to war, David ordered Joab and his men to

attack the Ammonites and besiege the city of Rabbah because he wanted to finish the war that Hanun had started. David had become very powerful and felt proud of what he had done. So he decided that his presence was no longer needed and returned to Jerusalem.

²Late one afternoon he went up to the roof of his palace to enjoy the evening breeze. As he looked down on the houses and courtyards below, he saw a woman bathing herself. She was very beautiful, ³so he sent someone to find out who she was. When the man came back, he said to David, "The woman is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, one of your mighty warriors, and the granddaughter of Ahithophel, one of your own counselors. She's the wife of Uriah the Hittite who joined our forces and is now at the battlefield." ⁴Then David sent messengers from the court to her house to tell her that the king would like to see her. She had just purified herself after her monthly period, so she agreed to sleep with him that night. Then early in the morning she returned home. ⁵Some weeks later she sent word to David telling him that she was pregnant.

⁶Then David sent this word to Joab: "Send Uriah the Hittite home. I need to see him." So Joab pulled Uriah off the front lines and sent him back to Jerusalem to see David. ⁷When Uriah arrived, David welcomed him and asked him all about the war, how the siege was going, how Joab was and how the troops were doing. ⁸After their conversation, David said to Uriah, "It's good to hear that everything is going so well. You deserve a rest. Stay home for a few days and take it easy." Uriah thanked the king, and David sent a gift of food to their house as a reward for Uriah's faithfulness to Israel. ⁹But Uriah didn't go home. Instead, he slept with the troops in the guardroom at the king's palace.

¹⁰The next day when David heard that Uriah had slept with the palace guards and not in his own house, he asked to see

him. David said, "I heard that you slept with the palace guards last night. You've come a long way and haven't been home for some time. Why would you sleep with them instead of in your own bed?"¹¹ Uriah answered, "The men of Israel and Judah, as well as our commander Joab, are all sleeping out in the open, and God's Ark is still housed in a tent. How can I, an officer, come home and eat and drink and sleep with my wife when my troops are out there fighting? I could never conscientiously do such a thing."

¹²David complimented him on his loyalty to the Lord and to the men in the field and asked him to stay one more day to get some more rest before going back. So Uriah agreed to stay one more day, eager to leave early the next morning.¹³ That evening David invited Uriah to dinner and he kept urging him to eat and drink what was set before him until Uriah was almost drunk. Then David sent him home, but Uriah didn't go home. Again, he slept on his blanket in the guard room.

¹⁴The next morning when David heard that Uriah still had not gone home but had slept in the guard room, he decided to write a letter to Joab and have Uriah deliver it.¹⁵ In the letter he said, "Assign Uriah to the front lines where the fighting is the heaviest. Then draw back from him so he'll be killed."¹⁶ Joab was more loyal to David than to God, so when he got the letter he ordered an attack on the city and sent Uriah to where the fighting would be the heaviest and the enemy forces the strongest.¹⁷ The Ammonites came out of the city to repulse the attack, and some of Joab's officers and men were killed, including Uriah.

¹⁸Joab sent a messenger to David to give him a full account of the battle.¹⁹ He said to the messenger, "When you finish telling the king about the battle,²⁰ and he gets angry with you and says, 'Why did Joab have his men get so close to the city when he knew that they would get shot at by the archers from the wall?'²¹ Didn't Joab remember how Abimelech, the re-

bellious son of Gideon, was killed at Thebez? He got too close to the wall and was killed by a woman who dropped a rock on his head. Why did Joab go so near the wall?' If the king asks that, then tell him, 'Your servant Uriah was also killed.'"

²²The messenger took off for Jerusalem and when he got there he told the king everything Joab had told him to say.²³ He said to David, "We attacked the city, and the Ammonites sent their best troops out against us. We fought them in the open. Then we drove them back right up to the city gates,²⁴ but we got too close to the wall and the archers shot at us, and some of our officers and men were killed, including Uriah the Hittite, one of our bravest officers."²⁵ David said, "Thank you for the report. When you get back to Joab tell him not to let this upset him because even though this was tragic, the sword is no respecter of persons. Tell him not to get discouraged, but to keep up the pressure on the city so we can end this war as quickly as possible."

²⁶When Bathsheba heard that her husband was killed in battle, she deeply mourned for him. When the period of mourning was over,²⁷ David had her brought to the palace and made her his wife and in due time she gave birth to a son. But the Lord was extremely displeased with what David had done.

Nathan's Parable and David's Repentance

12 As the weeks passed, David's evening with Bathsheba became known, and people suspected that the baby was his and that he had ordered the death of Uriah to cover it up. One day the Lord sent Nathan, the prophet, to see David. He told David this story: "There were two men who lived in the same town, one was rich and the other was poor.² The rich man had many sheep and cattle.³ But the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb. He carefully raised the little lamb as a family pet, and it grew up with his children. He would

give it food from his table, let it drink from his cup and hold it in his arms as if it were his own daughter. ⁴One day the rich man had a visitor whom he invited for dinner. But he didn't want to kill one of his own sheep, so he asked his servants to go to the poor man's house and take his sheep. He told his servants that if the man resisted, to take it by force. And that's what they did." ⁵Before Nathan could finish the story, David stood up in anger and said, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this heartless thing deserves to die! ⁶I will make him pay four times the value of that sheep because he had absolutely no pity on that poor man!"

⁷After David sat down, still furious over what Nathan had told him, the prophet fixed his eyes on the king and said, "You are that man! This is what the Lord says: 'I was the One who made you king over Israel and kept you from being killed by Saul. ⁸I gave you his kingdom and as a sign of transfer of power let you take care of his harem. I gave you Judah and Israel, and if this were too little, I would have given you still more had you only asked. ⁹But you had to exercise your earthly authority by taking the wife of my faithful servant Uriah and then had him killed to cover up your sin. By example, you have told the people that my commandments are not that important. To make things even worse, you had the Ammonites kill him for you. ¹⁰So now cruelty and bloodshed will never leave your family, because you ignored my law by committing adultery, killing Uriah and then taking his wife to be your own. ¹¹You'll live to see the consequences of your example, even in your own family. Someone close to you will have sexual relations with some of your concubines in broad daylight and I will not stop him. ¹²You took another man's wife secretly and someone close to you will take your wives publicly to show that he's the new king. And all Israel will see it.'"

¹³David was stunned. He knew he had

grievously sinned, and on hearing the prophet's words, he keenly felt it. Then, with trembling lips he admitted his guilt, saying to Nathan, "I have sinned a great sin against Uriah and Bathsheba, but most of all against the Lord. I deserve to die." After David finished weeping, Nathan said, "The Lord has heard your admission of guilt and has forgiven you. You will not die as you deserve. ¹⁴But because you have shown such disregard for God's law and for human life and have ignored what He has said, others who wish to ignore God's standards will claim an excuse to break them. Therefore, your newborn son, whom you love, will get sick and die in your place. This will be more painful to you than your own death."

David's Son Dies

¹⁵No sooner had Nathan gone home than the Lord brought sickness on the newborn son of David that Bathsheba had borne him, and he became very ill. ¹⁶David fasted and prayed for his little son to get well. He removed his royal clothes, and night after night, he lay on the ground asking forgiveness and pleading for the life of his infant son. ¹⁷David's officials tried to get him to eat something with them, but he refused. ¹⁸A week later the baby died, but they were afraid to tell David. They said, "If he grieved so much and wouldn't listen to us while his son was sick, he might even do something tragic to himself if we tell him that his son has died." ¹⁹When David heard them whispering to each other he figured that something had happened. So he asked, "Is my son dead?" They said, "Yes, he is."

²⁰Then David got up and bathed, combed his hair, put on fresh clothes and went to the Sanctuary to worship. After he returned to the palace, he asked his servants to bring him food; then he sat down and ate. ²¹His officials were puzzled. They said, "Why are you acting like this when your son has just died?"

When he was alive you fasted and prayed, which we can understand, but now that he has died, you get up and eat!" ²²David said, "While my son was alive I fasted and prayed and wept before the Lord because I thought that the Lord might hear my prayer and change His mind and let my little son live. ²³Now that he's gone, why should I fast? There's nothing more I can do. I can't bring him back to life. Someday I will join him in death, but he won't be coming back to me anymore."

Solomon Is Born

²⁴Then David went to comfort Bathsheba. Soon she became pregnant again and gave birth to another son. David named him Solomon. The Lord still loved David, and He also loved his newborn son. ²⁵To show His love, the Lord sent word to David through Nathan the prophet that he should also call the baby Jedidiah, meaning Loved by the Lord.

David Captures Rabbah

²⁶During this time Joab was at the front fighting the Ammonites and was about to take their capital. ²⁷So he sent word to David, saying, "We're ready to launch our final attack on Rabbah. We've already captured the lower part of the city with its water supply, so the more fortified section can't hold out for more than a few days. ²⁸Bring the rest of the troops with you and come and take the city. Otherwise, I'll have to take it, and they'll name it after me." ²⁹So David called up the rest of the troops and marched over to Rabbah. They attacked the city and took it.

³⁰David took the golden crown that had rested on the head of their idol god Molech and put it on his own head as a sign of victory. It had a huge precious stone in the front and was very heavy, about seventy-five pounds. David also took a large amount of spoils out of the city. ³¹He made the people work for Israel with saws, axes and picks, or had

them manufacture things such as bricks and building materials. It was his practice to do this to all the Ammonites whose cities he took. Then he and his men returned to Jerusalem.

Amnon and His Sister Tamar

13 In the course of time, four of David's sons died, according to the fourfold sentence he had pronounced on the rich man who had taken the poor man's sheep. Amnon, David's firstborn from Ahinoam, fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom. Absalom and Tamar were both children of Maacah, so Amnon was Tamar's half-brother. ²Tamar was a virgin. Amnon was so infatuated with her that he got sick. It was forbidden for him to have sex with her because she was his half-sister, and according to custom, all young women were to remain virgins until they got married.

³Jonadab, the son of David's brother, Shimeah, and a cousin to Amnon, was very shrewd. ⁴One day he said to Amnon, "You look sick. What's bothering you? You're the king's son, why do you go around looking so sad every day?" Amnon said, "I'm in love with my sister Tamar, and Absalom won't let me get near her." ⁵Jonadab said, "That's simple. Go to bed and pretend you're sick. That should be easy to do because you look it. When your father comes to find out how you are and asks what he can do for you, tell him you would like Tamar to bring you some food and cook it right in your room. This might increase your appetite." ⁶So Amnon went home and pretended he was sick. When David came to see him, Amnon said, "Could Tamar come and prepare some food for me? Maybe seeing it cooked would make me feel more like eating."

⁷Then David sent for Tamar, saying, "Take some food to Amnon and prepare it in front of him to help his appetite." ⁸Tamar went to her brother's apartment and found him in bed. She took the un-

leavened dough she had, kneaded it in front of him and then baked it over the hot coals in his presence. ⁹When the cakes were done, she took them out of the pan and served them to him, but he refused to eat. Then Amnon said to his servant, "Send everyone out of here." And they left. ¹⁰When Tamar and Amnon were alone he said to her, "Let me see those cakes again. I feel a little more like eating now." So she brought out the cakes and brought them to Amnon. ¹¹When she got near him, he grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister!"

¹²She cried out, "No! Let me go! Don't do this! You're my brother! We don't do such things in Israel! It's wicked! ¹³If I get pregnant before I'm married, they will accuse me of adultery and stone me, or if they let me go, I'll be disgraced for the rest of my life. And you'll either be stoned or considered to be a wicked fool. All you have to do is ask the king for me, and he'll let us get married." ¹⁴But Amnon wouldn't listen and pulled her into bed and raped her, because he was stronger than she was.

¹⁵Then he hated her so intensely that his hatred was greater than the love he had felt. So he told her, "Get up and get out!" ¹⁶She got up, but she refused to leave. She said, "No! Sending me away like a prostitute is even more insulting than what you've already done to me!" But he refused to listen. ¹⁷Then he called for his personal servant and said, "Get this woman out of my sight and lock the door so she can't come back in." ¹⁸That's what the servant did. He took hold of Tamar, pushed her out the door and locked it. Tamar was wearing a long dress with full sleeves like all the virgin daughters of the king wore. ¹⁹Once outside, Tamar tore her dress, sprinkled ashes on her head and buried her face in her hands as she went home crying aloud.

²⁰When her brother Absalom saw her, he said, "What happened? Did Amnon bother you?" Then she told him what had happened. Absalom said, "Let's try to

keep what happened to ourselves. After all, he is your brother. You come and move in with me." So Tamar lived in her brother's house and remained unmarried the rest of her life. ²¹When David heard what had happened, he was furious, but felt he couldn't do a thing about it because of his own sin with Bathsheba. ²²Absalom hated Amnon intensely for what he had done to his sister. But he never mentioned the incident to Amnon.

Absalom Murders His Brother Amnon

²³Two years later, at the time of sheep shearing, Absalom invited all his brothers to join him at a place called Baal Hazor, about fifteen miles northeast of Jerusalem, to celebrate the wool harvest. ²⁴He went to the king and said, "I am having my sheep sheared, and I want to invite you and your officials to join us in celebrating the harvest." ²⁵David said, "Thank you, son, but if we all went, there would be too many of us for you to take care of." Absalom urged him to come, but David refused. He did, however, give Absalom his blessing. ²⁶Absalom knew this would happen, and he also knew that the king would then grant him his second request. So he said to his father, "If you and your officials can't come, then at least could Amnon, my oldest brother, join us?" The king said, "Why should he be the only one who goes?" ²⁷Absalom kept pressing his father, so David ordered all his sons to go. Absalom had prepared an elaborate feast.

²⁸When they all got there and were celebrating together, Absalom said to his workers, "Listen, when Amnon has had too much to drink and starts acting like a happy fool, I want you to kill him. I'll tell you when. Now don't be afraid. I'll take full responsibility." ²⁹So at the right time, Absalom gave the signal and his workers surrounded Amnon and killed him. Then the rest of the king's sons got up, jumped on their mules and fled.

³⁰Somehow news got back to Jerusalem ahead of them that Absalom had

killed all his brothers, and this report reached David. ³¹He stood up, tore his robe and laid face-down on the ground. His servants also tore their clothes, shocked at what they had heard. ³²But Jonadab, one of David's nephews, went to him and said, "Your Majesty, don't believe the report you heard that all your sons were slain. Only Amnon was killed, none of the others." The king listened as Jonadab continued, "Absalom has been planning this for two years, ever since Amnon raped his sister Tamar. ³³So don't believe that your other sons are dead. The only one dead is Amnon."

Absalom Flees Jerusalem

³⁴Meanwhile, Absalom fled from the place of celebration. Back in Jerusalem a watchman on the wall saw a group of men on mules coming down the Horonaim road beside the mountain and went and told the king. ³⁵When Jonadab overheard this, he said to David, "See, the king's sons are coming back from the celebration, just as I told you." ³⁶No sooner had he finished speaking than David's sons came in sobbing uncontrollably and told the king what happened. Then the king and all his officials wept aloud over the death of Amnon. ³⁷While his brothers were rushing to Jerusalem, Absalom hurried for safety to Talmai, his maternal grandfather, king of Geshur, on the other side of Jordan. David was deeply grieved over the death of Amnon and mourned for him a long time. ³⁸Absalom stayed with his grandfather in Geshur about three years. ³⁹Finally, David stopped mourning for Amnon and longed for Absalom to return.

Joab Arranges Absalom's Return

14 Joab knew how much David missed Absalom and that he longed to see him. ²So he sent for a woman in Tekoa, who had a reputation for being very wise. He said to her, "I want you to do something for me. Put on some mourning clothes, but don't anoint

yourself with oil, because I want you to look like you've been mourning for a long time. ³Then go to see the king and tell him this." Then he told her what to say.

⁴The woman did exactly as Joab requested. When she was ushered in to see the king, she fell on her knees, bowed low to the ground and said, "Your Majesty, please help me!" ⁵David said, "Tell me what the problem is to see if I can help you." She said, "I'm a poor widow, and my husband has been dead for some time. ⁶I had two sons who looked after me, but they got into a fight out in the field and no one was there to stop them. One of them ended up killing the other. ⁷Now all our relatives want me to hand this son over to them for stoning because he killed his brother. They say he's a murderer and deserves to die. They're doing this not only to punish my son, but so they can divide my property among themselves. If they succeed, the one spark of hope I have will go out, and it will be the end of my husband's name and property in Israel."

⁸David said to the woman, "By special order I will pardon your son. Go back home quickly and tell him what I said." ⁹But the woman pressed the issue, saying, "But Your Majesty, if you override the law, the people will hold you responsible for the crime because you let it go unpunished. Let the guilt fall on me, and let me die in my son's place. The king should not be blamed for letting a murderer go free." ¹⁰The king answered, "If anyone has any questions, let him come to me and he won't bother you again. I'll take full responsibility for my decision." ¹¹The woman said, "Then let the king promise before God that he will not let one of my relatives take the law into his own hands and kill the only son I have left." David said, "As the Lord lives, my order will be clear that no one is to touch one hair on your son's head."

¹²The woman thanked the king and said, "My lord, may I say one more thing?" The king answered, "Speak." ¹³She said, "My lord, why are you so

quick to forgive my remaining son, and yet you don't forgive your own son who's living in exile? By your words, you convict yourself for not showing the same love toward him. ¹⁴All of us must die sometime, and when it happens, we are like spilled water on the ground which no one can gather up. Yet God respects each life and provides a way to bring us back from death so we will not remain separated from Him. ¹⁵I have come to the king because I was afraid of my relatives. I thought the only way out would be to see if you would grant my son a pardon. ¹⁶You are the only one who can deliver my son from the hand of those who are ready to kill him and take the inheritance that God has given us. ¹⁷You have graciously granted my request, and your promise gives me hope. My lord the king is like an angel of God, knowing the difference between good and evil. May the Lord God of Israel ever be with you."

¹⁸David listened patiently to the woman and then replied, "I'm going to ask you a question, and I want you to tell me the truth." The woman said, "Ask me anything, my lord, and I'll tell you the truth." ¹⁹The king said, "Did Joab put you up to this?" The woman said, "As surely as I live, the king is very wise. There is no way to avoid your question and still tell the truth. Yes, it was Joab who asked me to do this and told me what to say. ²⁰He wanted to bring about a reconciliation between you and your son Absalom. My lord has the insight of an angel of God to know so much."

²¹David dismissed the woman and asked to see Joab. When he came, David said, "I've decided to listen to what you have said through the woman. Go to Geshur and bring Absalom back home." ²²Joab knelt before the king, bowed low to show respect, then stood and thanked David for his mercy. He said to the king, "Thank you for showing favor by granting my request." ²³Then Joab went to Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. ²⁴But the king told his offi-

cial that he did not want to see his son Absalom ever again and that he was not to come into the palace, either alone or with his brothers. So when he returned, he went to live in his own house and was not called in to see the king.

David Forgives Absalom

²⁵Absalom was the most handsome man in Israel—tall, well proportioned and without a blemish from head to toe. He walked with the bearing of a king. ²⁶His hair was long and very thick. About once a year when it became too hard to manage, he would have it cut, and the cuttings weighed close to five pounds. ²⁷Absalom had three sons and a daughter. He named his daughter after his sister Tamar. She grew up to be a very beautiful woman.

²⁸When Absalom returned to Jerusalem, he was not allowed to see the king. For the next two years he played on the sympathy of the people who admired his courage in dealing with his brother when David would not. ²⁹One day he called for Joab to see if he would intercede again with the king to allow him to come to the palace. But Joab refused to come. Absalom asked for him a second time, but again he refused. ³⁰Then Absalom said to his servants, "Look, Joab's field of barley is right next to mine. I want you to set it on fire." So they did.

³¹Joab then went immediately to Absalom's house and asked, "Why did you have your servants set my field on fire?" ³²Absalom answered, "That's the only way I could get your attention. Listen, I want you to go and ask the king why he even brought me home. It would have been better for me to have stayed in Geshur. If I'm guilty of murder, let him put me to death." Absalom knew that because of his father's sin against Uriah and Bathsheba, he was in no position to carry out the law against him. ³³Joab went to David and told him what Absalom had said. David then sent for his son, and Absalom bowed before him

as all visitors did. David threw his arms around his son, kissed him and welcomed him home.

Absalom's Rebellion

15 For two more years Absalom played politics by riding around the city in a horse-drawn chariot with fifty men running ahead announcing his coming. ²He got up early and stood near the city gate. Whenever someone came into the city to take a case to the king, Absalom would draw him aside and ask where he was from. ³Then he would say, "You have a good case to take to the king. Unfortunately, there's no representative of the king assigned to the city gate to hear your case. ⁴Now if I were a judge, I could hear your case right here. I would carry out the law and see that justice is done." ⁵The man would bow before Absalom honoring him as the king's son and ask him for help. Then Absalom would put his hands on the man's shoulders and give him the greeting of a brother by kissing him on both cheeks. ⁶He did this to all Israelites who came to appeal their cases, no matter what tribe they belonged to. In this way Absalom stole the hearts of the people.

⁷All this took place after David had allowed Absalom to resume his duties in the palace. So after four years of quietly campaigning, Absalom went in to see the king and said, "Father, I would like your permission to go to Hebron where you first became king and where I was born. I made a vow to the Lord while living in Geshur, and I'd like to keep it. ⁸While I was there, I prayed, 'Lord, if you bring me back home to Jerusalem, I will go and worship you in the city where I was born to show my gratitude for what you have done for me.'"

⁹When David heard this he said to Absalom, "Of course, my son, I'll gladly let you go to worship the Lord." So Absalom went to Hebron, and David never suspected a thing. ¹⁰When Absalom got to Hebron, he sent secret

agents throughout the tribes of Israel to tell those who favored him that he planned to become king. These men were to get the people together, and at a set time the rams' horns were to blow and everyone would shout, "Absalom is king at Hebron!" ¹¹Absalom had invited two hundred prominent men from Jerusalem to go to Hebron as his guests, to a feast of thanksgiving before the Lord. They innocently accepted his invitation, not knowing what was going on. ¹²When Absalom got to Hebron he offered sacrifices to the Lord and then sent for Ahithophel, the grandfather of Bathsheba who lived in Giloh, only eight miles from Hebron. Ahithophel was one of David's advisers, but he was still angry over what David had done to Bathsheba. Under his guidance the plot against David had gained momentum and the number of Absalom's followers had grown tremendously.

David Flees Jerusalem

¹³A messenger brought the news to David: "Your son Absalom is planning to make himself king of Israel, and men from all over the country are pledging loyalty to him!" ¹⁴Then David's former decisiveness returned, and he immediately took charge. He called in all his officers who were in Jerusalem at that time and said, "Come! Let's get out of the city! Absalom will try to attack before we can prepare to resist him. Let's get out before he comes and kills us and everyone else in the city who opposes him." ¹⁵They all agreed, "We're with you, and we'll do whatever you say." ¹⁶So the king, his family and all his officials left the city, except for ten of his concubines whom he left behind to look after the palace. ¹⁷When David and his people got to the outskirts of Jerusalem before crossing the Kidron Valley, they stopped. ¹⁸David's bodyguard, made up of the Cherethites and Pelethites, marched first. Then came the six hundred men from Gath who had accepted Israel's God and joined the forces of David when he had hidden from Saul.

¹⁹The king stopped this group and said to Ittai, their commander, “Why are you coming with us? Why don’t you go back and pledge your allegiance to the new king? You and your men haven’t grown up in Israel, so no one will think it strange if you don’t get involved in our politics. ²⁰You’ve been in Israel only a few years, so why should you roam around the country with me when I don’t even know where I’m going yet? Go back, and may the Lord our God be with you.” ²¹But Ittai said, “As surely as the Lord God of Israel lives and as long as my lord the king lives, wherever he goes, we will go, even if it means we have to die.” ²²David had been testing their loyalty. “If that’s your decision,” he said, “you’re welcome to stay. So go and march on up ahead of us.” Then Ittai and his men and their families went on ahead. ²³Along the way, the people wept as David and his men passed by. They crossed the Kidron Valley and continued toward the wilderness. They headed east toward the Jordan River, planning to cross it and then turn north toward Mahanaim and the forest of Ephraim.

²⁴Abiathar and Zadok, who had come from Gibeon to Jerusalem, were both high priests. They had brought the Ark of the Lord out of Jerusalem, set it down and offered sacrifices until all the people who wanted to follow David had safely left the city. ²⁵Then David said to Zadok, “Why don’t you take the Ark back to the city? If the Lord wants me to continue to serve as king, He’ll bring me back to Jerusalem to worship Him. ²⁶But if He’s not pleased with me and doesn’t want me to continue to be king, then let Him do to me whatever He sees best. ²⁷You have a lot more insight than I have, so why don’t you take your son Ahimaaz and, together with Abiathar and his son Jonathan, go back to Jerusalem to see what’s going on. ²⁸I’ll wait to hear from you before I cross Jordan.” ²⁹So Abiathar and Zadok took the Ark back to Jerusalem and stayed there.

³⁰As David ascended the Mount of

Olives he went barefoot, covered his head and wept. The people covered their heads and cried also. ³¹When David heard that Ahithophel, the grandfather of Bathsheba and one of his advisers, had sided with Absalom, David prayed, “O Lord, please turn Ahithophel’s advice to Absalom into foolishness.”

³²When he got to the top of the Mount of Olives where people often went to pray, Hushai, the Archite, was there to greet him. He was wearing a torn robe and had ashes on his head. ³³David greeted his former adviser and said, “You’re an answer to prayer. You’re one of my most trusted friends. But you won’t be much help to me here. ³⁴You can be more help to me if you go back to Jerusalem and offer Absalom your services. Tell him you were one of his father’s advisers but that now you’re ready to work for him. That way you can hopefully defeat Ahithophel’s counsel. ³⁵I already sent Zadok and Abiathar back to Jerusalem with the Ark. Tell them everything you find out that I should know, and they’ll get it to me. ³⁶In fact, their sons Ahimaaz and Jonathan are there already. You can contact them and they’ll let me know what’s happening.” ³⁷So Hushai changed his clothes and went to Jerusalem, arriving just as Absalom was coming into the city.

Mephibosheth’s Servant

16 Just past the summit of the Mount of Olives, David met Ziba, a former servant of Saul whom David had put in charge of Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth, coming up the hill toward him. He had several donkeys loaded with two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred clusters of raisins, a hundred portions of figs and a huge leather container full of unfermented wine. ²The king asked Ziba, “Where are you going with all that?” He replied, “The donkeys are for you and the women in your family. The bread and the fruit are for everyone, and the wine is to take along for those who need it so

that they don't pass out as they make their way through the wilderness." ³The king asked, "Where's Saul's grandson Mephibosheth?" Ziba answered, "He decided to stay in Jerusalem because he thinks that the people of Israel will turn against Absalom and restore to him the kingdom his grandfather Saul had." ⁴David said, "You're a faithful friend, Ziba. Because of Mephibosheth's treason, I'm taking the property of his grandfather Saul away from him and giving it to you." Then Ziba bowed before the king and said, "My lord, may I always serve you and find favor in your eyes."

Shimei Curses David

⁵When David and his people got close to Bahurim, a city on the road from Jerusalem to Jordan, a man named Shimei from the tribe of Benjamin and a relative of Saul came out cursing. ⁶When he got close to David he began throwing stones at him and his officials, even though they were all surrounded by the king's bodyguards. ⁷As he cursed, Shimei shouted, "Get out of here, you murderer! You're nothing but a bloodthirsty old man, the son of a devil. ⁸The Lord has seen to it that you get a taste of your own medicine for killing all of Saul's family just so you could be king. He has taken the kingdom away from you and given it to Absalom. You murderer!"

⁹Abishai, David's nephew, said, "Why don't you let me go over and cut off his head for saying that?" ¹⁰David said, "You and your brother are the bravest men I have, but we don't think the same. The Lord may have let him come and curse me publicly for a reason. How do I know?" ¹¹Then he turned to those around him and said, "My own son, my flesh and blood, is out to kill me. Why should we be surprised if a Benjamite and a relative of Saul curses me? Leave him alone. The Lord may have a purpose in all this. ¹²I'd rather let the Lord take care of it if He feels He needs to do so. Who knows, God may want to see my re-

action and if I show mercy to this man, He may have mercy on me." ¹³So David and his people continued on down the road. Shimei walked on the opposite side of the road, cursing David and throwing stones and flinging dust at him. ¹⁴Finally, the king and his people got to the Jordan River. They were exhausted and hungry so they stayed there and rested and refreshed themselves.

The Counsel of Ahithophel

¹⁵Meanwhile, Absalom, Ahithophel and the Israelite leaders arrived in Jerusalem and found that David and his officials were gone. ¹⁶Then Hushai the Archite, David's trusted friend, went to the palace to welcome Absalom and said to him, "Long live the king!" ¹⁷Absalom said, "Is this how you show your loyalty to David by being the first to greet the new king? Why aren't you with him?" ¹⁸Hushai said, "I couldn't go with your father because I'm for the one chosen by the Lord and supported by the people and leaders of Israel. He's the one I will serve and no one else. ¹⁹Besides, if I served the father, why shouldn't I serve the son? So I'm ready to serve you as I served your father David."

²⁰Absalom was pleased and accepted the services of Hushai and made him one of his advisers. Then he turned to Ahithophel and said, "Now that we took Jerusalem without a fight, what shall we do next? What would you advise?" ²¹Ahithophel said, "Take the ten concubines that your father left behind and announce that they are now yours and that he's your enemy. Then the hearts of the people who are with you will be strengthened." ²²Absalom accepted Ahithophel's advice. He had a tent pitched on the roof of the palace and took his father's concubines into the tent with Israel looking on. ²³In those days people listened to Ahithophel's advice as if it came from God. That's also how both David and Absalom took his advice.

17 Ahithophel suggested to Absalom, “Why don’t you let me choose twelve thousand of your best men, and I’ll go after David tonight and get even with him for what he did to Uriah and Bathsheba. You need to stay here for your own safety and stabilize things in Jerusalem. ²I’ll launch a surprise attack while he and his people are tired and discouraged. His men will panic and run. That will give me a chance to go after David himself. ³Then his men will return to Jerusalem and pledge their loyalty to you. So the death of one man will mean the support of many. I will not harm any of the king’s family or any of his officials.” ⁴To Absalom this seemed like a reasonable plan, and the leaders of Israel agreed.

The Counsel of Hushai

⁵Then Absalom said, “Before we do this, let’s have Hushai the Archite come in and see what he has to say.” ⁶When Hushai came, Absalom told him what Ahithophel had said and then asked him what advice he would give.

⁷Hushai said, “This time Ahithophel’s advice is not good. ⁸You know the kind of fighters your father and his men are. They fight as fiercely as a mother bear robbed of her cubs. Besides, your father is an experienced fighter and would not spend the night with his troops out in the open where they could be attacked. ⁹He’s probably hiding in a cave somewhere as he used to do when he fled from Saul. So, if your men go looking for him, he’ll catch them off guard and launch a surprise attack as he’s done so many times with the Philistines and others. As soon as some of your men get killed, word will get back that David is winning, ¹⁰and even your bravest warriors who have hearts like lions will be frightened because they know what your father and his men can do. ¹¹My advice is to call together all men fit for military service, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, until they look as numerous as the sand on the seashore

and then you should personally lead them into battle. ¹²This way we’ll have enough men to hunt your father down and fall on him as the morning dew settles over the whole countryside. Then neither he nor his men will be left alive. ¹³If they make it to some city and think they’re safe, our people will bring ropes and pull that city off the mountain until nothing is left.”

¹⁴Absalom and the leaders of Israel listened and said, “The advice of Hushai is better than Ahithophel’s because it gives us a greater guarantee of success.” This is how the Lord caused Absalom to reject Ahithophel’s advice.

Hushai Warns David

¹⁵Then Hushai went to see Zadok and Abiathar, the high priests, and told them the advice that he and Ahithophel had given. “Absalom has decided to follow my plan,” Hushai reported, “but he could still change his mind.” ¹⁶Hushai then told them to get word to David as quickly as possible and tell him to cross the Jordan River as fast as he can and head for the forest of Ephraim. For him to spend the night at Jordan’s crossing could spell disaster for him and his people.

¹⁷Ahimaaz and Jonathan, the sons of Zadok and Abiathar, had decided to stay near the En Rogel well just outside of Jerusalem because there was always a crowd there, and they could be contacted without arousing suspicion. So Zadok and Abiathar sent a servant girl to the well to give Jonathan and Ahimaaz the message, and they were told to take it to David as quickly as they could. ¹⁸But an older boy saw them talking together, became suspicious and ran to tell Absalom. Jonathan and Ahimaaz had noticed the boy standing nearby watching them and decided to leave immediately. They got as far as Bahurim and stopped at the house of a friend who had a well in his yard, and they climbed down into it. ¹⁹The man’s wife put a covering over the well and then scattered some dry grain on it as if it had been

there a long time, so no one would get the idea of looking into the well. ²⁰When Absalom's men came looking for Jonathan and Ahimaaz they asked the woman if she had seen the sons of the high priests. The woman said, "I saw them cross that brook over there." Absalom's men covered the whole area looking for them but couldn't find them. So they went back to Jerusalem.

²¹After Absalom's men had left the area, Jonathan and Ahimaaz climbed out of the well and immediately headed for David's camp. When they got there they said to David, "You need to cross the river right away because Ahithophel advised Absalom to attack you tonight."

²²So David and his people crossed the Jordan River. By daybreak they were all safely on the other side.

²³When Ahithophel saw that Absalom and his men had firmly decided to follow Hushai's plan, he saddled his donkey and headed back home to Giloh near Hebron. Then he put his affairs in order and hanged himself. So they buried him next to his father in the family tomb.

²⁴Meanwhile David and his people headed north into the forest of Ephraim as Hushai had suggested. Absalom and his men also crossed the Jordan and went after David as fast as they could.

²⁵Absalom had put Amasa in charge of the army of Israel in place of Joab. Amasa's father Jether (also called Ithra) was an Ishmaelite who had married Abigail, David's half-sister by Nahash. Amasa had defected from David's army and joined Absalom at the first sign of rebellion. ²⁶So Absalom's army crossed the Jordan River and headed north into the land of Gilead in hot pursuit of David.

²⁷David and his people were still some distance ahead of Absalom. When they arrived at Mahanaim, three men came to meet him: Shobi, the son of Nahash, an Israelite who lived in the Ammonite city of Rabbah, Makir, the son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai, the Gileadite from Rogelim. ²⁸They brought

bedding, blankets, bowls and pots for David and his people. They also brought wheat, barley, parched grain, flour, beans, lentils, ²⁹honey, cheese, curds and sheep for them to eat. They said, "We knew you'd be hungry and thirsty after walking all that way through the wilderness."

Absalom Is Defeated and Killed

18 David took his most experienced men and divided them into divisions of thousands and companies of hundreds and set officers over them. ²He put Joab at the head of one division, Abishai at the head of another and Ittai from Gath over the third division. Then he told his troops that he would personally lead them into battle. ³But his men said to him, "No, you're not going to battle with us, because if we lose the battle, Absalom's men will forget about us and go after you. Getting you is worth more to them than ten thousand of us. No, it's better if you stay here with the reserves where you have some protection and get ready to send us more troops if we need them."

⁴David said, "I'll do whatever you think best." So the king stood at the gate of the city as his best troops marched past in units of hundreds and thousands on their way to battle. ⁵As Joab, Abishai and Ittai marched by at the head of their columns, David called out to each of them, "Be kind to Absalom for my sake." The troops also heard him.

⁶So David's men marched out to fight Absalom's army, and they met in the forest of Ephraim. ⁷David's troops defeated the Israelites with a great slaughter, killing over twenty thousand of them.

⁸The fighting spread over the whole countryside but most of those who died were killed in the forest rather than out in the open field.

⁹As Absalom was trying to get out of the forest on his mule, he spotted some of David's men following him, so he rode as fast as he could, glancing behind him. His mule ran under a huge oak tree and

Absalom's head was caught in the fork of two branches. As his mule ran out from under him, he hung there by his neck, unconscious, with his long hair entangled in the branches. ¹⁰One of David's men saw what happened but was afraid to touch Absalom because of what the king had said to the generals before they left for battle. So he ran to Joab and said, "Absalom is hanging over there caught in the branches of a tree!" ¹¹Joab said, "What! You saw Absalom hanging in the branches of a tree and didn't kill him? That was your chance! You should have run him through with your sword, and I would have given you ten pieces of silver and a warrior's belt!"

¹²The man said, "Even if you gave me a thousand pieces of silver, I wouldn't touch the king's son, because as we marched out to battle, we heard the king tell you and Abishai and Ittai to protect young Absalom. ¹³So if I killed him, the king might demand my head. He knows everything that's going on, and sooner or later, he would find out who had done it. And there would be nothing even you could do to save me." ¹⁴Joab said, "Let's not waste time arguing. Where is he?" Together they ran to Absalom, and Joab took three short spears and thrust them into Absalom's chest while he was hanging there unconscious, but still alive. ¹⁵Joab's ten young bodyguards finished the job to make sure that he was dead. Then they lifted his body out of the branches and laid it on the ground.

¹⁶Joab then blew the ram's horn, and David's men stopped pursuing the Israelites. ¹⁷Joab ordered his men to throw Absalom's body in a nearby pit in the forest and cover it with a huge pile of stones, which they did. Meanwhile, the Israelites had fled before David's men and returned to their homes. ¹⁸During the short time that Absalom had been king, he had ordered a monument built to himself in the Valley of the Kings, because he thought, "I have no son to carry on my name, so this way the people won't forget

me." He gave it his name, and today it's still called Absalom's Monument.

David Is Told of Absalom's Death

¹⁹Now Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok the high priest, was so eager to tell the king about the battle that he went to Joab and said, "Let me run and take the good news of our victory to the king and tell him that the Lord has saved him from his enemies." ²⁰Joab said, "No! You're an Israelite and the son of the high priest. You should not be the bearer of bad news, because even though we won, the king's son is dead. This will turn into a day of mourning, not a day of celebration." ²¹Then Joab turned to his Cushite servant and said, "Go and tell the king what happened." His servant bowed and took off running. ²²Then Ahimaaz spoke to Joab again, "Please let me run. Now that the Cushite is bearing the bad news, let me carry the good news." Joab said, "Son, why are you so eager to run to the king? The Cushite's already gone, and if there's a reward, he'll be the one to get it." ²³Ahimaaz said, "Reward or not, I'd like to run." So Joab said, "All right, go and run." Then Ahimaaz took the longer but easier way through the Jordan Valley, rather than the shorter way over the mountains, and he outran the Cushite.

²⁴David was sitting in one of the guardrooms between the inner and outer gates waiting for news from the front. When the watchman on the roof of the tower scanned the horizon, he saw a lone man running toward the city. ²⁵He called down to the king, "There's a runner coming!" The king said, "If he's alone, he's got good news, because no one runs with bad news." ²⁶Soon the watchman saw another man running toward the city. He called down to the king, "There's another runner coming, at little distance behind the first one, and he, too, is alone!" The king said, "He must be bringing more good news." ²⁷The watchman said, "The first runner looks like Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok." The king said, "He's a good

man, and if he's in a hurry, he must have good news."

²⁸When Ahimaaz saw the king standing by the gate waiting for him, he called out, "All is well!" At the gate he bowed before David and said, "Praise the Lord! He has given you victory over all those who rebelled against you!" ²⁹The king said, "How is Absalom? Is he safe?" Ahimaaz skirted the question, saying, "I saw a tumult around Absalom, but I didn't see what was happening, and that's when Joab sent your servant running." ³⁰The king said, "Stay here, because there's another runner coming and we'll see what he has to say." So Ahimaaz stayed beside the king and waited.

³¹Then the Cushite came running up to the king, bowed low and said, "This day the Lord has saved the king from all those who rebelled against him." ³²The king said, "How is my son Absalom? Is he safe?" The Cushite answered, "May all the enemies of my lord and all those who rebel against him be as he is."

David Mourns for Absalom

³³When the king heard that, he was overcome with grief and his whole body shook as he wept. He went to the guardroom over the gateway and cried, "O Absalom! My son, my son! If only I could have died in your place! O Absalom, my son, my son."

19 Then someone told Joab that the king was really shaken by news of the death of his son, and that he was in the guardroom over the gateway mourning and weeping over Absalom. ²When word got around to all the troops that Absalom was dead and that the king was grieving over his death, they, too, mourned. ³That day they came through the gates of the city like men who had been defeated in battle. ⁴They heard the king crying out in a loud voice, "O my son, my son! Absalom, my son!"

⁵Then Joab said to David, "We have

just gone out and risked our lives for you and your sons and daughters, your wives and your officials. We have received no thank you or word of appreciation. With all your weeping, you've made us feel ashamed of what we've done. ⁶You shame those who love you and love those who hate you. You've certainly made it clear to everyone that your field commanders and troops mean nothing to you and that you'd be happier if we were all dead and Absalom were alive. ⁷Stop crying now and go outside and show some appreciation to your troops for what they've done. I swear that if you don't welcome them back, none of us will stay, and by tonight, you'll be all alone. That will be worse than anything that's ever happened to you from your boyhood until now."

⁸David listened to Joab, then wiped his tears and went down to sit by the city gate. When the men heard that the king was by the gate, they lined up outside the wall and marched back in to receive his congratulations on their victory. Meanwhile, Absalom's men fled to their own homes.

David Starts Back to Jerusalem

⁹Some had actually revolted against David; others were indifferent toward him. Still others said, "David is the one who saved us from our enemies. He rescued us from the Philistines, but when Absalom claimed the throne, he left. ¹⁰So we made Absalom our king, but now he's dead. Why don't we just make David king again?"

¹¹When David heard about the confusion, he sent a message to Zadok and Abiathar, the two high priests, which said, "Ask the leaders of Judah why they're hesitating to invite the king back to his palace. ¹²Remind them that I'm their brother, that we belong to the same tribe and that I'm wondering why they're the last tribe to consider taking the king back. ¹³Also remind Amasa that he is my own flesh and blood and that I promise to put him in charge of all the armies of

Israel in place of Joab.” David hoped by this to win Amasa’s loyalty. ¹⁴Zadok and Abiathar did as David said and his message touched the hearts of the leaders of Judah and re-awakened their loyalty to him. So they sent a message to the king, “Come back home and bring along all those who are with you.”

¹⁵David left Mahanaim and got as far as the eastern bank of the Jordan River. The leaders of Judah arrived from Jerusalem and went to Gilgal on the western bank to welcome him. ¹⁶Shimei, the Benjamite from Bahurim, who had cursed David, heard that Absalom was dead and that David was on his way home. So he quickly joined the men of Judah and hurried with them to the Jordan to welcome David. ¹⁷A thousand men from the tribe of Benjamin also went, as did Ziba, the former servant of Saul, and his fifteen sons and twenty servants. They all went down to the Jordan to welcome the king and help him across.

David’s Mercy to Shimei

¹⁸The Benjamites went across the river first to see what they could do to help the king. When Shimei got there, he fell at David’s feet and said to him, ¹⁹“My lord, forgive me for cursing you the day you left Jerusalem. Please don’t hold it against me. ²⁰I know that I did wrong and sinned in doing that, but today I’m one of the first from Joseph’s house to welcome you back.” ²¹Then Abishai, the son of Zeruah, said, “This fellow dared to curse the Lord’s anointed! He ought to be put to death!” ²²David said to Abishai, “You and your brother Joab certainly don’t think as I do. This is not the time to execute people. It’s a time of mercy and not justice. I’m still the king, and no one from Israel will be put to death.” ²³Then David turned to Shimei and promised him with an oath that he would not execute him for what he had done.

David and Mephibosheth

²⁴Mephibosheth, Saul’s grandson, also

had joined the group to welcome the king. He had not cared for his feet, trimmed his beard, or washed his clothes since David had left Jerusalem. ²⁵When he greeted the king, David said to him, “Why didn’t you come with me when I left Jerusalem? Why did you stay behind? Did you think the people would make you the king?” ²⁶Mephibosheth answered, “Since I can’t walk, I told Ziba to saddle my donkeys for me so I could ride along with you, but he left without me. ²⁷I heard that he lied to you. He said that I decided to stay in Jerusalem, hoping to take back my grandfather’s throne and become king, which is not true. So now do to me whatever seems best to you, because you are like an angel from God to me. ²⁸All my grandfather’s descendants deserved to die because of the way they treated you. But out of love for my father Jonathan, you gave me a place at your own table. So I have no right to ask for additional mercy.”

²⁹David interrupted Mephibosheth and said, “Don’t say any more. Because Ziba brought us food and gave us donkeys when we were desperate, I told him he could have all your grandfather’s property, but I’m giving half of it back to you.” ³⁰Mephibosheth said, “He can have all of it! The only thing that matters is that you’re safely back home.” David felt that he could not restore all the property to Mephibosheth and remain true to his word.

David’s Kindness to Barzillai

³¹Now Barzillai, the Gileadite who with others had brought food and blankets to Mahanaim for David and his family, had come down from Rogelim to accompany the king across the Jordan. ³²Barzillai was an old man in his eighties. He was very wealthy and had provided for the king at Mahanaim. ³³So the king said to him, “Come on over Jordan with me to Jerusalem, and I’ll take care of you and be as generous to you as you have been to me.”

³⁴Barzillai replied, "I don't have that many more years to live. Why should I go and live in Jerusalem at this late time in my life? ³⁵I'm in my eighties and my mind is not what it used to be. It's hard for me to make decisions. I don't enjoy food like I used to, and my hearing is almost gone so that I can hardly hear the voices of singers. So why should I come to Jerusalem to be a burden to you? ³⁶I'll cross over Jordan, but then I'll go back home. The king doesn't need to reward me for what I have done. ³⁷Let me live out my days in my hometown and be buried next to my parents. But here's my son, Chimham. Let him go in my place if he wants to, and do for him what you would do for me." ³⁸The king said, "I'll be happy to take Chimham with me, and I'll do for him whatever I would have done for you. If there's anything else I can do for you, let me know and I'll be happy to do it." ³⁹So the king and all his people crossed to the western side of the Jordan River. Then David kissed Barzillai good-bye, and the old man returned home. ⁴⁰Chimham, Barzillai's son, went with the king. Then all the troops of Judah, but only half of those from Israel, welcomed the king back home.

Judah and Israel Argue Over David

⁴¹From here they went on to Jerusalem and when they drew close to the city, the leaders of Israel came out to meet the king and said, "Why were the men of Judah in such a hurry to go out to welcome you and help you cross Jordan? Didn't they want us to come along?" ⁴²The leaders of Judah said, "We did this because the king is our flesh and blood. He belongs to our tribe, so we thought it was our duty to go to welcome him and protect him. We didn't go out to get a reward. Why are you so angry?" ⁴³The men of Israel said, "Just remember that we have a ten-tribe claim on the king, even if he comes from your tribe. So don't keep looking down on us as if you're better than we are. Don't forget that it was our

idea to bring the king back to Jerusalem." But the leaders of Judah were not willing to back down. They spoke more angrily than the men of Israel.

Sheba's Rebellion

20 Sheba, the son of Bichri, and a troublemaker from the tribe of Benjamin, happened to be there when the people of Israel were arguing with those of Judah. So he blew his ram's horn and then shouted, "We're not related to David! So why should we fight over him! Let's get out of here and go home!" ²Then all the Israelites who were there, even those who had welcomed David, left on Sheba's suggestion and went home. But the men of Judah stayed by and escorted David into Jerusalem.

³When David got home, the first thing he did was to take the ten concubines that he had left behind and put them in a separate housing area of the palace. He did this to show that he did not approve of what Absalom had done. He provided for the concubines but never went to see them again. So they lived as widows the rest of their lives.

⁴Then the king called in Amasa and said to him, "Call together all the fighting men of Judah to meet me here day after tomorrow, and I want you to be with them." ⁵But Amasa took longer to get the men together than the king had allowed, because he went to tribes other than Judah. ⁶In the meantime, David also called in Abishai and said, "Sheba, the son of Bichri, will stir up more rebellion than Absalom ever did. Take our special forces and my bodyguards and go after him before he collects a whole army, takes over some of the fortified cities and gets away from us."

⁷So Abishai and his brother Joab and their men, together with the Cherethites and Pelethites, David's bodyguards, left Jerusalem and went after Sheba. ⁸About six miles away they reached the huge boulder at Gibeon just across the border in Benjamin. Amasa and some of his men

came out to greet them. Joab wondered what Amasa was doing in Benjamin when he was supposed to be rounding up the men of Judah. Joab loosened his dagger and as he stepped forward to greet Amasa and bowed to him, the dagger that was strapped to his waist fell out of its sheath. He bent over to pick it up with his left hand. ⁹Then he greeted Amasa and said, "How are you my brother?" He leaned forward and took hold of Amasa's beard with his right hand as if to pull him closer to give him a customary brotherly kiss.

¹⁰Amasa didn't even think about the dagger in Joab's left hand. Joab pulled him closer, kissed him and then plunged the dagger into Amasa's abdomen, ripping it open so that his insides fell out. He died instantly. Then Abishai and Joab went on their way to find Sheba. ¹¹One of Joab's officers who stood nearby shouted, "Whoever belonged to Amasa but favors Joab and is loyal to David, come and follow us!" So all of Amasa's men who were there followed Joab. ¹²Now Amasa's body was covered with blood and lay in the middle of the road. As the troops passed by, they all stopped to look. When one of the officers realized what was slowing down the troops, he took Amasa's body and dragged it into the field and threw a blanket over it. ¹³Then the troops moved on and went with Abishai and Joab to find Sheba.

¹⁴In the meantime, Sheba had gone through all the tribes to gain support and to collect his own private army. The men from his father's clan went with him and when they got up to the city of Beth Maacah near the city of Dan, they stopped to rest. ¹⁵The forces of Abishai and Joab caught up with Sheba and besieged the city. They began digging a ditch to get dirt to build a ramp against the wall so they could get into the city. Then they started battering the top of the wall to break it down.

¹⁶A woman appeared at the top of the wall and called down to the men, "Listen! Listen to me! Tell Joab to come here. I

want to tell him something." ¹⁷They passed the word along, so Joab came and the woman called down to him, "Are you Joab?" He said, "Yes, I am." She said, "Listen to what I have to say." He replied, "Go on, I'm listening."

¹⁸She spoke firmly, "For years the people have said, 'If you want some good advice, go to the city of Beth Maacah,' and the advice we gave them would solve the problem. ¹⁹We're a peaceful people and loyal Israelites. We're like a mother to the people of our country. Why must you destroy those who are serving the Lord?" ²⁰Joab listened to her and replied, "The last thing I want to do is to kill your people and destroy your good city. ²¹But there's a man in there by the name of Sheba, from the tribe of Benjamin. He lives in the hill country of Ephraim and has revolted against David. Bring him out to us, and we'll leave your people alone." The woman said, "Wait there, and we'll throw his head down to you." ²²The woman talked to the people of the city. They grabbed Sheba, cut off his head and threw it down to Joab. Joab then blew the ram's horn and gave the order for the men to break up and go home. But Joab and Abishai took the special forces and returned to Jerusalem.

David's Officials

²³Joab was still the commander of all the armies in Israel. Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada was still over the Cherethites and Pelethites, David's personal guards. ²⁴Adoniram (Adoram) was in charge of conscripted labor, and Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahilud, was in charge of government records. ²⁵Sheva was the royal court secretary, and Zadok and Abiathar were still the high priests. ²⁶Ira from the city of Jair was David's personal envoy and royal adviser.

David and the Gibeonites

21 Toward the close of David's reign, there was a severe famine for three years. David prayed to the Lord

about it. The Lord finally answered, "I'm withholding rain because there is guilt on Israel over Saul killing the people of Gibeon in cold blood. Years before, Joshua signed a peace treaty with these people, and they had put their trust in Israel." ²So David called for the leaders of the Gibeonites who were left to come to see him. The Gibeonites were a small group of surviving Amorites whom the Israelites had agreed not to destroy. But Saul in his misguided zeal for Israel had ignored the treaty and tried to wipe them out. ³When they came to see David, he said, "What can I do to make amends for what Saul did to you? The Lord is displeased with Israel for the way we have treated you. We want you to know that our God did not tell us to do that."

⁴The Gibeonites said, "We are not insisting on being paid for the death of our people or the loss of our property. We're not interested in Saul's silver and gold, and we're certainly not here to demand that an equal number of Israelites be killed." David said, "Then what is it that I can do for you?" ⁵They answered, "Saul wanted to completely destroy us and almost succeeded. The few of us who are left are scattered everywhere, and we have no place to call our own. ⁶So give us seven male descendants of Saul. We will execute them and hang their bodies up before the Lord outside of Saul's hometown. This is what Moses did with the leaders of Israel who had sex with the Moabite women who seduced them into worshipping Baal. At that time it stopped the plague the Lord had sent on Israel, and maybe this time it'll stop the famine." David said, "I'll give them to you as you request."

⁷So the king gave seven male descendants of Saul to the Gibeonites, but he spared Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, because of the oath he had taken before the Lord and Jonathan to care for Jonathan's family. ⁸But David did order Armoni and Mephibosheth, two sons of Saul from his concubine Rizpah, to be handed over to

the Gibeonites. Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, was the one that Saul's commander Abner, had slept with. David also ordered the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab to be handed over to the Gibeonites. She was the one Saul had first promised to David but then gave to Adriel, the son of Barzillai the Meholahite. ⁹So the Gibeonites took them and impaled all seven of them on the mountain just outside of Saul's hometown of Gibeah at the beginning of the barley harvest.

¹⁰Then Rizpah went to Gibeah where the bodies were, spread some rough cloth on a nearby rock and stayed there to keep vultures away during the day and wild animals away at night. She stayed there from the beginning of the barley harvest until the rains came. ¹¹When David heard about the honor Rizpah gave her sons, he was moved with compassion and greatly sympathized with her.

¹²David decided to honor Saul and Jonathan who had been killed in the battle of Gilboa while defending Israel. The Philistines had hung their bodies up for public display in Beth Shan, but men from Jabesh had gone and gotten the bodies and given them an honorable burial in their own city. So David ordered the bones of Saul and Jonathan dug up and taken from Jabesh in Gilead to Saul's hometown, for re-burial. ¹³When David's men returned, he ordered them to bury the bodies of the seven descendants of Saul, together with the bones of Saul and Jonathan in Gibeah. ¹⁴They buried them in the tomb of Kish, Saul's father, and the Lord allowed the rains to return and refresh the drought-stricken land.

Battles With Philistine Giants

¹⁵Once more, war broke out between the Philistines and Israel. Then David left Jerusalem and took his men into battle. While in hand-to-hand combat, he suddenly became exhausted. ¹⁶When Ishbi-Benob saw David, he decided to go after him. He was a Philistine of tremendous size, a descendant from the giants of

Gath. His bronze spearhead weighed seven-and-a-half pounds and his sword was brand new and as sharp as a razor. ¹⁷But Abishai saw him and came to David's rescue. He attacked the giant with such force that he struck him down with one blow and killed him. Then David's officers said to the king, "You're not going out to battle with us again! If you're killed, Israel will have lost its light!" David agreed and stayed away from the front. After their victory, he and his men returned to Jerusalem.

¹⁸Not long afterward there was another battle between Israel and the Philistines at Gob near the city of Gezer. It was during this battle that Sibbecai, the Hushathite, killed Saph, another man of tremendous size and a descendant of Rapha the giant. ¹⁹In still another battle, Elhanan, the son of Jair, a weaver from Bethlehem, killed a man named Lahmi, the youngest brother of Goliath whom David had killed. ²⁰In yet another battle, which took place near the city of Gath, there was a man of tremendous size with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. He, too, was a descendant of Rapha, the giant. ²¹When he challenged Israel to a fight, Jonathan, the son of David's brother Shimeah, accepted the challenge and killed him. ²²So these four descendants of the giants from Gath were all killed by David's men.

David's Song of Victory

22 This is one of the songs that David wrote and sang to the Lord after being delivered from all his enemies, including Saul. ²He sang,

"The Lord is my Rock, my Fortress, my Defense. ³My God is my Rock under whose overhang I hide; He is my strength and He holds my salvation. He is my stronghold, my tower of defense, the One who has saved me from violence. ⁴I called on the Lord for help and He saved me from my enemies; He alone is worthy to be praised.

⁵"When death was all around me and

the waves of destruction were about to roll over me, ⁶when the grave was ready to trap me, and death reached out to touch me, ⁷I cried to the Lord for help; I called for Him to come and rescue me. He heard me from His Temple.

⁸"Then the earth quaked and the heavens shook; the Lord was angry with my enemies. ⁹Smoke and fire came out of the earth; hail like burning coals came down from the sky. ¹⁰The Lord came down from heaven in a thick, dark cloud. ¹¹He stepped into his heavenly chariot, surrounded by thousands of angels, and rode down on the wings of the wind. ¹²Darkness covered Him and clouds heavy with rain filled the sky. ¹³Lightning flashed from His presence, and bolts of lightning streaked the sky.

¹⁴"The sound of thunder filled the air, and the voice of the Most High God was heard defending me. ¹⁵He directed His arrows at my enemies, and His bolts of lightning sent them running. ¹⁶At God's rebuke, the bottom of the ocean was uncovered, and the foundations of the earth were laid bare when He breathed.

¹⁷"He reached down from the sky and took hold of me and pulled me out of deep waters. ¹⁸He rescued me from my enemies and from those who pressed in to kill me; they were too strong for me. ¹⁹They attacked me and it looked like the end, but the Lord came to my rescue. ²⁰Suddenly there was space around me; He had saved me from death because He was pleased with me.

²¹"The Lord helped me because I tried to do right; He rewarded me according to what I had done. ²²I have followed in the ways of the Lord; I have not turned away from Him to do that which is evil. ²³I know His commandments by heart; I have not broken His law. ²⁴He knows that I'm innocent of wrongdoing and that I have kept myself from sin. ²⁵The Lord has rewarded me according to my obedience, according to my cleanness in his sight.

²⁶"The Lord is loyal to those who are

loyal; He does good to those who do good. ²⁷Those who are pure see Him as pure, but those who are wicked see Him as cruel. ²⁸The Lord helps those who are humble and humbles those who are proud. ²⁹Lord, you are my lamp, the One who turns my darkness into light. ³⁰With your help I can scale a wall; with you beside me, I can attack a whole army. ³¹The ways of the Lord are perfect; the words of the Lord are true; He is a mighty shield to all who seek His protection.

³²“Who is God but the Lord? Who is the Rock, but our God? ³³He alone is my refuge and strength; He clears the way before me; He makes my path safe. ³⁴He helps me run like a deer and protects me high in the mountains. ³⁵He helps me train for battle; He gives me strength to bend the strongest bow. ³⁶The Lord gives me the victory; His gentle condescension has made me great. ³⁷He has protected me from being captured. He has kept me from stumbling in battle and falling into the hands of my enemies.

³⁸“With His help I pursued my enemies and defeated them; I pursued them until I destroyed them. ³⁹I struck down my enemies so they could not rise; they fell at my feet and lay defeated. ⁴⁰You gave me strength to do battle; you gave me victory over my enemies. ⁴¹You made my enemies turn and run; you helped me defeat those who hated me and were out to get me. ⁴²They cried for help to their gods, but no one came to save them; they cried to the God of heaven, but neither did He answer them. ⁴³I struck my enemies to the ground; I trampled them in the dust; I walked on them as I charged into battle.

⁴⁴“You delivered me from my enemies and placed me at the head of nations; people I don’t even know are subject to me. ⁴⁵Foreigners bow before me; when I speak, they obey. ⁴⁶When they see me they lose courage; they come down from their strongholds and fall at my feet. ⁴⁷The Lord our God is alive! He will never die! Praise be to the Rock of our defense!

Let us exalt the Lord who saves us. ⁴⁸He is the One who gives me victory; He is the One who puts nations under my feet. ⁴⁹He saves me from my enemies; He exalts me above those who hate me; He protects me from the hands of violent men.

⁵⁰“Therefore I will praise the Lord among the nations; I will sing praises to His name. ⁵¹The Lord gives the king great victories; He is loyal to the one He has chosen; He showers David and his descendants with unspeakable love.”

David's Last Words

23 David was the son of Jesse, the man God chose to be king, the one whom the God of Jacob made great. He composed many songs and was known as Israel’s beloved singer. This was his last song:

²“The Spirit of the Lord spoke to me, and His message is in my mouth. ³The God of Israel spoke and the Rock of Israel said to me, ‘One will come whose rule over men will be just, who will rule in the fear of God. ⁴He is like light flooding the earth at dawn on a cloudless day; He is like the sun that fills the sky after the rain; He makes every blade of grass sparkle like a diamond in the field and sprout from the ground.’ ⁵God has made an eternal covenant with me to establish my house forever; He will keep His word and bring to pass all my desires. ⁶When He comes, evil men will be cast aside like thorns; those whom no one could touch without getting hurt will be no more. ⁷Only an iron hand or a spear can now control them, but when He comes, He will use fire to destroy them forever.”

David's Mighty Warriors

⁸Here is a list of David’s mighty warriors: There was Josheb Basshebeth (or Jashobeam), also known as Adino the Eznite. He was leader of The Famous Three. He used his sword and spear fearlessly, and he killed three hundred men in one battle, and a total of eight hundred.

⁹The second of The Famous Three was

Eleazar, the son of Dodo the Ahohite. He alone stood with David against the Philistines at Pas Dammim after the rest of the men withdrew. ¹⁰Eleazar fought so long and hard that when the battle was over, his hand was cramped around the handle of his sword and he couldn't let go. The Lord gave them the victory that day. The rest of the men finally returned, but only to strip the dead of their weapons and armor.

¹¹The third of The Famous Three was Shammah, the son of Agee, the Hararite. When the Philistines gathered at Lehi in a field of lentils, the Israelites had fled. ¹²But Shammah stood in the middle of the field and defied the Philistines. When they attacked, he fought them off, and the Lord gave him a great victory.

¹³Actually, David had thirty such mighty men. Once during the harvest, three of these were with David at the cave of Adullam while the Philistines camped in the Valley of Rephaim. ¹⁴As David and his men stood on top of a hill not far from Bethlehem where a Philistine garrison was stationed, ¹⁵he longed aloud for a drink, saying, "O, how I wish I could have a drink of water from the well by the gate of Bethlehem!" ¹⁶So these three broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well and brought it back to David. When they gave it to him, he refused to drink it, but poured it out on the ground as an offering to the Lord. ¹⁷He said to them, "You could have been killed! How could I have enjoyed that water knowing you risked your lives for it?" These were the kinds of exploits The Mighty Thirty carried out.

¹⁸Now Abishai, the son of Zeruiah and brother of Joab, was the leader of The Mighty Thirty. He was not at all afraid to use his sword and spear, and during one long battle he killed three hundred men. This kind of bravery, along with his leadership, gave him a name next to The Famous Three. ¹⁹He was the most respected of The Mighty Thirty and was also their commander, even though he

was not one of The Famous Three.

²⁰Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, from Kabzeel in Judah, also performed great feats of valor. He killed two giant Moabite warriors who attacked him at the same time. He went down into a pit on a snowy day to face a trapped lion and killed it. ²¹He also killed a huge Egyptian, about seven-and-a-half feet tall, who came at him with a spear. Benaiah attacked him with his club, snatched the spear from the Egyptian's hand and used it to kill him. ²²These were some of the feats of Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, which gave him his standing among The Mighty Thirty. ²³He was looked up to and respected by The Mighty Thirty, even though his feats did not equal the feats of The Famous Three. Benaiah was also in charge of David's bodyguards, made up of the Cherethites and Pelethites.

²⁴These are some of the men who were at one time or another counted among The Mighty Thirty: Asahel, the brother of Joab, who was killed by Abner; Elhanan, the son of Dodo from Bethlehem; ²⁵Shammah and Elikah from Harod; ²⁶Helez the Paltite; Ira, the son of Ikkesh from Tekoa; ²⁷Abiezer from Anathoth; Mebunnai (also known as Sibbecai) a Hushathite; ²⁸Zalmon (or Ilai) the Ahohite; Maharai the Netophathite; ²⁹Heleb (or Heled), the son of Baanah the Netophathite; Ithai, the son of Ribai from Gibeah in Benjamin; ³⁰Benaiah, the Pirathonite from Ephraim; Hiddai from the waters of Gaash; ³¹Abi Albon (or Abiel) the Arbathite; Azmaveth the Bahumite; ³²Eliabha the Shaalbonite; the sons of Jashen; ³³Jonathan, the son of Shammah the Hararite; Ahiam, the son of Sharar the Hararite; ³⁴Eliphelet, the son of Ahasbai of Maacah; Eliam, the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite; ³⁵Hezro (or Hezrai) the Carmelite; Paari the Arbite; ³⁶Igal, the son of Nathan from Zobah; Bani (or Mibhar), the son of Hagri the Gadite; ³⁷Zehek the Ammonite; Naharai from Beeroth who was the armor bearer of Joab, the son of Zeruiah; ³⁸Ira and

Gareb, the two Ithrites;³⁹ and Uriah the Hittite, whom David ordered killed. All these men were at one time among the mighty men of David.

David's Census

24 Toward the end of David's life the Lord was again displeased with the people of Israel. They had become proud of their newly attained national greatness and desired to be like the nations around them. God's purpose for their existence was forgotten, and David succumbed to Satan's temptation to take a census of Israel and Judah to see how many were of military age.² He called in Joab, his commander, and said, "Send your men throughout Israel from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south and take a census for me. Count the number of men of military age to see how large an army we would have if we decided to go to war to enlarge our country."³ Joab said to the king, "May the Lord increase the size of Israel and its fighting men a hundredfold and may the king live to see it, but let the Lord do so. Why go through the entire country just to count those of military age? That sounds like nothing but ambitious pride. It is not a good thing to do."

⁴But the king overruled Joab's reluctance, so Joab left to carry out the king's order.⁵ Joab and his men crossed the Jordan River and camped in a small valley just south of Aroer. They began taking the census at the southern border of Israel and worked their way north to Jazer in the land of Gad.⁶ From there they went on to Gilead and Kadesh in the land of the Hittites and then north to Dan, and west to Sidon.⁷ At Sidon they turned south to the city of Tyre on the coast of the Mediterranean, taking in all the cities along the way that once belonged to the Hivites and the Canaanites. Then they kept heading south until they got to Beersheba in the Negeb, the southern part of Judah.⁸ It took nine months and twenty days to finish taking the census,

then Joab and his men returned to Jerusalem to give the king their report.⁹ Joab gave the final count to David, and there were eight hundred thousand fighting men in Israel, not counting the nearly three hundred thousand in David's standing army. There were almost five hundred thousand in Judah alone.

Judgment on David for Taking a Census

¹⁰Then David's conscience began to bother him, and he realized that he had given in to the temptation of pride. He said to the Lord, "O Lord, I have sinned! Please forgive me! Take away my sin and my guilt. I gave in to my pride and did a very foolish thing."¹¹ Early the next morning before David got up, the Lord said to the prophet Gad,¹² "Go talk to David and say to him, 'The Lord has heard your prayers and forgiven you. But both you and the people need to be disciplined, because they were just as full of pride as you were. The Lord is giving you three options; choose the one you want Him to carry out.'" ¹³So Gad went to see David and said to him, "The Lord has heard your prayers and is giving you three options. Which one of these should He carry out as punishment for your sin? Should it be three years of drought and famine, three months of being chased by invading armies, or three days of a plague throughout Israel? You decide and I'll take your answer back to the Lord."¹⁴ "This is awful!" David said. "How can I decide such a thing? I know this: It is better to fall into the hands of the Lord than into the hands of our enemies. Let Him punish us, because He's full of compassion."

¹⁵So the Lord sent a plague in the land which began that very morning and was to last for three days. Seventy thousand men from Dan to Beersheba who had been trained for military service died as a result of that plague.¹⁶ Then the angel standing on Mount Moriah stretched out his sword over Jerusalem ready to strike the city with the plague, but the Lord said to him, "That's enough. Stop!" The

angel was standing by the threshing floor of Araunah, the Jebusite, whom the people called Ornan. ¹⁷And the Lord opened David's eyes to let him see the angel with a drawn sword. David said, "O Lord, I'm the one who sinned! I'm the one who started all this! The people are my sheep. They only did what I asked them to do. Just punish me and my father's house, not them!"

The Altar on Mount Moriah

¹⁸Then the prophet of God came to see David and said, "Go up to Mount Moriah where you saw the angel standing, and build an altar to the Lord there on the threshing floor of Araunah, the Jebusite." ¹⁹So David left Jerusalem and headed to the top of Mount Moriah, just as the prophet had said. ²⁰When Araunah saw David and his officials coming toward him, he went to greet them, bowed face down in front of David and asked, ²¹"Why has my lord the king come to see me?" David answered, "I have come to buy your threshing floor

so I can build an altar to the Lord and stop the plague that's spreading through the land."

²²Araunah said to David, "Let the king do whatever pleases him. Here are my oxen; you may use them for sacrifices. And here are their wooden yokes and the boards of the threshing floor; you may use those to make the fire." ²³Araunah offered all these to David, then added, "May Israel's God accept these and answer your prayer." ²⁴David replied, "No, I must pay you. I will not bring to the Lord an offering that doesn't cost me anything." So David bought Araunah's threshing floor and his oxen for fifty silver coins, and the entire hill of Moriah for six hundred gold coins. From then on, that area was considered holy. It was the place where Abraham had built an altar to offer his son Isaac and where Solomon would later build the Temple. ²⁵David built an altar there and had the priests offer the oxen as burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord. Then the Lord answered David's prayer and stopped the plague.

1 KINGS

Adonijah Claims the Throne

1 When David was about seventy years old, he just couldn't keep warm anymore, even when his servants covered him with blankets. ²Then his physicians said to him, "We'll find a healthy young virgin who is not engaged to be married to come and take care of you. She will lie close to you and keep you warm." The king agreed, ³so they searched throughout the tribes of Israel and found a young woman named Abishag in Shunem near Mount Tabor and brought her to Jerusalem to care for the king. ⁴She was very beautiful and after some training under the king's physicians, she became David's nurse. At night she would lie next to him to keep him warm, but he had no sexual relations with her.

⁵After Absalom's death, Adonijah, the son of David and Haggith, wanted to take the throne. So he assembled chariots and horses and an escort of fifty men to run ahead of him. ⁶Unfortunately, his father had never disciplined him or questioned his actions. Adonijah was even more handsome than his older brother Absalom had been, though they had different mothers. ⁷Adonijah talked to Joab, the commander of David's army, and to Abiathar, the high priest serving the Ark of God in Jerusalem, about succeeding his father on the throne. In spite of the fact that David had already appointed Solomon, they gave Adonijah their support. ⁸But Zadok the high priest serving at the sanctuary in Gibeon, Benaiah commander of David's bodyguard, Nathan the prophet, and Shimei and Rei who were in charge of the chariot drivers and David's special forces did not join in the conspiracy.

⁹One day Adonijah sacrificed a number of sheep, young bulls and fattened calves as a peace offering. He made these sacrifices on top of Snake Rock near the spring En Rogel just south of Jerusalem. Then he held a royal thanksgiving feast and invited his brothers, the leaders of Judah

who served at his father's court, and other important people who supported him. ¹⁰But he did not invite his brother Solomon, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah or any others from the king's bodyguard.

¹¹When Nathan heard this, he went to see Solomon's mother Bathsheba and said, "Have you heard that Adonijah without David's knowledge has told the people that he's succeeding his father as king? ¹²If he does that, it will be the end of you and Solomon because Adonijah knows full well that David wants Solomon to be the next king. To make his throne secure, Adonijah would have to kill Solomon. So if you want to save your life and that of your son, let me tell you what to do. ¹³Go to David and ask him, 'My lord, didn't you say God told you that He wants Solomon to be the next king to rule over all the tribes of Israel? Why is Adonijah rebelling against God by telling everyone that he's to be the next king?' ¹⁴After you've talked to the king, I'll go in and confirm what the Lord has said and what Adonijah is doing."

¹⁵So Bathsheba went to see David in his private room where Abishag was taking care of him. ¹⁶She bowed before David and sat next to his bed. He asked what he could do for her. ¹⁷She said, "My lord, didn't you tell me that God wanted our son Solomon to succeed you as king? ¹⁸Adonijah is telling everyone that he's to be the next king, and he hasn't even discussed it with you. ¹⁹He's already sacrificed sheep and young bulls and fattened calves for a royal thanksgiving feast and invited Abiathar and Joab and all your other sons except Solomon. ²⁰Now everyone is looking to you to find out who will really be the next king. ²¹If you don't do anything, as soon as you're dead, Adonijah will take your throne, and Solomon and I will be executed."

²²While Bathsheba was talking to David, Nathan the prophet came to the palace. ²³A servant told the king that

Nathan was there to see him, and David asked to have him sent in. Bathsheba excused herself. Then Nathan came in, bowed before the king and sat next to his bed. ²⁴He said, "My lord, the king, did you say that Adonijah is to succeed you as king and be the next one to rule Israel? ²⁵He's telling everyone that he is to be the next king and is holding a royal feast to celebrate. He has slaughtered numerous sheep, young bulls and fattened calves and has invited all the king's sons, the commanding officers of your army and Abiathar the high priest, and they have all accepted. The feast is going on right now and everyone is shouting, 'Long live King Adonijah!' ²⁶But he didn't invite his brother Solomon, Zadok the high priest, Benaiah the commander of your bodyguards, or me, because he knows that we don't support him. ²⁷Did you approve of this? If so, why didn't you tell us?"

David Proclaims Solomon King

²⁸Even though David was very weak, his mind was clear and he responded to the crisis with his former spirit. He said, "Ask Bathsheba to come back in." So Nathan left, and Bathsheba returned and stood before the king. ²⁹David took an oath, declaring, "As surely as the Lord lives who has delivered me out of many troubles, ³⁰our son Solomon will be king as the Lord has said. I will obey the Lord and this very day Solomon will sit on my throne as the new king of Israel." ³¹Bathsheba, who was kneeling next to the king's bed, bowed and stated, "May my lord, the king, live forever."

³²David said, "Go and call Zadok, the high priest, Nathan the prophet and Benaiah the commander of my bodyguards to come to see me. Hurry!"

³³When they came, he ordered, "Get my personal servants and take the royal mule. Have Solomon sit on the mule, and go through the city out to the Gihon Spring, about a half-mile from where Adonijah is holding his feast. ³⁴There I

want you, Zadok, as high priest, and you, Nathan, as prophet, to anoint my son Solomon as the new king of Israel. Then blow the ram's horn and shout, 'Long live King Solomon!' ³⁵After that, make your way back to the palace and have Solomon sit on my throne to rule in my place. I have chosen him to be king over both Israel and Judah. This is in harmony with the will of the Lord."

³⁶Benaiah, commander of the king's bodyguard, was the first to respond, "Amen! Let the will of the king be done!"

³⁷As the Lord God of Israel was with my lord, the king, so may He be with Solomon and make his reign even greater and more prosperous than that of David!"

³⁸Then Zadok, Nathan, Benaiah and the king's bodyguards went to get the king's mule. They sat Solomon on it and escorted him through the city out to the Gihon Spring. And the people followed them. ³⁹There Zadok the high priest took

a small animal horn of olive oil which he had brought from the tent where the Ark of the Lord was, and he anointed Solomon as the new king of Israel. Then they blew the ram's horn and the people shouted, "Long live King Solomon!" ⁴⁰And all the people followed Solomon back to the city, playing on their flutes and shouting for joy. When they got to the city they shouted so loudly that the ground shook.

⁴¹Adonijah and his guests heard the shouting just as they were finishing their royal feast. Joab was the first to speak.

He said, "What's the meaning of all that noise coming from the city?" ⁴²While Joab was still speaking, Jonathan, son of Abiathar the high priest, came running up. Adonijah welcomed him, saying, "It's good to see you. Come and join the festivities. A worthy young man like you must be bringing good news. Tell us, what is it?"

⁴³Jonathan said, "It's not good news. David has just made Solomon king. ⁴⁴He told Zadok, Nathan and Benaiah, along with David's bodyguards,

to have Solomon ride on the king's mule. ⁴⁵They have just escorted him out to the

Gihon Spring and Zadok anointed him with oil. The people shouted, 'Long live King Solomon!' Then they followed him back to the city shouting for joy. That's the noise you heard. ⁴⁶Solomon is now sitting on David's throne as the new king of Israel. ⁴⁷The government officials have already paid their respects to him and accepted him as their king! They thanked David for choosing Solomon and said to him, 'May the God of Israel who helped you, make Solomon's name even greater than yours!' David accepted their expressions of appreciation and while on his bed bowed in worship. ⁴⁸praying, 'Praise be to the Lord God of Israel who has let me live to see one of my own descendants succeed to the throne.'

⁴⁹When Adonijah and his guests heard this, they were afraid and left the feast. ⁵⁰Adonijah fled to the Sanctuary in Gibeon and took hold of the horns of the sacrificial altar for safety, acknowledging that he had sinned against the will of the Lord. ⁵¹So they went and told Solomon, "Adonijah is afraid of the king. He says, 'Let Solomon be merciful and promise not to execute me.'" ⁵²Solomon told the men who came to him, "If Adonijah shows himself to be loyal, not a hair of his head will be touched. But if not, he will surely die." ⁵³Then Solomon sent some men to get Adonijah. They convinced him it was safe to come to the palace, so he went and bowed before the king. Solomon said to him, "I've forgiven you. You're free to go."

David's Final Instructions to Solomon

2 As David grew weaker and realized that he would soon die, he called for his son Solomon and said, ²"I am very weak and could die any time now. I want you to be a strong and courageous king for the Lord. ³Do what God says. Keep His commandments and laws that He gave through His servant Moses, and He'll bless and prosper you in everything you do. God gave those laws for our own good. ⁴The Lord promised me, 'If your

descendants obey me with all their hearts and have complete faith in me, your house will never fail to have one of your descendants on the throne.'

⁵"You remember how your cousin Joab hurt my name when he heartlessly killed two commanders of Israel, Abner and Amasa. They met him in peace as brothers, and he killed them in anger as if they had been enemies at war. Their blood stained the belt around his waist and the sandals on his feet; it was premeditated murder. But I could do nothing about it because I, too, had sinned against the Lord by having Uriah the Hittite killed. ⁶You must carry out Joab's sentence for me at the right time and place according to the wisdom the Lord gives you. But don't let him die without paying openly for his crime. ⁷Do be kind to the sons of Barzillai from Gilead and be sure they have plenty to eat. They stood by me and helped me when I fled from Absalom. So care for them. ⁸You also have Shimei, the son of Gera, to deal with. He's the Benjamite from Bahurim who cursed me publicly for having taken the throne away from Saul as I went to Mahanaim when fleeing from Absalom. After your brother died, Shimei came to meet me at the Jordan River and apologized, so I promised not to touch him. ⁹But remember, he's treacherous and not as innocent as he makes out to be. You are wise and will know what to do and when to do it. He should be put to death."

The Death of David

¹⁰That day David talked to Solomon for some time. Soon afterward, he died and was buried in Jerusalem near the palace. ¹¹He had ruled a little over forty years, seven and a half years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. ¹²So Solomon ruled in his father's place, and his kingdom was firmly established.

Solomon Orders Adonijah Killed

¹³Soon afterward, Adonijah, the son of Haggith, went to see Bathsheba, Solo-

mon's mother. Bathsheba asked him, "Is this a friendly visit?" He answered, "Yes, it is." So she agreed to talk to him. ¹⁴He said, "I have something important to ask you." "What is it?" she asked. ¹⁵Adonijah replied, "As you know, the people wanted me to be king, and I would have been, but my father chose Solomon to take his place because that was the Lord's choice. ¹⁶Since then I've been thinking, and I have only one request. Please don't refuse me." "You may make your request," Bathsheba stated. ¹⁷Adonijah said, "Ask your son Solomon to let me have Abishag, the Shunamite woman who took care of my father, to be my wife." ¹⁸Bathsheba said, "That's a reasonable request. I'll talk to the king for you."

¹⁹When Bathsheba went in to see Solomon, he stood up to greet his mother and bowed to her in respect. He had a royal chair brought in for her so she could sit next to him. ²⁰Then he asked why she had come to see him. She answered, "I have a small favor to ask, so please don't refuse me." Solomon replied, "Tell me, Mother, what is it? You know that I'll do anything for you that I can." ²¹Bathsheba answered, "Adonijah would like to marry Abishag and wants your permission to have her as his wife." ²²Astonished, Solomon replied, "Do you realize what you're asking? The people consider her the king's concubine. If I consented for him to marry her, I'd be acknowledging that he had a right to the throne. That's one of the first things Absalom did when he came to Jerusalem to take the kingdom away from my father David was to have sexual relations with his concubines. It's only because of God's will that I succeeded my father, because Adonijah is older. If I let him take Abishag, I might as well give him the whole kingdom. That's what Abiathar the old high priest and Joab want me to do!"

²³Then King Solomon took an oath, "May the Lord strike me dead if I don't deal with this underhanded rebellion

against Him. Adonijah will pay for this with his life! ²⁴God has put me on this throne and given me the kingdom of my father David to help establish his house forever. As surely as the Lord lives, Adonijah will die this very day for his sly maneuvering." ²⁵Then Solomon ordered Benaiah, the commander of the king's special guard, to go and execute Adonijah, which he did.

Solomon Exiles Abiathar and Orders Joab Killed

²⁶The king also sent this message to Abiathar, the high priest: "I want you to retire from active service. Go back to your home in Anathoth. You really deserve to die for going against the will of the Lord by supporting Adonijah to be the next king when you knew better. But I will not have you put to death, because you shared the hardships of my father David when he fled from Saul and later you were in charge of the Ark when David brought it to Jerusalem." ²⁷So Solomon took away the priestly privileges from Abiathar and put Zadok, who also was a high priest, in charge of the Sanctuary and the Ark of the Covenant. This fulfilled the prophecy the Lord had given to Samuel against the house of Eli that the high priesthood would pass from the descendants of Aaron's son Ithamar to the descendants of his son Eleazar.

²⁸When Joab heard what had happened to Adonijah and Abiathar, he fled to the Sanctuary. He went into the courtyard and took hold of the horns of the sacrificial altar for protection. Although Joab had not taken part in Absalom's rebellion, he had supported Adonijah, and by going to the Sanctuary for protection, he was admitting his guilt. ²⁹When Solomon heard that Joab had fled to the Sanctuary and was holding on to the horns of the altar, he sent a messenger to ask him why he was doing that. Joab said he was afraid Solomon would have him killed for supporting Adonijah and going against the Lord's will. Then Solomon

told Benaiah to go and kill Joab, based on his own admission of guilt. ³⁰So Benaiah went to the Sanctuary and asked Joab to come out from the courtyard to be executed for his crimes. Joab said, "No! If I must die, I will die right here."

Benaiah went back to the king and said, "Joab refuses to leave the Sanctuary. What should we do?" ³¹The king said, "If he wants to die there, it's his choice. Kill him by the altar and then bury him. He needs to die, not so much for supporting Adonijah, because I could banish him for that, but for killing two officers who came to meet him as a friend. I must do what my father David could not do. ³²Joab killed Abner, the commander of Israel's army, and Amasa, the commander of Judah's army, in cold blood and didn't even tell my father what he had done or why. Those two officers were more honorable than he was. ³³The guilt of their blood rests squarely on Joab's head and the consequences will be with his descendants forever. But peace will come to the house of David for seeing that justice is done." ³⁴So Benaiah went back to the Sanctuary and ran a sword through Joab as he was holding on to the horns of the altar. They buried Joab by his house near the desert. ³⁵Then Solomon asked Benaiah to take Joab's place as commander-in-chief of all the armies of Israel, just as he had asked Zadok, the high priest, to take over all the responsibilities of the high priest which he had shared with Abiathar.

Solomon Orders Shimei Killed

³⁶Next the king sent for Shimei and said, "Because of what you did to my father David, cursing him when he had to flee from my brother Absalom and publicly accusing him of taking the throne away from Saul, I could have you executed. But I won't. I'll let you live. However, I want you to build a house in Jerusalem and stay there so I can keep an eye on you. ³⁷The day you cross the Kidron Brook just outside the city, I'll

have you executed to keep you from stirring up trouble against the will of the Lord." ³⁸Shimei answered, "You are kind, Your Majesty. I will do as you have said." So Shimei built a house in Jerusalem as the king requested and stayed there for some time.

³⁹Three years later, two of Shimei's domestic slaves ran away. They went to the city of Gath that was ruled by Achish, the son of Maacah, but controlled by Israel. Someone told Shimei where they were. ⁴⁰So he saddled his donkey and left Jerusalem to go to Gath to find them. Soon he found them and brought them back home. ⁴¹When Solomon heard that Shimei had been out of Jerusalem, he called for him and said, ⁴²"Didn't you promise me that you would not leave Jerusalem? You even sealed it with an oath to the Lord! Didn't I tell you that if you ever left the city I would have you executed? You agreed to that. ⁴³Then why did you ignore my orders and break your oath to the Lord? Why didn't you send someone else after your servants? I can't really trust you or your loyalty to the crown. ⁴⁴You know all the wrong you did to my father, and when things changed, you pretended you were loyal to him. But even though he promised not to harm you, you have now brought judgment on yourself. I will have you executed, not so much for leaving Jerusalem as for helping Absalom in his rebellion against my father who was appointed to be king by the Lord. ⁴⁵Now the blessing of the God of Israel will rest still more on David's descendants and on his throne, and his house will be established forever because justice is being done." ⁴⁶Then the king ordered Benaiah, his commander-in-chief, to take Shimei out of his presence and execute him.

So the kingdom was secured, and Solomon, the son of David, was firmly established on the throne.

Solomon Prays for Wisdom

3Next, Solomon gave his attention to international affairs by making a political alliance with Egypt. Custom called for such an alliance to be sealed with a marriage. Solomon met Pharaoh's daughter and took her to be his wife. He brought her to live with him in the southern section of Jerusalem known as the City of David until he finished building his palace. He also began to carry out his father's wish to build a Temple for the Lord and a wall around Jerusalem. ²Now the people were offering sacrifices to the Lord on various altars in high places throughout the country where the Canaanites had worshiped their gods, because, they said, "There is no house for the Lord in Jerusalem."

³Solomon loved the Lord and did what his father David had told him to do, except he did offer sacrifices and burn incense to the Lord at different high places in the country, which was against God's law. ⁴He also went to Gibeon, just a few miles from Jerusalem, where the Sanctuary was and offered a thousand sacrifices and much incense in appreciation for what the Lord had done for him. ⁵It was at Gibeon that the God of Israel spoke to Solomon in a dream one night, saying, "Is there something special that you would like me to do for you?" ⁶Solomon answered, "Lord, you were very kind to my father who served you with all his heart. He was faithful and loyal to you and accepted your correction without excuse. You even let him live to see his own son sit on his throne. ⁷You have chosen me to be king and to rule Israel in my father's place. But I'm so young, I'm like a little child that doesn't know what to do. ⁸I'm supposed to rule these people, but there are so many of them, it's even hard to count them all. ⁹What I would like is wisdom to know how to rule and to decide between right and wrong. Who can rule such a large number of people, especially your people, and make all the right decisions?"

¹⁰The Lord was pleased with Solomon's request. ¹¹So He said to him, "Since you have asked for wisdom to rule instead of wealth or a long and healthy life or the death of your enemies, ¹²I will give you what you have asked for. I will give you wisdom and the ability to decide between right and wrong more than anyone ever has had or ever will have in the future. ¹³Besides that, I will give you what you didn't ask for. I will give you such wealth and honor that no king can be compared to you. ¹⁴If you walk in my ways, keep my commandments and obey my laws as your father David did, I will also give you a long and healthy life."

¹⁵Then Solomon woke up and knew that the Lord had spoken to him in his dream. So he returned to Jerusalem where the Ark of the Covenant was and sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord. He also provided another feast of thanksgiving for everyone in his court.

Solomon Judges Between Two Women

¹⁶One of the first cases that Solomon had to judge was the case of two prostitutes. ¹⁷As they stood before the king, one woman said, "Your Majesty, this woman and I live in the same house. She was with me when I had my baby, a boy. ¹⁸Three days later I was with her when she had her baby. It also was a boy. After her baby was born, the people who had come to help us left, and there was no one in the house but us. ¹⁹During the first night after she had given birth, she rolled over and accidentally smothered her baby. ²⁰When she woke up and saw what she had done, she quietly took my baby while I was asleep and put hers next to me. ²¹In the morning when I woke up to nurse my baby, he was dead! But when I looked at him closely, it wasn't my baby at all!" ²²Then the other mother who had been holding the baby spoke up, "This is my baby! The dead one is yours!" So they stood there and argued over the infant in front of the king.

²³Solomon quieted them down and then said, "One of you says, 'The live baby is mine and yours is dead,' and the other one says, 'No, the live baby is mine and yours is dead.' How can I know who's telling the truth?" ²⁴Then the king turned to his servant and asked him to bring a sword. The king said to the servant, ²⁵"Go over and cut the baby in two and give half to each of them. That should settle it." ²⁶Then the baby's real mother cried out, "No! Please, my lord! Don't kill the baby! Let her have it!" The woman who was holding the baby said to the first woman, "The king is right. Neither of us should have the baby. Let them cut it in two and give each of us half." And she handed the baby over to the servant with the sword. ²⁷The king said, "Don't kill the baby. Give it to the other woman. It belongs to her. She's the real mother because she loves the baby and wants it to live."

²⁸When the people heard how Solomon had solved this case, they were filled with awe at his insight into human nature. They knew that the Lord had given him wisdom to administer justice for all.

Solomon's Government

4 Solomon was king over all of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and beyond. ²These were his chief officials: Azariah, the grandson of Zadok, who later became high priest; ³Elihoreph and Ahijah, the sons of Shisha, were the king's secretaries; Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahilud, was in charge of government records; ⁴Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, was commander-in-chief of Israel's armies; Zadok and Abiathar were the high priests; ⁵Azariah, son of Nathan the prophet, was over the district governors; Zabud, the other son of Nathan, was the king's personal adviser and friend; ⁶Ahishar was in charge of the palace; and Adoniram, the son of Abda, was in charge of conscripted labor.

⁷Solomon divided Israel into twelve

districts and appointed a tax officer over each district. It was their responsibility to collect taxes and supply food for the king and for those who worked for him. Each tax officer provided the necessary supplies for the king for one month a year. ⁸These are the names of the twelve tax officers and their districts: Ben Hur was in charge of the hill country of Ephraim; ⁹Ben Deker was in charge of the cities of Makaz, Shaalvim, Beth Shemesh, Elon Beth Hanan and the surrounding areas; ¹⁰Ben Hesed was in charge of the cities of Arubboth, Socoh and all the land of Hepher; ¹¹Ben Abinadab, who married Solomon's daughter Taphath, was in charge of the territory of Dor; ¹²Baana, the son of Ahilud, was in charge of the cities of Taanach, Meggido and all the region of Beth Shan up to the town of Zarethan just south of the city of Jezreel and as far as the cities of Abel Meholah and Jokmeam; ¹³Ben Geber was in charge of the city of Ramoth in Gilead and all the other cities and towns in Gilead belonging to the descendants of Manasseh through Jair, and also the entire region of Argob in Bashan that had sixty fortified cities with high walls and bronze gates; ¹⁴Ahinadab, the son of Iddo the prophet, was in charge of the Mahanaim district; ¹⁵Ahimaaz, who married Solomon's daughter Basemath, was in charge of the territory of Naphtali; ¹⁶Baana, the son of Hushai, was in charge of the territory of Asher and Aloth; ¹⁷Jehoshaphat, the son of Paruah, was in charge of Issachar; ¹⁸Shimei, the son of Ela, was in charge of Benjamin; ¹⁹and Geber, the son of Uri, was in charge of the territory of Gilead which at one time had been ruled by Sihon, king of the Amorites, and another time by Og, king of Bashan. There was also a tax officer in charge of Judah who was over the twelve other officers.

Solomon's Prosperity

²⁰By this time the children of Israel and Judah were so numerous that they seemed to cover the land like sand on

the seashore. Their tables were bounteously spread and they were happy.

²¹Solomon ruled over the whole area from the Arabian Desert in the east to the Mediterranean in the west, and from the Euphrates River in the north to the border of Egypt in the south. Everyone paid taxes to him, including the Canaanites and others who were still living in the land.

²²Solomon had over ten thousand people working for him at the palace. Every day he needed over one hundred and eighty bushels of fine flour, over three hundred and seventy-five bushels of meal, ²³ten heads of stall-fed oxen, twenty heads of pasture-fed cattle, one hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and poultry.

²⁴Solomon ruled over all the land west of the Euphrates River from Tiphseh in the north to Gaza by the Mediterranean in the south. All the local kings in this whole area were subject to him, and he was at peace with all the nations around him. ²⁵During his reign, all Judah and Israel from Dan to Beersheba lived securely, each family having its own property. ²⁶Solomon had four thousand stalls for his chariot horses, plus twelve thousand horses with riders at various military posts. ²⁷Each month a tax officer supplied Solomon with all the food he needed for that month. There was never anything lacking. ²⁸These men also supplied barley and straw for Solomon's chariot horses and other horses.

²⁹In addition to everything that Solomon had, the Lord also gave him wisdom, insight, good judgment and breadth of understanding that couldn't be measured. ³⁰His wisdom was greater than all the wisdom found in the East and all the wisdom of Egypt. ³¹He had more understanding of things than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. His fame spread throughout the surrounding nations. ³²He wrote over three thousand proverbs and over a thousand songs.

³³He wrote about all kinds of plant life, from the cedars in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls and about all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and fish.

³⁴People came from everywhere to hear Solomon's wisdom. Other kings heard about it and sent their scholars to listen to him.

Solomon Prepares to Build the Temple

5 King Hiram of Tyre on the Mediterranean coast had always been a friend of David's and when he heard that Solomon had succeeded his father as king of Israel, he sent ambassadors to congratulate him and offer him his friendship. ²Solomon welcomed the ambassadors and sent back this message:

³"Thank you for your friendship. As you know, my father David had to fight against our enemies who were all around us. Because of this he was not allowed to build a temple for the Lord our God. He was told that the temple was to be built in a time of peace, not in a time of war, because it is to be a temple of peace. ⁴Now that the Lord has given us peace on all sides, I intend to build it. ⁵The Lord promised my father, 'Your son will succeed you on the throne and will build a Temple for me.' I now plan to build it for the Lord my God. ⁶I need your help. Please send your men to Lebanon to cut down some of the giant cedars for me. If you're willing, my men can come and help. I'll pay whatever price you set for your workers. No one is as skillful in cutting down those huge trees as you and your men."

⁷When Hiram got Solomon's message, he was pleased and said to his officers, "Praise to Israel's God who has given David such a wise and peace-loving son to succeed him as king over a great nation." ⁸Then he replied to Solomon: "I received your message and I'm happy to do what I can to provide all the cedar and cypress timbers you need. ⁹My men will cut them and bring them down from the mountains to the sea. Then they'll tie

them together and float them as rafts to the place you specify. My men will bring them on shore and your men can then take over and haul them inland to Jerusalem. All I'm asking is that you feed my men; I'll pay their wages." And Solomon agreed. ¹⁰So Hiram, king of Tyre, supplied Solomon with all the cedar and cypress he needed. ¹¹And Solomon gave Hiram one hundred and twenty-five thousand bushels of wheat and one hundred and fifteen thousand gallons of olive oil. He gave this to him every year as long as Hiram's men were cutting and hauling the logs he needed. ¹²The Lord blessed Solomon in everything he did and gave him much wisdom. Solomon and Hiram had such a good relationship that they made a friendship treaty between themselves.

¹³Then Solomon drafted thirty thousand men from all over Israel to help with the work. ¹⁴He would send ten thousand men a month to bring to Jerusalem the logs that Hiram's men brought to the coast. Then he would bring them home for two months. So there were three shifts of ten thousand men, each shift working one month, with two months off. Adoniram was in charge of the entire operation. ¹⁵Solomon employed seventy thousand laborers and eighty thousand stone cutters to work in the hill country. ¹⁶He had three thousand, six hundred foremen and overall supervisors who took charge of the various projects to make sure everything stayed on schedule. ¹⁷Solomon ordered the stonecutters to carefully cut huge stones from the quarry for the foundation of the Temple. ¹⁸The craftsmen of Solomon and Hiram, plus the craftsmen from Gebal (Byblos), a coastal city of Phoenicia, worked together and prepared all the wood and stones needed for the Temple.

Solomon Builds the Temple

6 In the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Jacob had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of

Solomon's reign and in the second month of that year, he began building the Temple. ²The Sanctuary portion of the Temple was one hundred and ten feet long, thirty-six feet wide and fifty-five feet high, including the attic above the two compartments. These measurements were based on a cubit and hand's breadth being a little more than twenty-one inches. ³Solomon built an entrance on the front of the Sanctuary thirty-six feet across, as wide as the Sanctuary, and eighteen feet deep. ⁴The walls of the Temple had openings in them, narrow on the outside and wide on the inside. ⁵Outside the Temple, on three of its sides—north, west and south—Solomon built a three-story annex, each story being nine feet high. ⁶The first story wall was nine feet wide, the second story eleven feet wide and the third story thirteen feet. At each level the wall was narrower, making the upper rooms wider. It was recessed to make a ledge so the beams for the next story could rest on them without having to be inserted into the wall, thus weakening it.

⁷The stones for the Temple were prepared at the quarry, so when they brought them to the building site, everything fit and the Temple was built without the noise of hammers, axes or any iron tools.

⁸The entrance to the first story of the annex was on the south side of the Temple, with stairs leading up to the second and third stories. ⁹When Solomon finished building the Temple, he roofed it with beams and planks of cedar. ¹⁰The three-story annex with its nine-foot high rooms and cedar beams was built against the wall of the Temple.

¹¹Then the Lord said to Solomon, ¹²"As for the Temple, don't think that it can hold me. Heaven is my throne and the earth, my footstool. But if you keep my commandments, obey my laws and listen to what I have to say, I will keep the promise I made to your father David. ¹³I promised him that I would come and live with my

people in this Temple you are building and that I would not forsake my people.”

¹⁴So Solomon continued building the Temple until it was finished. ¹⁵The inside walls of the Holy Place were covered from floor to ceiling with cedar boards. The floor was covered with boards of cypress. ¹⁶The Most Holy Place measured thirty-six feet square, and its walls were also covered from floor to ceiling with cedar boards. ¹⁷The Holy Place was seventy-two feet long and thirty-six feet wide. ¹⁸The whole inside of the Sanctuary was covered from floor to ceiling with cedar so that the stone wall could not be seen. Gourds and flowers were carved into the wood. ¹⁹The inner Sanctuary, called the Most Holy Place, was where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. ²⁰This room was thirty-six feet long, thirty-six feet wide and thirty-six feet high, not including the attic. Solomon overlaid this room with pure gold. He also covered the cedar altar of incense with pure gold. This altar stood in front of the curtain going into the Most Holy Place. ²¹The whole inside of the Sanctuary was covered with pure gold including the entrance. Then he made chains of pure gold and hung them across the front of the Most Holy Place. ²²All the walls of the Sanctuary were covered with gold, including the altar of incense which, according to function, belonged in the Most Holy Place but which sat in the Holy Place.

²³Solomon also had two extra angels made to stand in the Most Holy Place next to the Ark of the Covenant, in addition to the cherubim which were already part of the ark. They were made of olive wood and each one was eighteen feet tall. ²⁴Each wing from the middle of the shoulder to its tip was nine feet long. From one wing tip to the other was eighteen feet. ²⁵Both angels were the same shape and size, including their wings. ²⁶Each angel was eighteen feet high. ²⁷The tips of their outstretched wings touched each other and the opposite

walls of the Most Holy Place. ²⁸Both cherubim were overlaid with pure gold.

²⁹Solomon had angels and palm trees carved on the walls of the two inner rooms in addition to the gourds and open flowers. The carvings were also overlaid with gold. ³⁰Even the wooden floors of both rooms were covered with gold.

³¹Then he had a huge double door made of olive wood for the entrance to the Holy Place. Each door was three and a half feet wide and nine feet high. So the two doors with the frames covered one-fifth of the entrance. ³²He had angels, palm trees, gourds and flowers carved on them and then overlaid everything with gold.

³³The frame for the entrance to the Holy Place was made of olive wood. ³⁴The doors were made of cypress. He made the doors with two panels each, which folded over each other. ³⁵He also had angels, palm trees, gourds and flowers carved on these doors, then overlaid the doors with gold. ³⁶There were two courtyards, the inner one for the priests and the larger one for the people. The courtyard for the priests was in front of the Sanctuary and was enclosed with walls made of three rows of carefully cut stones and one row of trimmed cedar beams alternating all the way up.

³⁷Work began on the Temple in the second month of the fourth year of Solomon's reign. ³⁸It was completed in the eighth month of the eleventh year of Solomon's reign. He built it exactly as it had been planned by his father David. It took seven years to complete.

Solomon's Other Building Projects

7 Solomon also built a palace complex, including living quarters for himself, which took thirteen years.

²One part of the large complex was the Hall of Lebanon. According to the measure of an ordinary cubit, it was one hundred and fifty feet long, seventy-five feet wide and forty-five feet high. It was paneled with cedar and had four rows of cedar pillars, fifteen in each row, with

cedar beams resting on the pillars. ³The ceiling had forty-five such cedar beams, fifteen in each row, resting across all four rows of pillars. The inner two rows of pillars made three great aisles down the length of the building. ⁴Three rows of windows were placed high on the side walls facing each other to let the sun shine down on the pillars. ⁵The doorways had rectangular frames, artistically decorated, which faced each other across the hall as the windows did.

⁶The Porch of Pillars was seventy-five feet wide, forty-five feet deep and covered from floor to ceiling with cedar. It led into the Hall of Lebanon and had an overhanging roof with pillars.

⁷The Hall of Justice was where Solomon sat and judged those cases brought to him from the lower courts. It was also covered from floor to ceiling with cedar.

⁸Solomon's living quarters were set farther back and designed to match the rest of the palace complex. He had similar quarters built for his wife, the daughter of the king of Egypt.

⁹All the buildings making up the palace complex from the foundation to the roof were made of high-grade stones, carefully cut and smoothed to tightly fit together. ¹⁰The foundation stones were huge, from twelve to fifteen feet square. ¹¹On top of these stones were two layers of other stones carefully cut to size and then a layer of cedar wood. ¹²The walls of the palace complex were built just like the walls of the Temple, three layers of carefully cut stones and one layer of trimmed cedar beams and so on all the way up.

Hiram the Craftsman

¹³When Solomon asked Hiram, the king of Tyre, to send him a craftsman, he sent a skilled coppersmith named Hiram. ¹⁴Hiram's mother was a descendant of Oholiab (or Aholiab) from Dan the one whom the Lord had given special wisdom in helping to build the Sanctuary

for Moses. She had been twice widowed. Her first husband had been from the tribe of Naphtali and the second had been from Tyre. Now her son was invited to take charge of all Solomon's metalwork because of his skill and experience.

¹⁵He cast two bronze pillars for the Temple according to the Sanctuary cubit. Each pillar was thirty-three feet high and twenty-two feet around. ¹⁶He made two bronze crowns to sit on top of the pillars. Each crown was four-and-a-half feet high; together they measured nine feet. ¹⁷Each crown had a design of seven interwoven chains of wreaths ¹⁸and two rows of pomegranates. This design was repeated in each of the crowns. ¹⁹Each crown was shaped like a lily and was seven-and-a-half feet across. ²⁰All the way around the crown were rows of pomegranates, one hundred of them on each crown. ²¹Solomon had these freestanding pillars set at the entrance of the Temple. The pillar to the south was called Jachin, meaning The Lord Shall Establish, and the pillar to the north was called Boaz, meaning In God Is My Strength. ²²Each pillar had a lily-shaped crown. The work on these special pillars was finally finished.

The Bronze Basin and the Oxen

²³Next, Hiram made a huge bronze basin or laver. It was about eighteen feet across, nine feet high and fifty-six feet around. From this basin the priests used water to wash their hands and feet before ministering at the altar or entering the Sanctuary. It symbolized their need to be clean in heart and life when worshipping God. ²⁴Just below the rim and all around it were two rows of bronze gourds, ten gourds about every twenty-one inches. ²⁵The huge basin rested on the backs of twelve bronze bulls standing in a circle facing outward. Three faced north, three south, three east and three west. ²⁶The sides of the basin were three-and-a-half inches thick and the rim curved out like a cup or a lily blossom. It could easily hold ten thousand gallons of water.

The Carts and the Lavers

²⁷In addition to the huge basin, he made ten movable carts with basins for washing parts of the sacrifices. For these extra basins, he used the regular eighteen-inch cubit. Each cart with its basin was six feet long, six feet wide and four-and-a-half feet high. ²⁸The bottom part of the cart had four panels around it attached to the frame. ²⁹On the panels were figures of lions, bulls and flying angels. Above and below these figures were flowers of hammered bronze.

³⁰Each cart had four bronze wheels attached to bronze axles. Above the panels was a bronze basin held there by four supports attached to the four corners. ³¹Each basin was twenty-seven inches across and eighteen inches deep. Around its circular opening there were engravings. The panels of the stands below the basins were square. ³²The two axles for each cart were below the four side panels and each axle had two bronze wheels attached. Each wheel measured twenty-seven inches across. ³³The axles were made like those on chariots: the axles, rims, spokes and hubs were made of metal.

³⁴Each stand had four handles, one projecting from each of the four corners of the frame. ³⁵Each basin had a nine-inch wide circular bronze rim attached to the four corners. The panels below were attached to the frame to make the cart one firm piece. ³⁶Both the panels and the supports were engraved with angels, lions, palm trees and wreaths of flowers. ³⁷All of the carts were identical in size and shape.

³⁸Huram designed and made all ten of them. Each cart was six feet across, and its basin could hold over two hundred gallons of water. ³⁹Five stands were placed on the south side and five on the north side of the courtyard, and the huge bronze basin sitting on twelve bronze bulls was placed in line with the entrance to the Holy Place.

Temple Furnishings

⁴⁰Huram also designed and made the bowls, shovels and pots used for the Temple services. This is a list of what he made for Solomon: ⁴¹Two huge pillars with lily-shaped crowns ⁴²containing four hundred pomegranates, one hundred for each crown and two hundred to be used elsewhere; ⁴³ten carts with ten basins; ⁴⁴the huge basin sitting on the backs of twelve bulls; ⁴⁵and the bowls, shovels and pots needed for the services. Huram the coppersmith from Tyre made all these things for the Temple for Solomon out of the finest polished bronze.

⁴⁶They were first cast in clay molds in the foundry in the Jordan Valley between Succoth and Zarethan. ⁴⁷They were not weighed, because bronze was used for so many things that their weight was never determined.

⁴⁸Solomon did other things for the furnishings of the Temple. He had the altar of incense overlaid with gold. He had additional tables made to hold the holy bread, five for the north side of the Holy Place and five for the south side. ⁴⁹He had additional lampstands made to bring more light into the Holy Place, five on the north side of the entrance and five on the south side, with gold floral work, lamps and tongs. ⁵⁰He also had other things made, such as dishes, wick trimmers, sprinkling bowls, ladles and pans for carrying hot coals, all of which were made of gold. Even the hinges and sockets for the doors were made of gold.

⁵¹When the Temple was finished, Solomon brought in all the things his father David had dedicated to the Lord—the silver, the gold and the other precious things—and placed them in the Temple treasury.

The Ark Brought to the Temple

8 Then Solomon invited the leaders of Israel to Jerusalem. He wanted the older leaders, heads of tribes and leaders of families to witness the bringing of the Ark from the City of David (the southern

section of Jerusalem) to the newly-built Temple on Mount Moriah. ²They met with Solomon in the month of Ethanim (also called Tishri) which is the first month of the civil calendar year and the seventh month of the religious year. On the tenth day of the seventh month the Day of Atonement was held and on the fifteenth day, the Festival of Tabernacles began. ³When they had all arrived, the Levites under the direction of the priests moved the Ark of the Covenant the short distance from Mount Zion to the Temple. ⁴Also the Sanctuary at Gibeon with all its furnishings and holy vessels was moved to the Temple.

⁵Solomon and all the leaders and officials of Israel assembled in front of the tent where the Ark of the Covenant was and sacrificed so many sheep and oxen to the Lord that they couldn't be counted. ⁶Then the Levites, under the direction of the priests, brought the Ark of the Covenant to the Temple, into the Most Holy Place, and set it down beneath the outstretched wings of the two huge angels. ⁷The outstretched wings of these two angels stretched from wall to wall and arched over the whole ark including its carrying poles. ⁸When the ark was set down, the carrying poles were so long that they stretched across the entire floor of the Most Holy Place. Their protruding ends could be seen from inside the Holy Place but not from the entrance to the Sanctuary. They were never removed from the ark.

⁹At this time there was nothing inside the Ark except the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written. They had been placed there by Moses when the children of Israel were in the wilderness after they had left Egypt. ¹⁰The priests directed the Levites where to locate the rest of the furniture in the Holy Place. When they finished and came out, a dazzling cloud enveloping the Lord's presence flooded the entire Temple. ¹¹It was so bright that the priests and Levites had a hard time car-

rying out their responsibilities in the courtyard and had to leave the Temple until the glory of the Lord subsided and allowed them to return.

¹²Then Solomon lifted up his voice in prayer and said, "O Lord, you are the One who created light and separated it from darkness. ¹³You have been with our people in a cloud, but now we have built a beautiful Temple for you. It is yours to live in forever."

Solomon Speaks to the People

¹⁴Solomon then turned and blessed the leaders of Israel and the people who were standing there, by saying to them, ¹⁵"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who kept the promise He made to my father David. ¹⁶God said to David, 'From the time I brought my people out of Egypt, I have not asked for a temple to be built for me nor have I chosen a city in which to live. But I have chosen you and your descendants to rule my people Israel.' ¹⁷My father David wanted to build this Temple for the Lord more than anything else. His whole heart was set on doing it. He wanted to honor the name of the Lord and to exalt the God of Israel. ¹⁸The Lord said to my father, 'I know that you want to build me a temple to honor my name, and that's good. ¹⁹But you are not the one to do it. Your son, your own flesh and blood, will build a temple for me.' ²⁰The Lord has kept His promise. He chose me to succeed my father as king, and I have built this Temple to honor His name and to exalt the God of Israel above all other gods. ²¹I provided a place in the Temple for the Ark of the Covenant. Inside the Ark are the same two stone tablets on which God wrote the covenant that He made with our ancestors when they first came out of Egypt."

Solomon's Prayer

²²Then Solomon went up the steps to the five-and-a-half-foot high platform by the altar of sacrifice in the Temple courtyard. As he knelt facing the altar of sacri-

fice, he raised his hands in prayer and said, ²³“O Lord God of Israel, there is no other God like you in heaven or on earth. You keep your promises and hold to the covenant that you have made with your people. You shower them with your love and bless those who keep your righteous law. ²⁴You have kept your promise to my father David who loved you with his whole heart. You told him that his son would build a temple for you and that you would help him do it. Here it stands. ²⁵Now, Lord, keep your other promise to David that his descendants would always sit on the throne of Israel as long as they obey you and love you as he did. ²⁶We believe that everything you told my father David will come true.

²⁷“But how can you, the infinite God of heaven, maintain your presence on earth confined to a temple? Even heaven cannot contain all your glory, so how can this Temple hold you? ²⁸O Lord, my God, please listen to my prayer and grant my requests. I am totally your servant and plead for your mercy. ²⁹May you be pleased with this Temple and watch over it day and night. May this Temple always be known as a place where prayers are heard and your name is revered. ³⁰Hear me, O Lord, and the prayers of your people when they come here to pray or even when they pray just facing this place. When they ask you to forgive them, hear them in heaven, your dwelling place, and forgive their sins and shortcomings.

³¹“When someone is accused of sinning against his neighbor and comes to the Temple, taking an oath in front of the altar that he’s innocent, render your judgment. ³²If he is guilty and has lied, may the consequences of his sin fall on his own head; but if he’s innocent, hear in heaven and vindicate him so that his name is cleared.

³³“In the future when your people sin against you and then are defeated by an invading army and carried off as captives, if they look again to this Temple

and confess their sins, ³⁴please hear their prayers in heaven and forgive them and bring them back home to the land that you gave to their fathers. ³⁵When there is a severe drought in the land because your people have sinned against you, and they look to this Temple and confess their sins, ³⁶do hear their prayers in heaven and forgive them and send them the rain they need. Then teach them how to do what is right and bless their land with the needed rains.

³⁷“When there is a famine because the crops have been destroyed by locusts or grasshoppers, by blight or mildew, by an invading army or other disasters, or when diseases strike down your people ³⁸and they face this house with uplifted hands asking for forgiveness, ³⁹then hear them from your place in heaven. You are the only One who knows the hearts of all of your people. Forgive them and answer their prayers according to their needs. ⁴⁰May your presence be a deterrent from sin so they can continue to live safely in this land you have given them.

⁴¹“When foreigners join your people in worship, ⁴²and those who live in distant lands hear of your mighty works and how you have reached out to your people as they come to your Temple praying for help, ⁴³hear their prayers and answer them from your throne in heaven. Lord, in your wisdom answer our prayers in such a way that people everywhere will know that this Temple is yours and that you are their God too. Then they will love you as we do.

⁴⁴“When you tell your people to go to war against their enemies and they look toward Jerusalem and this Temple built in your name, praying to you, ⁴⁵do hear their prayers and give them victory.

⁴⁶“We know that there is no one who does not sin. So when your people sin grievously and you permit them to be taken into captivity, do not forget them. ⁴⁷If they confess their sins, admitting how wrong they were in leaving you and how wicked they have been, ⁴⁸and repent and

turn to you with all their hearts and souls and minds, as they face their homeland, the city you have chosen and the Temple I have built for you, ⁴⁹then hear their prayers and be merciful to them. From your throne in heaven, send them the help they need. ⁵⁰Forgive the sins that they have committed against you and cause their captors to have mercy on them. ⁵¹Even when they're captives, they are still your people and your special possession whom you brought out of Egypt, that blazing furnace of oppression.

⁵²"O Lord, do hear my prayer and the prayers of your people whenever we call on you to help us. ⁵³You have chosen us to be your people out of all the people of the world. You have chosen us to be your own, your special possession. This is what you said to our forefathers through Moses when you brought them out of Egypt."

Solomon Blesses the Congregation

⁵⁴When Solomon finished his prayer, he rose from where he had been kneeling in front of God's altar praying with outstretched arms ⁵⁵and looked toward the people. In a loud voice he blessed all of them, saying, ⁵⁶"Let us praise the Lord! He has given us peace just as He promised. Not a word has failed of all the promises He gave through His servant Moses. ⁵⁷May the Lord our God ever be with you as He was with our forefathers. May He never leave us or forsake us. ⁵⁸May He give us the desire to follow Him and help us to walk in His ways and keep His commandments and laws which He gave us through our forefathers. ⁵⁹May the Lord God of Israel never forget the prayer I just prayed. May He keep it before Him day and night and help us according to our daily needs. ⁶⁰Then people everywhere will know that the Lord is God and that there is no other. ⁶¹May your hearts always be in tune with His. May you always love the Lord your God with all your hearts. May you always be as committed to

obeying Him and keeping His commandments as you are today."

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

⁶²Then the king and the people offered many sacrifices to the Lord. ⁶³They offered twenty-two thousand young bulls and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep as part of the dedication service of the Temple and the festivals that followed. ⁶⁴That same day Solomon dedicated the courtyard of the Temple in front of the Holy Place and offered consecration offerings, grain offerings and fellowship offerings. Sacrifices were made in many places in the courtyard because the sacrificial altar was too small to hold all of them.

⁶⁵Solomon and all Israel, from the entrance to the Hamath Pass in the north to the Egyptian border in the south, celebrated the Festival of Tabernacles (also called the Festival of Shelters or Booths) for fourteen days, twice as long as usual. ⁶⁶The next day, he sent the leaders and those who were with them back home. Then the people blessed the king and with their hearts overflowing with love for God, praised Him all the way home for what He had done for David and for Israel.

God Appears to Solomon Again

9 So Solomon finished building the Temple and his royal palace and had everything made the way he wanted it. ²At their completion, the Lord appeared to him as He had in Gibeon when Solomon first became king. He said to Solomon, ³"I have heard the prayer you prayed at the dedication of the Temple which you built, and I have accepted this place as my own. It will be a holy place with my presence. If my people are obedient, I will protect it. I will watch over it with my eyes and my heart. ⁴If you will love me and serve me with all your heart as your father David did and keep my commandments and do what I ask you to do, ⁵I will keep the promise I made to him when I told him

that one of his descendants would always be on the throne of Israel.

⁶“But if you or your descendants turn away from me and don’t keep my commandments or do what I asked you to do and you follow other gods and worship them, ⁷then I will have no choice but to withhold my blessings and protection and turn away from this Temple. Israel will then be taken from this land and become an object of ridicule and contempt wherever they live. ⁸Even though my intention is for this Temple to stand forever as a place of awe and worship, a monument to what I have done for Israel, all who pass by and see it in ruins will be appalled and say, ‘Why did the God of Israel let this happen?’ ⁹Others will answer, ‘Because they turned away from God who brought their forefathers out of Egypt with a mighty hand and miracles. They followed other gods and served them—that’s why all this happened.’”

Solomon and King Hiram

¹⁰It took Solomon twenty years to build the Temple and the royal palace—seven years for the Temple and thirteen for the palace. ¹¹Hiram, king of Tyre, provided all the cedar, cypress and gold that Solomon needed. As payment, Solomon gave Hiram a section of Galilee with twenty cities. ¹²When Hiram went to see these cities, he was disappointed with what he saw. He sent this message to Solomon: ¹³“Friend, is this the territory that you’re offering me? These twenty cities are worthless!” He renamed the territory Cabul, meaning Good For Nothing. ¹⁴Not only had Hiram given Solomon large quantities of cedar and cypress, but he had also given him about four-and-a-half tons of gold. In comparison, he felt the twenty cities he got in return were worthless.

Solomon’s Other Achievements

¹⁵Solomon used conscripted laborers to build the Temple and his palace. He

also used forced labor to build the terraced gardens and walls around Jerusalem. Then he rebuilt the cities of Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer. ¹⁶Gezer was the city that the king of Egypt had attacked and burned. The Egyptian king had killed all the Canaanites who lived there and had given the city as a wedding gift to his daughter who became Solomon’s wife. ¹⁷That’s why Solomon was so interested in rebuilding Gezer. He also rebuilt the cities of Lower Beth Horon, ¹⁸Baalath, Tamar (or Tadmor) in the wilderness and others. ¹⁹He used these cities as military bases and kept his horses and chariots there. He also built other cities in which to store the country’s surplus grain. Solomon built many other things in Jerusalem, in the Lebanese mountains and in various other places. ²⁰The descendants of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites ²¹who were still in the country because the Israelites had not driven them out made up the conscripted labor force that Solomon used to do most of the work. ²²He did not use the men of Israel for such labor, but they served instead as soldiers, horsemen, chariot drivers, commanders, captains and other officers.

²³The Israelites were also government officials and supervisors. Five hundred and fifty of them were needed just to oversee these various building projects.

²⁴Solomon built a palace for his Egyptian wife, and she moved from the lower part of Jerusalem called the City of David into her new royal quarters west of the Temple. Solomon also constructed large terraced gardens for her so she would feel more at home.

²⁵During all this time Solomon never failed to fulfill his obligations to the Lord. Three times a year he brought a large number of animals to the Temple to be sacrificed as consecration and fellowship offerings on the altar that he had built for the Lord, together with the required grain offerings and incense.

²⁶Solomon also built ships at the port city of Ezion Geber on the Gulf of Aqabah

near Elath in the land of Edom. ²⁷Hiram, king of Tyre, sent his experienced sailors to help the men of Israel sail their fleet. ²⁸From Ezion Geber they would sail to Ophir on the northeastern coast of Africa to bring back gold. They brought back sixteen tons of gold just for Solomon alone, not counting what he shared with Hiram.

The Queen of Sheba

10 When the queen of Sheba heard about the wisdom of Solomon and how his God had blessed him, she decided to go to see him herself and to test his wisdom with difficult questions. ²Leaving her kingdom at the southwestern tip of Arabia, she traveled all the way to Israel just to talk to Solomon. She arrived in Jerusalem with a large number of attendants and a great caravan of camels carrying gold, spices and precious stones. She asked Solomon every question she could think of. ³He answered everything she asked. Nothing was too hard for him to explain. ⁴Then she realized how wise Solomon truly was. She saw the palace that he had built, ⁵the food on his table, the seating of his many officials, the attending servants in their rich robes, his cupbearers and the large number of sacrifices offered at the Temple, and she was greatly impressed.

⁶She said to Solomon, "What I heard in my country about your wisdom and accomplishments is true! ⁷I didn't believe it until I saw it myself. In fact, those who told me didn't tell half of it. Your wisdom and wealth are much greater than what they said. ⁸How fortunate your people are to have a king like you! How privileged your officials and servants must feel to serve you and to hear what you have to say! ⁹Praise be to the Lord your God who must have been pleased with you to place you on the throne of Israel. He must have an everlasting love for Israel to give you such wisdom and help you administer justice and maintain law and order." ¹⁰Then she gave Solomon about four-and-

a-half tons of gold, many spices and precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought into the country at one time as those that the queen of Sheba gave to Solomon.

¹¹Previously, Hiram's ships had brought gold, spices and precious stones into the country, as well as sandalwood from southwestern Arabia. That's how the queen of Sheba had first heard about Solomon. ¹²Solomon had used sandalwood to make supports for the Temple and his palace. He also used this wood to make harps and lyres for his musicians. Never again was so much sandalwood seen or brought into the country as when Solomon was building the Temple and palace.

¹³When the queen of Sheba was ready to leave, Solomon gave her many gifts and anything else she asked for. Then she left with her attendants and camels and returned to her own land, amazed at what she had seen of Solomon's wisdom and at the greatness of his God.

Solomon's Wealth

¹⁴The annual income of Solomon's government was twenty-five tons of gold. ¹⁵This did not include revenues that came in from international trade with other kings and governors. ¹⁶Solomon had two hundred large shields out of hammered gold made for his bodyguards. Over seven pounds of pure gold went into each shield. ¹⁷He also made three hundred smaller shields for the rest of the palace guards and overlaid each shield with three-and-a-half pounds of pure gold. These five hundred shields were hung in the Hall of Lebanon and used only on state occasions.

¹⁸Solomon's throne was very large. It was covered with ivory inlaid with gold. ¹⁹It had armrests and a high rounded back. Beside each armrest was the statue of a huge lion. There were six steps leading to the throne ²⁰and twelve statues of smaller lions, six on each end of the six steps. Nothing like this had ever been

made in any other kingdom.

²¹All of Solomon's goblets, plates and bowls were made of pure gold, as was all the other dinnerware used for serving in the Hall of Lebanon. Nothing was made out of silver because during the reign of Solomon silver was of little value. ²²Solomon also had a huge fleet of ships in addition to the ships his men shared with the sailors from King Hiram. Once every three years this larger fleet would return from Tarshish loaded with gold, silver and huge amounts of ivory, as well as with peacocks, baboons and apes.

²³Solomon's kingdom ranked greatest in wisdom and wealth among all nations of his day. ²⁴Other kings wanted to talk with him to hear the wisdom God had given him and to learn about his God. ²⁵Year after year, every king who came brought him gifts, including silver, gold, expensive spices, costly robes, chariots, weapons of war, horses and mules.

²⁶Altogether, Solomon had fourteen thousand chariots and twelve thousand horses and riders which he stationed at military posts throughout the country and in Jerusalem. ²⁷During Solomon's time silver was as common as stones and cedar as plentiful as fig trees in the lowlands of Judah. ²⁸In addition to the horses and costly gifts that kings gave to Solomon, he imported horses from Egypt and Cilicia (Turkey). ²⁹He also imported chariots from Egypt for six hundred pieces of silver each and horses for one hundred and fifty pieces of silver. Then he sold them at a profit to the Syrians and Hittites.

Solomon's Heart Is Turned Away From God

11 King Solomon had many foreign women as wives besides the daughter of Pharaoh. There were women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon and the Hittite territories. ²He brought them into his harem, even though the Lord had told the Israelites not to intermarry with these nations because these women

would turn them away from Him as the Moabite women had done to their forefathers at Peor. But it was the custom of kings to make alliances with other nations through marriage, and Solomon thought he was strong enough to resist their influence. ³He had seven hundred wives of royal birth in his harem and three hundred concubines of more common origins. They soon turned his heart away from God.

⁴In time Solomon began to worship foreign gods just as the Lord had predicted if he married foreign wives. He was not faithful to God as his father David had been. ⁵Human nature eventually overcame common sense, and Solomon ended up worshiping such gods as Ashtoreth, the nude sex goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the bloodthirsty god of the Ammonites to whom babies were sacrificed. ⁶By doing this, he not only sinned against the Lord but also lost his love for God. He no longer followed the Lord as his father David had done. ⁷To please some of his wives, Solomon even built a place of worship near Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives for Chemosh and Molech, the gods of the Moabites and Ammonites. ⁸He did the same for all of his foreign wives because they wanted to also worship their own gods, to burn incense and offer sacrifices to them.

⁹The Lord was very displeased with what Solomon was doing because it turned him away from the God of Israel who had appeared to him twice in a dream and talked to him personally. ¹⁰The Lord had plainly told him not to marry foreign women or to worship other gods, but Solomon had done so anyway.

¹¹Now the Lord spoke to him again, saying, "Because you have broken the covenant I made with you when you first became king and have not kept my commandments, I will take the kingdom away from you and your descendants and give it to one of your servants. ¹²However, for the sake of your father David, I won't do it

until after you die. Then I will take it from your son. ¹³I won't take the whole kingdom from him, but most of it. For the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city I call my own, I will give him the tribe of Judah and the little tribe of Benjamin."

Solomon's Enemies

¹⁴Then the Lord caused Hadad from the royal line of Edom to stir up a revolt in his country against Solomon's control. ¹⁵Years before, when David was at war with Edom, Joab, his commander, had stayed behind after his victory over the Edomites to see that those who had died were buried. While there, he had killed all the adult males he could find. ¹⁶For six months Joab and his men searched the land for every man until they thought they had killed them all. ¹⁷But young prince Hadad escaped to Egypt, together with some of his father's officials. ¹⁸They left Midian where they had been hiding and went to Paran. Some of the men from Paran decided to go with them to Egypt. The king of Egypt welcomed them and gave Hadad and his father's officials a house, some land and whatever they needed. ¹⁹When Hadad grew up, the king of Egypt was so pleased with him that he gave him the sister of Queen Tahpenes to be his wife. ²⁰Queen Tahpenes's sister then gave birth to a son whom she called Genubath. She brought him to the palace to be raised, and he grew up with Pharaoh's children, as if he were one of them. ²¹While Hadad was in Egypt, he heard that David and Joab had died. Then Hadad said to Pharaoh, "Let me go. I need to return to my country." ²²Pharaoh asked, "Why? Aren't you happy here? Do you lack anything so that you must go back home?" Hadad said, "No, but I must go back to my own country. So please let me go." Then Pharaoh gave him permission to leave, and Hadad returned to Edom as king and became Solomon's bitter enemy.

²³The Lord also permitted Rezon, the

son of Eliada and a servant of Hadadezer, king of Zobah, to revolt against Solomon's control. ²⁴Years before, David had defeated Hadadezer and his old Syrian allies. At first Rezon was just the leader of an armed band roving the country, but then he went to Damascus and established himself as the new king of Syria. ²⁵As king of Syria, Rezon became Solomon's enemy and caused him endless trouble in the north while Hadad the Edomite was causing him trouble in the south.

Jeroboam's Rebellion

²⁶Then the Lord allowed Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, to rebel against Solomon. He was one of Solomon's young officials from Zeredah in Ephraim. His father was dead, but his mother Zeruah was still living. ²⁷The rebellion inside the country started while Solomon was building the terraced gardens and fortifying the eastern walls of Jerusalem. ²⁸Jeroboam was a very competent official. When Solomon noticed how hard he worked and how conscientious he was, he put him in charge of the entire labor force from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

²⁹One day as Jeroboam left Jerusalem, Ahijah the prophet from Shiloh met him on the road out in the open country. Ahijah was wearing a new outer robe. As they talked together, ³⁰suddenly Ahijah took off his new robe, and to the surprise of Jeroboam, tore it into twelve pieces.

³¹"Here, take ten of these pieces," said the prophet. "They're for you. The Lord says, 'I will take the united kingdom away from Solomon and give ten of the tribes to Jeroboam. ³²But for the sake of my servant David, the city of Jerusalem which I have made my own and the tribe of Judah with the little tribe of Benjamin will stay with his descendants. ³³Solomon has disobeyed me and is worshipping foreign gods such as Ashtoreth, Chemosh and Molech. He is no longer walking in my ways, keeping my commandments or doing what is right as his father David

did. ³⁴I will let Solomon stay on the throne and continue to rule Israel as long as he lives. I'm doing this for the sake of his father David whom I made king of Israel and who loved me and kept my commandments and tried to do what was right. ³⁵When Solomon is dead and his son is king, I will give the ten tribes to you. ³⁶I will give one large and one small tribe to his son so that David will always have a descendant on the throne in Jerusalem, the city I have made my own. ³⁷As for you, you will rule over Israel, which is what you desire, and be king over ten tribes. ³⁸If you listen to me and keep my commandments and do what is right as my servant David did, I will be with you as I was with him. You and your descendants will be the future kings of Israel and I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the dynasty of David. ³⁹Because of Solomon's sins I will humble David's descendants, but not forever."

⁴⁰Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam because of his open disapproval of Solomon's reign. He feared Jeroboam would try to cause a revolt. So Jeroboam had left Jerusalem and was on his way to King Shishak in Egypt when Ahijah met him. He remained in Egypt until Solomon died.

The Death of Solomon

⁴¹Everything that Solomon did during his reign as well as his wisdom is recorded in the official state records and in the books written by the prophets Nathan, Ahijah and Iddo. ⁴²Solomon ruled in Jerusalem over the kingdom of Israel for forty years. ⁴³When he died he was buried in the southern section of Jerusalem called the City of David and his son Rehoboam became king.

The Northern Tribes Rebel Against Rehoboam

12 For his coronation ceremony Rehoboam went to Shechem where the leaders of Israel wanted to make him king. ²Jeroboam was in Egypt to escape

being killed by Solomon. When he heard that Solomon was dead, he returned to Ephraim. ³The leaders of Israel invited Jeroboam to come to Shechem to join them for the coronation of Solomon's son Rehoboam as the new king of Israel. They also asked Jeroboam to speak to Rehoboam about the heavy taxes they were asked to pay. So Jeroboam said to Solomon's son, ⁴"Your father was hard on us by asking us to pay such heavy taxes. Lower our taxes and we'll be happy to serve you as our king." ⁵Rehoboam said, "Come back the day after tomorrow and I'll give you my answer." So Jeroboam and the leaders left.

⁶Then Rehoboam called the older counselors together, those who had served under his father Solomon and said to them, "What advice do you have for me about the request the people have to lower their taxes?" ⁷They said, "If you want to serve the people and be a shepherd to them, be kind and give them a favorable answer, and they'll willingly serve you forever." ⁸But Rehoboam didn't like their answer and called in his younger counselors, those who had grown up with him, and asked them what to do. ⁹He asked them, "What's your advice? What do you say I should do about the request of the people to lower their taxes?" ¹⁰The young men answered, "Tell the people who complained about your father's high taxes that your little finger is thicker than your father's waist. ¹¹Tell them that if they thought your father's taxes were heavy, they haven't seen anything yet. Taxes will now be heavier than your father's ever were. If they felt like your father was beating them with ordinary whips, they will now feel the sting of cattle whips. These people need to know who's in charge or they'll never respect you."

¹²On the third day Jeroboam and the leaders of Israel returned to find out Rehoboam's decision. ¹³Rehoboam ignored the advice of the older men and spoke harshly to the delegation. ¹⁴He followed the advice of his young friends,

saying, "You people complain about the heavy taxes my father laid on you, but I'll make your taxes even heavier. You said you felt like my father was whipping you, but I'll beat you so hard you'll feel you've been stung by scorpions." ¹⁵Rehoboam did not listen to the people and determined to rule them with a rod of iron. But the Lord would not let him carry out his policy, so what Ahijah the Shilonite had said to Jeroboam came true.

¹⁶When the people realized that Rehoboam would not listen to them, they said, "We're not related to David. Why should we support one of his descendants? Let's leave this place! Let Rehoboam rule his own people!" So they turned and left and did not accept him as their king. ¹⁷This split the kingdom and from then on, Rehoboam only ruled over the people of Judah and Benjamin. ¹⁸Then Rehoboam sent Adoniram, chief of Israel's labor force, to go out immediately to get more workers for his building projects. But the people of Israel stoned Adoniram and he died. When Rehoboam saw that the rebellion was real, he ran to his chariot and raced back to Jerusalem. ¹⁹So the ten tribes of Israel rebelled against the house of David and formed their own kingdom. Never again were they part of the kingdom of Judah. ²⁰Then they sent for Jeroboam and made him the king of Israel. Only the tribe of Judah and the little tribe of Benjamin stayed with Rehoboam.

²¹When Rehoboam got back to Jerusalem, he called up all the fighting men of Judah and Benjamin—one hundred and eighty thousand of them—to fight against the ten tribes of Israel to the north. He wanted to bring them back under his rule. ²²But the Lord said to Shemaiah the prophet, ²³"I want you to talk to Rehoboam, the son of Solomon who is king of Judah and Benjamin. Give him and his people this message: ²⁴"The Lord does not want you to attack your brothers. Send all your troops back home. The dividing of the kingdom is

from me and what has happened has my approval.'" Rehoboam and his officials listened to the Lord and all the troops were sent back home.

Jeroboam's Golden Calves

²⁵Then Jeroboam fortified the city of Shechem in the mountains north of Ephraim and made it his capital. He also rebuilt the town of Penuel (or Peniel) on the other side of Jordan and made it a military outpost. ²⁶Jeroboam wondered how he could keep the ten tribes away from the tribe of Judah. ²⁷He thought, "These people will go to Jerusalem to worship, and it won't be long before they'll give their allegiance to Rehoboam. If I object, they'll turn around and kill me." ²⁸So he talked the problem over with his advisers and decided to make two golden calves like the one Aaron had made at the foot of Mount Sinai. Then he said to the people, "Listen to me, my Israelite brothers. These calves represent the presence of the Lord our God who brought us out of the land of Egypt. From now on you don't need to go all the way to Jerusalem to worship the Lord." ²⁹He built a shrine for one golden calf in Bethel in the south near the border of Judah and another in Dan on Israel's northern border.

³⁰What Jeroboam did led the Israelites away from God and into idolatry. Most people went to Dan to worship the calf there. ³¹Jeroboam built shrines for other gods throughout the country and appointed common men, regardless of character, to serve as priests because the Levites refused to participate. As a result, the morals of the people sank lower than ever. ³²Then he instituted a rival religious festival to be held throughout the country on the fifteenth day of the eighth month in opposition to the Festival of Tabernacles held in Judah on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. He had his priests offer sacrifices to the golden calves and at the other shrines that he had built. ³³At the opening of his religious

festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, Jeroboam went to Bethel to personally officiate as priest at the dedication of the new altar.

Prophet Condemns Worship at Bethel

13 Then the Lord sent a prophet from Judah to Bethel to confront Jeroboam. He crossed the border and arrived just as the king was standing by the altar ready to offer a sacrifice. ²The prophet cried out against the altar, "O altar! The Lord says, 'A child called Josiah will be born to the family of David. He will come and slay all the false priests that have been appointed in Israel and burn their bones on you.'" ³Then the man of God said to all those present, "This is a sign that what the Lord has spoken is true. The altar will split apart, and the ashes of the sacrifices on it will fall to the ground."

⁴When Jeroboam heard what the man of God had said against the altar he had built, he pointed at him with an outstretched arm and said to the men nearby, "Grab him!" As soon as he said that his arm became paralyzed and he couldn't pull it back. ⁵Then the altar split apart and the ashes fell to the ground just as the prophet from Judah had said it would. ⁶Jeroboam said to the man of God, "Please pray to the Lord for me and ask Him to restore my arm." So the prophet prayed and the king's arm was restored to normal. ⁷Then the king said to the prophet, "Come home with me and let's eat together, and I'll give you a present." ⁸The man of God said, "Even if you were to give me half of your kingdom, I wouldn't eat with you. I wouldn't think of eating in this idol-infested place. ⁹The Lord told me not to eat or even drink water here, nor to go back home the way I came." ¹⁰So the prophet left and started home from Bethel another way than the Lord had told him to go.

The Death of the Prophet

¹¹There was an old man living in

Bethel who claimed to be a prophet of the Lord. That day his sons came running home and told their father about the man of God from Judah and everything that had happened. They also told him about how the king had invited the prophet to eat with him, but the prophet had turned him down. ¹²Their father said, "When he left, which way did he go?" His sons told him. ¹³Then he said, "Quick! Saddle my donkey for me." So they did, and the old man went after the prophet. ¹⁴He found the man of God sitting under an oak tree. He asked, "Are you the prophet from Judah?" The man answered, "I am." ¹⁵Wanting to be hospitable, the old man said, "Come home with me and have something to eat before you go back." ¹⁶The prophet said, "I can't, because the Lord told me not to eat with anyone in this place, not even a piece of bread or a drink of water. ¹⁷I'm not to eat or drink anything until I get back home. He also told me not to go back the same way I came." ¹⁸The old man said, "I, too, am a prophet of the Lord. Just a little while ago an angel said to me, 'Go and find the man of God and bring him back to your house and give him something to eat.'" He kept repeating this to the man of God, but the old man was lying.

¹⁹The man of God finally believed him, and without checking with the Lord, he got up and went with the old man to his house and ate food and drank water. ²⁰While they were still sitting at the table after eating, the Lord spoke to the old man and gave him a message for the man of God from Judah. ²¹He stood up and said to the prophet from Judah, "Listen to the word of the Lord. You have not done what the Lord commanded you to do. ²²You ate bread and drank water in this place where He told you not to. If your disobedience goes unpunished, Jeroboam will not take God's message seriously and will think that his sins will go unpunished and that the prophecy you gave him was untrue. Therefore, you will

die before you get back home, and your body will not be buried in the tomb of your fathers.”

²³After he had plenty to eat and drink, the man of God got up from the table to leave. The old man had a donkey saddled for him and gave it to him as a gift. Then the prophet got on it and rode away. ²⁴As he was traveling along the road home, he met a lion which attacked and killed him. His body lay in the road, and the lion and the donkey stood quietly beside it. ²⁵Soon some men came along and were amazed at what they saw—a lion and a donkey standing beside a dead man’s body. So they ran to the old man’s town and told what they had seen.

²⁶When he heard it, the old man thought, “This must be the man of God from Judah who disobeyed the Lord. God kept His word and sent a lion to kill him but not to eat him.” ²⁷He called his sons and said, “Quick! Saddle my donkey for me.” And they did. ²⁸He rode out to the place where the prophet’s body was and saw everything just as the men had said. The body was lying in the middle of the road, and the lion and the donkey were just standing there. The lion had not eaten the body or attacked the donkey. ²⁹Then the lion left, and the old man picked up the prophet’s body, put it on the donkey and took it back to the city for burial. ³⁰There the old man had his sons lay the prophet’s body in his own family tomb. He wept and said, “O my brother, my brother! What have I done!”

³¹After they buried the prophet from Judah, the old man said to his sons, “When I die, lay my body next to his. We were brothers in life and we will be brothers in death. ³²Now we know that the message he gave against the altar here in Bethel and all the shrines throughout our country and against King Jeroboam will surely come true.”

³³But even after Jeroboam heard what had happened to the prophet from Judah, he did not change his ways. He appointed more priests from the com-

mon people to serve at various places of idol worship. All anyone had to do to become a priest was to bring animals and volunteer his services. ³⁴This is the sin that brought an end to the royal house of Jeroboam and led to its downfall. Eventually his whole family was cut off and the Northern Kingdom disappeared from the face of the earth.

The Death of Jeroboam’s Son

14 About this time Abijah, the son of Jeroboam, became very ill. ²Jeroboam said to his wife, “Disguise yourself so no one will recognize you as my wife and go down to Shiloh where the old prophet Ahijah lives who said I would become king. ³Take ten loaves of bread with you, some cakes and a jar of honey as a present. Ask him about our sick son, and he’ll tell you what to do.”

⁴So Jeroboam’s wife disguised herself, took the gifts and made her way to Shiloh where Ahijah lived. Because of his age, Ahijah couldn’t see, so he couldn’t tell who was at the door. ⁵But the Lord said to him, “Jeroboam’s wife is here to see you to ask you about their son who is sick. But she disguised herself and is pretending to be someone else. This is what I want you to say to her.” Then the Lord told him what to say.

⁶So when she knocked, Ahijah got up and felt his way to the door, opened it and said, “Come in, wife of Jeroboam. The Lord told me that you were coming. I have bad news for you.” ⁷So she came in and Ahijah said to her, “Tell your husband Jeroboam that this is what the Lord God of Israel says, ‘I chose you to be king over my people Israel. ⁸I took the ten tribes away from the house of David and gave them to you. But you haven’t walked in my ways as David did. He loved me and kept my commandments and followed me with all his heart, even when I had to discipline him. He always tried his best to do what was right. ⁹But you have done more evil in a short time than anyone before you, including Solomon whose actions

you so openly criticized. You have made your own gods, cast golden images and turned your back on me. ¹⁰Because of this, I will bring disaster on the entire house of Jeroboam. Every one of your male descendants will die, whether they remain free or are taken by your enemies. I will see to it that all your heirs disappear like dung that people throw in the fire and burn until there's nothing left. ¹¹Dogs will eat the bodies of your heirs who die in the city and birds will feed on the bodies of your heirs who die in the country. The Lord has spoken."

¹²Then Ahijah said to her, "As for your sick son, when you return to your city, he will die. ¹³All Israel will mourn his death and then they will bury him. He will be the only one of Jeroboam's sons who will be buried, because the Lord has seen something good in him, and in mercy He will lay him to rest. ¹⁴God will choose another king to reign over Israel who will put an end to the house of Jeroboam. The day of doom for his house has already begun. ¹⁵Israel will be punished also and will sway like a reed in the water. If she does not repent, God will uproot Israel from the land He has given her and scatter her people beyond the Euphrates River. He will do this because they have turned their backs on the Lord and put Asherah, the mother goddess of fertility, in His place. ¹⁶He will give up Israel because she has allowed herself to be led into sin by Jeroboam and enjoyed going along with what he wanted her to do."

¹⁷Then Jeroboam's wife went back to Tirzah, the new capital of Israel, where she lived. As soon as she set foot in her house, the boy died. ¹⁸All Israel mourned for the boy and buried him in great sadness as the Lord through his prophet Ahijah had said they would.

The Death of Jeroboam

¹⁹The other things that Jeroboam did, his wars and how he ruled, are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ²⁰Jeroboam ruled for twenty-two years

and then slept with his fathers. After his death Nadab his son ruled in his stead.

Rehoboam's Reign in Judah

²¹While Jeroboam ruled over Israel to the north, Rehoboam, son of Solomon, ruled over Judah to the south. His mother was an Ammonite named Naamah, one of Solomon's many foreign wives. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he became king, and he ruled Judah from Jerusalem for seventeen years. The Lord called Jerusalem His own city, and He wanted His people to come there to worship Him. ²²However, the people of Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord and displeased Him more than their ancestors had ever done. ²³They built places of worship on hills and in groves throughout the land. Stone pillars and wooden poles were set up as symbols of Asherah and other false gods of their northern neighbors. ²⁴Men as well as women served as prostitutes at these shrines and the people did shameful things to excite the goddess' reproductive powers so they would have a plentiful harvest. They followed the customs of the heathen who had lived there before even though the Lord had taken the land from the heathen for that very reason.

²⁵Now in the fifth year of Rehoboam, king of Judah, the Lord allowed Shishak, the king of Egypt, to attack Jerusalem. (This was the same king who had allowed Jeroboam to come to Egypt for protection against Solomon.) ²⁶He took away treasures from the Temple and the royal palace. He even took the five hundred gold shields that Solomon had made which hung in the Hall of Lebanon. ²⁷After Shishak left, Rehoboam replaced these gold shields with bronze ones, which the royal guards used for state occasions instead of gold ones. ²⁸Whenever the king went to the Temple, the guards who went with him carried their bronze shields, and when they got back, they returned the shields to the guardroom to be hung in the Hall of Lebanon.

²⁹The other things that Rehoboam did are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ³⁰While Jeroboam was king of Israel and Rehoboam was king of Judah, there was constant warfare between them. ³¹When Rehoboam died, he was buried in Jerusalem with his ancestors. He was the son of Naamah, the Ammonite wife of Solomon. Then Rehoboam's son Abijah became the next king of Judah.

Abijah's Reign in Judah

15 It was in the eighteenth year of the reign of Jeroboam, king of Israel, that Abijah became king of Judah. ²He ruled Judah for less than three years. His mother was Maacah, the granddaughter of Absalom. ³He did all the evil things his father had done and was not devoted to the Lord as his ancestor David had been. ⁴But for the sake of David, the Lord gave Abijah a son to succeed him who would keep the city strong. ⁵David had loved the Lord with all his heart and had kept His commandments all the days of his life, except in the case of Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite. ⁶There was war between Abijah and Jeroboam all during Abijah's reign, just as there had been between his father Rehoboam and Jeroboam. ⁷All the other things that Abijah did are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah, including the wars between Abijah and Jeroboam. ⁸When Abijah died, he was buried with his fathers in the section of Jerusalem called the City of David. His son Asa became the next king of Judah.

Asa's Reign in Judah

⁹It was in the twentieth year of Jeroboam's reign in Israel that Asa became king of Judah. Two years later Jeroboam died. ¹⁰Asa ruled Judah from Jerusalem for forty-one years. His grandmother's name was Maacah, the granddaughter of Absalom, son of David. ¹¹Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord as David had done. ¹²He banned the male

prostitutes throughout the country who worked at the shrines of the fertility gods. He also destroyed all the idols that his father, grandfather and great-grandfather had set up. ¹³He even deposed the Queen Mother, who was his grandmother, because of the obscene image she had set up of the goddess Asherah. Asa had it cut down and burned in the Kidron Valley outside of Jerusalem. ¹⁴He tried but did not succeed in destroying all the shrines in the country. Asa's heart was fully committed to the Lord, and he was faithful to Him all his life. ¹⁵Like his father Abijah, he did his best to replace all the silver, gold and other treasures that Shishak, king of Egypt, had taken from the Temple and royal palace during the reign of Rehoboam.

¹⁶There was never any real peace between Israel and Judah and soon hostilities broke out again. When Baasha killed Jeroboam's son Nadab and became the new king of Israel, ¹⁷he invaded Judah and took the border town of Ramah and began to fortify it to keep his people from going to Jerusalem and settling in Judah. ¹⁸Then Asa took the silver, gold and other treasures from the Temple and royal palace which were still left and had his ambassadors take them to Benhadad I, king of Syria. Benhadad was the grandson of Hezion (or Rezon), whom the Lord had raised up to fight against King Solomon. ¹⁹The ambassadors went to the city of Damascus and delivered Asa's message, which said, "Let's be friends as our ancestors were at one time and remember the treaty which our fathers made with each other. Here is some silver and gold from our Temple and royal palace as a present to you from us. Break your alliance with Baasha, the king of Israel, so he will have to concentrate on protecting his border with you and will pull his troops out of Judah."

²⁰Benhadad accepted Asa's offer of friendship and decided to cross the border into Israel and attack some of its northern cities. He also took the land

near the northern end of the Lake of Galilee and the whole territory belonging to Naphtali. ²¹When Baasha heard what Benhadad had done, he stopped fortifying Ramah. He withdrew his forces from Judah and brought them back to his capital in Tirzah. ²²Then Asa ordered the people of Judah to come to Ramah and help carry away all the timbers and stones Baasha had been using to fortify the city. Instead, the king used these materials to build up and fortify the cities of Geba and Mizpah in the territory of Benjamin. ²³All the other things that Asa did, his achievements and the cities that he fortified are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. During the last years of his life he ruled the country jointly with his son Jehoshaphat while he suffered greatly from a foot disease. ²⁴When he died, they buried him with his ancestors in Jerusalem. His son Jehoshaphat ruled in his place.

²⁵Before this, after Jeroboam had died in Israel, Nadab his son took over during the second year of Asa, king of Judah. Nadab ruled Israel for parts of two years. ²⁶He did all the wicked things his father Jeroboam had done and led Israel even deeper into sin.

Baasha's Reign in Israel

²⁷While Nadab was besieging the Philistine city of Gibbethon, Baasha revolted against him and killed him. Baasha was not from one of the major tribes of Israel but from the obscure tribe of Issachar. ²⁸In the third year of Asa, king of Judah, Baasha proclaimed himself the new king of Israel. ²⁹One of the first things he did was to kill everyone in Jeroboam's family for his own security. He left no one alive. This was in harmony with what the prophet Ahijah from Shiloh had told Jeroboam's wife when she came to him about her sick boy. It all happened just as he had prophesied. ³⁰Jeroboam had turned Israel against God and had led them into worshipping idols which greatly dis-

pleased the Lord. Because Jeroboam would not repent, God's protection was withdrawn from him and his family.

³¹All the other things that happened during Nadab's reign are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ³²There were periodic wars between Baasha, king of Israel, and Asa, king of Judah, during the entire time they ruled.

³³Baasha became king of Israel in the third year of the reign of Asa, king of Judah, and he ruled the Northern Kingdom for twenty-four years. ³⁴He did all the evil things that Jeroboam and Nadab had done and led Israel even deeper into sin.

16 Then the Lord spoke to Jehu, the son of Hanani from the tribe of Judah, and gave him this message for Baasha: ²"You were a nobody until I permitted you to become leader of my people. But you've been just as wicked as Jeroboam and you've led Israel even deeper into sin. You knew that this would displease me, but you didn't care. ³So I will remove you and your family just as I removed Jeroboam and his family. ⁴Those of your family who die in the city will be eaten by dogs and those who die in the country will be eaten by vultures."

⁵All the other things that Baasha did, his achievements and victories, are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ⁶Baasha died and was buried in Tirzah where his fathers were buried, and Elah his son ruled in his stead. ⁷The Lord gave this message to Jehu, the son of Hanani, against Baasha because of all the wicked things he had done against the Lord. He had done every evil that Jeroboam had, and more, and took it on himself to kill everyone who belonged to the royal house of Jeroboam.

Elah's Reign in Israel

⁸It was in the twenty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, king of Judah, that Elah, the son of Baasha, became king of Israel. He

ruled Israel from Tirzah for less than two years. ⁹Zimri, commander of half the king's chariots, plotted against him. One day Elah was visiting in the home of Arza, the man in charge of the palace, and got drunk. ¹⁰Then Zimri came into the house and killed him. This happened in the twenty-seventh year of the reign of Asa, king of Judah.

¹¹The first thing he did as king was to kill every male he could find who was related to Baasha and Elah, and even Baasha's friends. ¹²This is just what the prophet Jehu had told Baasha would happen, and Zimri carried it out. ¹³The Lord allowed this to happen because of all the wicked things that Baasha and his son Elah had done in leading Israel deeper into sin. They knew that worshipping idols greatly displeased the Lord but they had done it anyway. ¹⁴All the other things that Elah did are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

Zimri's Reign in Israel

¹⁵It was in the twenty-seventh year of the reign of Asa, king of Judah, that Zimri became king of Israel. He had only been king for about a week when the army of Israel that was besieging the Philistine city of Gibbethon heard what had happened. ¹⁶When the army heard how Zimri had killed Elah, son of Baasha, they were glad, but they didn't like Zimri either. So they made Omri, their commander, king of Israel. ¹⁷Then they withdrew from Gibbethon and marched back home to Tirzah, the capital of Israel, and besieged it. ¹⁸When Zimri saw that the city was surrounded and would soon be taken, he went into the palace, set it on fire and died in the flames. ¹⁹The Lord allowed this to happen because of all the wicked things that Zimri had done. During his one week in office, he did the same wicked things that Jeroboam had done. ²⁰All the other things that Zimri did and the rebellion he carried out are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

Omri's Reign in Israel

²¹Then the people of Israel were divided over who should be the next king. Some wanted Tibni, the son of Ginath, to be king, and others went along with the troops and accepted Omri as their king. ²²After more than four years of civil war, Tibni was killed and Omri was accepted as king of Israel. ²³In the thirty-first year of the reign of Asa, king of Judah, Omri became king over the entire country of Israel. He ruled for twelve years from the time his troops first proclaimed him king. For six years he ruled from Tirzah, the capital. ²⁴Then he bought a hill from a man named Shemer for one hundred fifty pounds of silver. Here is where Omri built and fortified a city which he called Samaria after Shemer, and moved his capital there. It was situated for defense as well as beauty.

²⁵But Omri did worse in the sight of the Lord than all the evil kings before him. ²⁶He followed Jeroboam's wicked example and continued to worship worthless idols and led the people of Israel into even greater apostasy, which greatly displeased the Lord. ²⁷All the other things that Omri did are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ²⁸During his last years he ruled from Samaria and was buried there. Ahab, his son became the next king.

Ahab's Reign in Israel

²⁹In the thirty-eighth year of Asa, king of Judah, Ahab began to reign over Israel, and he ruled for twenty-two years. ³⁰Ahab did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any other king before him. ³¹What Jeroboam had done to displease the Lord was mild in comparison to Ahab. He married a woman named Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians and high priest of Baal. Then Ahab began to worship the storm god Baal. ³²He built an altar to the storm god Baal right in the city of Samaria. ³³He also set up a carved pole of Asherah, the mother goddess of fertility. Ahab did more to displease the

Lord with his evil ways than all the kings of Israel before him.

³⁴During Ahab's time, Hiel from Bethel decided to rebuild Jericho. During the construction Hiel's firstborn son Abiram was killed by accident when the foundations of the city were being laid, and his youngest son Segub also was killed by accident when they were putting the city gates in place. This was in harmony with what the Lord through Joshua had said would happen to the man who tried to rebuild Jericho.

Elijah Predicts a Drought

17 In the mountainous region of Gilead in the obscure village of Tishbe lived a faithful prophet named Elijah. God sent him to Samaria, where he boldly walked into Ahab's presence and stated, "As the Lord God of Israel lives whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the land for the next three years until I say so." Then he turned and left. ²The Lord spoke to Elijah again, ³"Now leave the city and camp by the Cherith Brook in the valley east of Jordan. ⁴You'll be safe from Ahab and will have plenty of water to drink during the drought that's coming. I'll order the ravens to bring you food." ⁵Elijah did what the Lord directed, left Samaria, crossed the Jordan River and hid in the valley by the Cherith Brook. ⁶The ravens brought him pieces of bread and meat in the morning and again in the afternoon. He drank water from the brook. ⁷Soon the drought began and the people turned to Baal to send rain, but none came. The land became parched and even the Cherith Brook dried up.

Elijah and the Widow in Zarephath

⁸Then the Lord said to Elijah, ⁹"Go north to Jezebel's country to the city of Sidon on the Mediterranean coast. Before you get there, you'll come to the village of Zarephath. Stay there until the drought is over. I've asked a widow who lives there to feed you. Though she's not

an Israelite, she believes in me." ¹⁰So Elijah left the valley and went to Zarephath. As he neared the village he saw a woman just outside the gate picking up sticks. He asked, "Would you be so kind as to get me a drink of water?" ¹¹The woman laid down her sticks to go to the village well to get a drink for Elijah. As she started to go, he said, "Could you also please bring me a piece of bread?" ¹²She turned and said, "As truly as the Lord lives, I don't have any bread. All I have is a little flour and a little olive oil. I was here getting some sticks to make a fire so my young son and I could have one last meal and prepare to die because the drought is too great."

¹³"Take your sticks," Elijah said, "go home and make a small cake of bread for me and bring it here. Then go back and make some for yourself and your son." ¹⁴The Lord God of Israel has given me this message for you: Your flour and oil will last until the drought is over." ¹⁵While not an Israelite, she accepted what Elijah said as God's word and made a little cake and brought it to Elijah. When she returned home, her containers had still more flour and oil. She ran back and invited Elijah to stay with them, and they had plenty of bread. ¹⁶The flour and oil did not run out, just as the Lord had said.

The Widow's Son Restored

¹⁷Some time later the widow's young son got sick. He grew steadily worse until he died. ¹⁸Then the widow said to Elijah, "What does your God have against me? Have you come here to keep me alive so you could punish me for my sins by killing my son?" ¹⁹Elijah said, "Bring the boy to me." She picked up his little body and brought him to Elijah. He carried the child upstairs to the room where he was staying and laid him on his bed. ²⁰Then he knelt next to the bed and prayed to the Lord, "O Lord God, you have allowed death to enter the very house where this widow has been so kind. What will these Phoenicians think of you?"

²¹In agony of spirit he spread himself on top of the little boy's body and bitterly cried to the Lord, asking Him to give the boy's life back to him. He did this three times. Each time, he prayed, "O Lord God, please give this boy's life back to him!" ²²The Lord heard Elijah's prayer and life returned to the boy's body. ²³Then Elijah picked him up, carried him downstairs and called to the boy's mother, "Look! Your son is alive!" ²⁴The woman took her son into her arms and said, "Now I really know that you're a prophet of the Lord and that whatever your God says is true!"

Elijah and Ahab

18 In the third year of the drought, the Lord said to Elijah, "Go back to Israel and present yourself to Ahab. I am about to send rain on the land. ²Elijah left and began the trip of over one hundred miles to see Ahab. The drought was very severe around Samaria and very little food was left. ³Ahab had called in Obadiah, who was in charge of the palace, to help him find food for his horses and mules. Obadiah was a steadfast believer in the Lord. ⁴Jezebel had been so angry with what the prophet Elijah had done that she had killed anyone even remotely connected with him, including some of the young men who had studied under him. Obadiah had come to their rescue and had hidden a hundred of them in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water. ⁵The king said to Obadiah, "I want you to help me find some springs and grass nearby to keep my horses and mules from wasting away and dying." ⁶So they divided up the land and agreed how much each one would cover. Ahab went in one direction and Obadiah in the other.

⁷As Obadiah was riding along, he saw Elijah heading toward Samaria and recognized him immediately. He bowed and called out, "Elijah! Is that you?" ⁸Elijah said, "Yes, it is. Go and tell Ahab that I'm here and want to see him." ⁹Obadiah

said, "Do you want me to die? If I tell Ahab that I know where you are, he'll kill me. ¹⁰Ahab is out to get you and anyone who supports you. He's sent people everywhere looking for you. He also asked the rulers of nearby countries to help capture you. He even had them swear that they tried but couldn't find you. ¹¹Now you're asking me to go to Ahab and tell him that I know where you are? ¹²Even if I do that, how do I know you'll still be here when I get back? Maybe the Spirit of the Lord will take you away and hide you somewhere and if Ahab comes and doesn't find you, he'll think I lied to him and will kill me. Either way I'll lose. I've been true to the Lord the whole time you've been gone just as I have been since my youth. ¹³Maybe you haven't heard, but Jezebel has killed everyone who openly identified himself with you, including many of your students. I hid a hundred of them in two caves, fifty in each and have been supplying them with food and water. ¹⁴And now you want me to tell Ahab, 'I know where Elijah is!' He will certainly kill me!"

¹⁵Elijah said, "As surely as the Lord Almighty lives, I'll be right here. So when Ahab comes, he'll have no reason to kill you. You'll be safe." ¹⁶So Obadiah went to find Ahab and told him where Elijah was. Ahab immediately followed Obadiah to see for himself. ¹⁷When he got there and saw Elijah, he said, "So there you are, you troublemaker of Israel!"

¹⁸Elijah said, "I'm not the cause of the trouble in Israel. You are! You and your father's house have disobeyed the Lord and turned against Him by worshiping Baal!" ¹⁹Now go and invite the people from all over Israel to meet me at Mount Carmel by the Mediterranean and bring with you the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of the fertility goddess Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table."

Elijah on Mount Carmel

²⁰Ahab did what the prophet Elijah

said. He sent word throughout Israel for people to come to Mount Carmel to see Elijah. He called the prophets of Baal together and took them along, but not the prophets of Asherah. ²¹When everyone got there, Elijah stood where he could be seen and said in a loud voice, "When will you make up your minds as to who the true God is? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, then follow him." The people just stood there and said nothing. ²²Then Elijah said, "I'm the only prophet of the Lord who is left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. ²³Go and get me two young bulls. Let the prophets of Baal choose one for themselves, and I'll take the other one. Let them build an altar, then kill their young bull, cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but don't light a fire. I'll do the same. I'll repair the Lord's altar, kill my bull, cut it into pieces and lay it on the wood, but I won't light the fire. ²⁴You prophets of Baal, pray to your god and I'll pray to mine. The one who sets the wood on fire is the real God!"

The people said, "That's a good idea!" ²⁵So Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Since there are so many of you, you go first. Choose one of the bulls, kill it and lay it on the wood, but don't light a fire." ²⁶They agreed, chose one of the bulls, prepared it and did what Elijah had asked them to do. Then they prayed to Baal, "O Baal, send down the fire!" But no fire came. Then they shouted to him, but nothing happened. They danced and jumped around their altar, constantly shouting to Baal, but still there was no answer. ²⁷This went on all morning. About noon, Elijah began to tease them, "You need to shout a little louder. Maybe your god can't hear you. Maybe he's meditating. Maybe he's busy doing something important, or maybe he's on a trip. Maybe he's sleeping and you need to shout loud enough to wake him up."

²⁸So they shouted louder and louder, danced and jumped much harder, and even began cutting themselves with

knives and swords until the blood flowed, which the worship of Baal required. ²⁹They kept this up for hours, with Elijah carefully watching them so they wouldn't light the fire themselves. They continued this until late in the afternoon, but there was still no response.

³⁰Then Elijah said to the people, "Come closer. Don't stand so far away." So the people came closer and watched as Elijah carefully repaired the altar of the Lord which lay in ruins. ³¹Then he chose twelve stones, one for each of the twelve sons of Jacob whose name the Lord had changed to Israel. Elijah told people that these stones represented the twelve tribes of Israel. ³²He used them to finish repairing the altar, then he dug a trench around it. ³³Next he put the wood on the altar, killed the young bull, cut it in pieces and laid the pieces on the wood. Then he said to the people, "Go to the spring in the Kishon Valley and fill four huge watering jars. Then bring the water and pour it over the sacrifice and the wood." ³⁴So they did. "Now do that again," he said. So they did. Then he said to them, "Do it one more time." And they did it a third time. ³⁵Altogether they poured twelve large jars of water on the sacrifice and on the wood, and the water that ran down filled the trench.

³⁶By this time it was late afternoon and time for the evening sacrifice. Elijah stepped up to the altar, raised his hands toward heaven and cried aloud, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, let the people know that you are the God of Israel and that I'm your servant who has done all this at your bidding. ³⁷Answer my prayer, Lord, answer me, so that these people will know that you are the God of Israel and so they will return to you with all their hearts."

³⁸No sooner had Elijah finished praying than fire came down from heaven, consumed the sacrifice, the wood and the stones, scorched the ground and licked up the water in the trench. ³⁹When the people saw this, they fell on their

knees with their faces to the ground and cried out, "The Lord is God! The Lord is God!" But the prophets of Baal refused to repent. ⁴⁰Then Elijah said to the people, "Quick! Grab these prophets and don't let any of them get away." Then he led the prophets of Baal down to the nearby Kishon Valley where he had every one of them killed.

The Drought Ends

⁴¹Ahab had been watching everything. Elijah came to him and said, "You'd better eat something before you go back because it will soon be raining really hard."

⁴²Ahab sat down to eat while Elijah went back to the top of Mount Carmel to pray for rain. He bowed low before the Lord, thanking Him for this day of victory.

⁴³Then he said to his servant, "Go and look out toward the Mediterranean, then come back and tell me what you see." The servant went to the highest point and looked out toward the sea but saw no sign of rain. He came back and told Elijah he had seen nothing unusual. ⁴⁴Elijah asked him to go and look again. This happened seven times. The seventh time he saw a small black cloud in the distance about the size of a man's hand hovering over the Mediterranean. He raced back and told Elijah what he had seen. Elijah said to his servant, "Quick! Tell Ahab to get in his chariot and head for Samaria before the rain comes and the valley gets flooded."

⁴⁵Soon the sky was filled with dark, churning clouds. The wind picked up and a downpour began. At Elijah's warning, Ahab had jumped into his chariot and headed for his other palace in nearby Jezreel where his wife Jezebel was. ⁴⁶The Spirit of the Lord came on Elijah and he tucked his robe in his belt, and in the power of God, he ran ahead of Ahab's horses, guiding the chariot for more than twenty miles through blinding rain all the way to Jezreel.

Elijah Escapes and Goes to Sinai

19 When Ahab got to the palace he told Jezebel everything that Elijah had done and how that prophet of God had killed four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. ²Then Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: "May the gods strike me dead if by this time tomorrow I don't hunt you down and kill you." ³During the night the messenger found Elijah fast asleep against the city wall. He awakened the prophet and told him what Jezebel had said. Then Elijah got up and ran for his life. When he got to Beersheba on the edge of the wilderness, about a hundred miles south of Jezreel, he told his servant to stay behind while he went on.

⁴He continued walking for another day, and when he found a tree that gave good shade, he slumped to the ground and prayed to die. He said, "Lord, I've had it. I can't take any more. Please let me die. I'm no better than my ancestors. I scored a victory for you on Mount Carmel and then ran from a woman." ⁵Discouraged and disappointed in himself, Elijah lay down and fell asleep. A little later an angel awakened him and gently said, "Sit up, Elijah. I have brought you something to eat." Then the angel disappeared. ⁶Elijah opened his eyes and saw some bread, freshly baked over hot coals, and beside it, a jug of water. He sat up, ate and drank and then lay back down and fell asleep. ⁷After a while the angel returned, touched him and said, "You have a long way to go, so I have brought you some more food." Then he disappeared. ⁸Elijah sat up, ate and drank again, and then felt strong enough to go on his way. That food sustained him for the next forty days as he traveled through the wilderness for almost two hundred miles until he reached Sinai.

⁹When he arrived, he slipped into one of the caves to spend the night. Then the Lord said to him, "Elijah, what are you doing here?" ¹⁰Elijah answered, "I know I'll be safe here on your mountain. I've been very zealous for you and the honor of

your name. I've tried to lift you up as the God of Israel and to get the people to worship you and you alone. They have broken your covenant, torn down your altars and killed your prophets. What looked like a revival and reformation didn't change Jezebel's mind one bit. She's still in charge of things and out to kill your prophets. I'm the only one left and she's determined to find me and kill me."

¹¹The Lord said to Elijah, "Go and stand at the opening of the cave because I'm about to pass by." Elijah obeyed, and as he stood there, a powerful wind came from the direction of the Lord's voice and hit the side of the mountain with such force that it shattered some rocks, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind came an earthquake, and the whole mountain shook, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹²After the earthquake came flames of fire that scorched the mountain so badly that Elijah ran back into the cave for protection. But the Lord was not in the fire. Suddenly, all was still. Then he heard a quiet, gentle voice outside. It was the voice of the Lord. ¹³Elijah pulled his mantle over his head and stood at the entrance of the cave. The Lord spoke to him, "What are you doing here?" ¹⁴Elijah said, "Lord, I have been very zealous for you to protect your name, but the children of Israel have broken your covenant, torn down your altars and killed your prophets until I'm the only one left. Now they're after me."

¹⁵In the same quiet, gentle voice the Lord said to Elijah, "I want you to go back to Israel the way you came. Go north until you get to Damascus, the capital of Syria. As you near the city, a man named Hazeal will meet you. I am sending you to anoint him king of Syria. ¹⁶Then come back south into Israel and go to the city of Samaria where you'll find a man named Jehu, the son of Jehoshaphat and grandson of Nimshi, who is one of Ahab's officers. I want you to anoint him king of Israel. Then go north toward Jezreel and anoint Elisha, the son of Shaphat, from Abel Meholah in

the Jordan Valley to take your place as my prophet. ¹⁷Soon the Syrian army under Hazeal will attack Israel from the north, and Jehu will kill anyone from Ahab's house who escapes from Hazeal. Then Elisha will pronounce the death sentence on anyone who escapes from Jehu. ¹⁸There are still seven thousand people scattered throughout Israel who have not worshiped Baal. They have refused to kneel down in front of him and have not gone up to kiss his carved image."

The Call of Elisha

¹⁹So Elijah came down from Mount Sinai and went back the way he came. He did what the Lord had told him to do. He anointed Hazeal and Jehu and then went to look for Elisha. He found him and the family servants plowing the field with twelve teams of oxen. Elisha was driving the twelfth team. When he saw Elijah coming, he stopped plowing and went to greet him. Elijah said nothing. He just threw his mantle over Elisha's shoulders and turned and walked off. ²⁰Elisha stood there a moment, then left his team of oxen standing in the field and ran after Elijah, saying, "I know what this means, but I first need to go and tell my father and mother and say good-bye to them. Then I'll come with you."

Elijah said, "Go back to your plowing. Why would you want to be a prophet?" ²¹Then Elisha decided to accept the Lord's call without going back home. So he killed the young oxen and sacrificed them to God as a sign of his acceptance and his commitment to the prophetic ministry. He used wood from the plow to cook some of the meat, then shared it with the servants. After they had all eaten, he told them to take the rest of the meat home. Then he joined Elijah and became his helper.

War With Syria

20 Now King Benhadad II of Syria called up all his troops and, supported by the thirty-two local rulers under

his control, took all their horses and chariots and invaded Israel and besieged Samaria. ²He sent messengers to Ahab who said to him, ³"King Benhadad of Syria demands that you give him all your silver and gold and the best of your wives and children. These are his terms for peace." ⁴Ahab said, "I accept his terms. Tell King Benhadad that he can have me and my family and everything I own."

⁵The messengers carried Ahab's response to Benhadad who then sent Ahab another demand which read, "King Benhadad accepts your silver and gold and the best of your wives and children as the terms for peace, ⁶but in addition he will send his officers into the city not only to search the palace but also the houses of all your officials and take what they want."

⁷Ahab told the messengers to wait outside. Then he called the old leaders of Israel together and said to them, "This man Benhadad is looking for a fight. When he asked for my silver and gold and the best of my wives and children as terms for peace I agreed. But now he wants to come into the city and go through our houses and take everything he wants. What should I do?" ⁸The old leaders said, "Don't do it. Don't give in to him or he'll only ask for more."

⁹So Ahab called the messengers back in and said to them, "Tell your king that I am his servant and still accept the first terms of peace, but not the second." So they left and took Ahab's message back to Benhadad. ¹⁰Early the next morning Benhadad sent a message to Ahab, "I've got so many men ready to attack you that if each one took a handful of dust from your city, there wouldn't be anything left. May the gods strike me dead if I don't wipe you and your city off the face of the earth."

¹¹Ahab sent a message back, "A real soldier boasts after the battle when he takes his armor off, not before it while he's putting it on." ¹²The messengers gave Benhadad Ahab's message while he

and his thirty-two allies were sitting in their tents drinking. As soon as he heard this, he ordered his troops to move into position to attack.

¹³Then a prophet of the Lord came to Ahab and said, "The Lord God of Israel says, 'Don't be afraid of Benhadad and his huge army. I will give them into your hands and you will know that I am the Lord and am longing for my people to come back to me.'"

¹⁴Ahab said to the prophet, "But I'm not sure that my officers are brave enough to initiate the attack." The prophet answered, "The Lord says the special young men who are under the provincial officers will." Ahab said, "But who will lead out?" The prophet replied, "You will." ¹⁵So Ahab called together the provincial officers and their young men, and there were only two hundred and thirty-two of them. Then he called up all the fighting men in Israel which totaled seven thousand. He told his troops that the plan was to attack the enemy, and he would personally lead them into battle.

¹⁶Ahab decided to attack at noon while Benhadad and his thirty-two allies were in their tents resting from the heat and drinking themselves into a stupor. ¹⁷Ahab's special unit under their provincial officers were sent out first. In the meantime, Benhadad had sent out scouts to keep an eye on what Ahab was doing. They came back and told Benhadad that a small Israelite detachment had left Samaria heading their direction. ¹⁸Benhadad ordered his men to take the Israelites alive, whether they were coming out for peace or for war.

¹⁹Ahab's young men under their provincial officers marched out of the city, followed by the rest of the Israelite army. ²⁰They attacked Benhadad's scouts, and during the hand-to-hand combat, each Israelite killed the man he fought. When the rest of the Syrians saw that no Israelites had been killed, they got scared and ran. Ahab's men pursued them and headed for Benhadad's tent.

But the king and his allies mounted their horses and escaped. ²¹Ahab now took personal command of Israel's entire army and went after the retreating Syrians. He defeated them with a great slaughter and captured many horses and chariots.

²²After the battle, while Ahab and his men were resting, the prophet of the Lord came to see the king and said to him, "You need to build up your forces as quickly as you can because next spring Benhadad will come back and attack you again."

The Syrians Defeated

²³When the king of Syria got back home, his advisers said to him, "The reason you were defeated is because the Israelite God is the God of the hills. You need to fight the Israelites on flat land, then you'll be able to defeat them. ²⁴So we suggest that you replace your allied commanders with commanders who know how to fight in the open. ²⁵Then call up enough men to replace the ones you lost and those who deserted you. Also, replace the horses and chariots you lost. Train these men to fight on flat land and this time we'll defeat them." Benhadad agreed and did what they said.

²⁶By the next spring, Benhadad was ready to fight Ahab. He got his men together and with this fresh army trained to fight on the plains, he marched against the Israelite city of Aphek and took it. This city was in the region of Jezreel where Ahab had his second palace. ²⁷Then Ahab called up his men, gave them provisions and marched them out in two groups to meet the Syrians. When they got there and set up camp, they looked like two small flocks of goats compared to the hordes of men that Benhadad had which seemed to cover the countryside. ²⁸Again the prophet of the Lord came to see Ahab and said, "This is what the Lord says, 'Because the Syrians think that I'm the God of the hills and not the God of the plains, I will deliver this huge army into your hands, and again

you'll have evidence that I am the Lord.'"

²⁹For the next seven days the armies camped opposite each other. On the seventh day after their arrival, the Israelites attacked. Ahab's men killed a hundred thousand foot soldiers in one day. ³⁰Some of them ran back to the city of Aphek for protection against the Israelites. They crowded against the city wall while a few climbed up to keep an eye on Ahab's army, but the wall collapsed, and another twenty-seven thousand died. Then Benhadad and those closest to him hid in a house in the middle of the city.

Ahab's Treaty With the Syrians

³¹They said to Benhadad, "We've heard that the kings of Israel are merciful kings. Why don't you let us go to Ahab with sackcloth wrapped around our waists and ropes around our necks and beg for mercy. Maybe he'll let us live." Benhadad agreed and let them go. ³²They asked the people in the city for sackcloth, which they wrapped around their waists. Then they wrapped ropes around their necks and went to meet Ahab. They said to him, "We are at your mercy. Please let Benhadad live." Ahab answered, "You mean to tell me that he's still alive? Good, because he's my brother." ³³The men saw this as an indication of mercy and replied, "Yes, your brother Benhadad is alive and well." Ahab then said to them, "Go and get him." When he came, Ahab invited him to step up into his chariot. ³⁴Benhadad did so, saying to Ahab, "As a sign of peace I will give you back all the cities my father took from your father. Also, you can come and set up markets in Damascus as my father did in Samaria." Ahab responded, "On that basis I'll let you live and return home in peace." So they shook hands and made peace and Ahab let him go.

Ahab Condemned by a Prophet

³⁵Then the Lord said to one of the sons of the prophets, "Go and ask a companion

to take his weapon and hit the side of your face so hard that you bleed.” The prophet went to a companion and told him what the Lord had said. But he refused to do it. ³⁶The prophet said, “Because you refused to obey the Lord, a lion will attack and kill you.” After the man left, a lion tracked him down and killed him. ³⁷The prophet went to another companion and said, “The Lord wants you to take your weapon and hit me on the side of my face so hard that it bleeds.” So the man did. ³⁸Then the prophet bandaged his face in such a way as to disguise himself and stood by the side of the road waiting for the king to pass.

³⁹When Ahab approached, the prophet called out to him, “Your Majesty, I went to fight in the battle and on the way an officer asked me to guard a prisoner. He told me that if I let the prisoner escape I would pay for it with my life or with seventy pounds of silver. ⁴⁰I got busy with some other things and when I wasn’t looking, the prisoner escaped. What can I do? If the officer finds me, he’ll kill me because there’s no way I can pay what he’s asking.” The king answered, “You brought the sentence on your own head. You’ll have to pay for it with your life.” ⁴¹The prophet then ripped the bandage off his face and the king recognized him. ⁴²He said to the king, “The Lord says, ‘You let your prisoner go, the very one I appointed for destruction. So it will be your life for his.’” ⁴³When Ahab heard that, he was terribly shaken and returned to Samaria, resentful and sullen.

Jezebel Orders Naboth Killed

21 Some time later Ahab was back in Jezreel. There was a vineyard close to his palace that he liked, but it belonged to a man named Naboth. ²One day Ahab went to see Naboth and said, “Let me buy your vineyard that’s close to my palace so I can have it plowed to use for a vegetable garden. I’ll pay you whatever you think it’s worth, or I can give

you an even better vineyard for it.” ³Naboth answered, “This vineyard has been in the family for a long time so it’s very special to us. It’s been passed down the line from father to son, generation after generation. There’s no way I would feel right about selling it.” ⁴Then Ahab went home and laid down on his couch, sulking and refusing to eat because he couldn’t have that cherished vineyard.

⁵Jezebel came in and asked what was wrong and why he would not eat. ⁶He answered, “Because I went to see Naboth who owns the vineyard close to our palace and offered to buy it from him, but he refused to sell.” ⁷Jezebel said, “You’re the king of Israel—he’s not. Stop sulking and come eat. I’ll get the vineyard for you.”

⁸So Jezebel wrote a letter in Ahab’s name and sent it to the city fathers and others of influence, saying, ⁹“I want you to announce a special day of fasting and prayer. After the people have come together, take Naboth to the head table with you and give him a place of honor. ¹⁰Find a couple of shady characters and seat them across from him. At the right time have them accuse Naboth of cursing God and the king for calling a day of fasting and prayer. Then take Naboth and have him stoned.” ¹¹So the city fathers did what Jezebel told them to do according to the letter she had written in Ahab’s name. ¹²They announced a day of fasting and prayer and when the people came together, Naboth was at the head table where everyone could see him. ¹³At the right time, two scoundrels, sons of Belial, sitting across from him jumped up, pointed their fingers at Naboth and said, “This is the man who a little while ago cursed God and the king for calling a day of fasting and prayer!” Then the city fathers told the people to take Naboth outside the city and stone him to death. ¹⁴When it was all over, the city fathers sent word to Jezebel that Naboth was dead.

¹⁵As soon as Jezebel got word, she went to see Ahab who had been sulking

on his couch for days and said to him, "Now get up and go to the vineyard that Naboth refused to sell you and claim it as yours. Naboth is dead. He was found cursing you and God and the people decided to stone him for it." ¹⁶When Ahab heard that, he got up and went to the vineyard and claimed it as his own.

Elijah Condemns Ahab

¹⁷Now the Lord had known this would happen, so He had said to Elijah the Tishbite, ¹⁸"I want you to go to see Ahab. You'll not find him in Samaria, but at his other palace in Jezreel. When you get there, he'll be in Naboth's vineyard looking it over, ready to lay claim to it. ¹⁹Give him this message from me: 'First you arranged to have an innocent man killed and now you're here to claim his property. Because of this, dogs will lick up your blood in the same place they licked the blood of Naboth.'"

²⁰So Elijah went to see Ahab and found him looking over Naboth's vineyard, just as the Lord had said. When Ahab saw Elijah, he said, "Well, how's my enemy? So you found me." Elijah said, "Yes, I found you. The Lord sent me here because you sold out to the devil. ²¹This is His message to you: 'I have decided to do away with you and with all males related to you, no matter where they are or what position they have. ²²Your family will disappear from the face of the earth like the families of Jeroboam and Baasha disappeared from the tribes of Ephraim and Issachar. You've led Israel still deeper into sin, and you've turned against every evidence of my love and my leading. ²³As far as Jezebel is concerned, dogs will eat her body in the streets of Jezreel right outside the palace. ²⁴Your relatives who die in the city will be left unburied, and dogs will eat their bodies. Any of your relatives who die in the country will be eaten by vultures.'"

²⁵No one in all Israel ever did such incredibly wicked things as Ahab, urged on by his wife Jezebel. ²⁶He threw himself

into the abominable worship of idols with the same zeal as the Amorites whom the Lord had driven out of the land.

²⁷When Ahab heard the message from the Lord that Elijah gave him, he tore his robe, put on sackcloth, fasted and prayed. He truly humbled himself before God. ²⁸Then the Lord said to Elijah, ²⁹"Go back to Ahab and give him this message: 'I have seen your sorrow for sin and how you've humbled yourself before me. Because of this I will not carry out the sentence on you and your family while you're still alive. But I will see to it that it's carried out in the days of your son.'" So Elijah went to see Ahab and told him exactly what the Lord had said.

The Prophet Micaiah Warns Ahab

22 For the next three years there was peace between Syria and Israel. ²Toward the end of the third year, King Jehoshaphat of Judah, whose son had married Ahab's daughter, went to visit Ahab. ³During the banquet Ahab turned to his officials nearby and said, "Why haven't we done anything to get Ramoth in Gilead back from the Syrians? Benhadad promised to give it back." ⁴He said to Jehoshaphat, "Will you join forces with us against Syria to get Ramoth back?" Jehoshaphat answered, "I'm ready when you are. I'll call up my troops and get my horses and chariots ready to join you whenever you say. You name the time and place, and I'll be there."

⁵Then he added, "But before we go, we ought to ask the Lord to see if it's what He wants us to do." ⁶Ahab agreed. So the two kings with their officials and guests moved to the large open square near the city gate. Then Ahab sent for his prophets, about four hundred of them. When they got there, Ahab said, "I want to attack the city of Ramoth in Gilead to get it back from the Syrians. Should I go or should I wait?" The prophets said, "Go, for the Lord will go with you, and He will give you the victory." ⁷Then Jehoshaphat said, "Isn't there a true

prophet of the Lord God nearby whom we can ask?" ⁸Ahab said, "Yes, there's one other prophet we can ask, but I don't trust him because he never says anything good about me. His name is Micaiah, the son of Imlah." Jehoshaphat said, "The king shouldn't talk about a prophet of the Lord that way. We need to ask him too." ⁹So Ahab told one of his officers to get Micaiah.

¹⁰Dressed in their royal robes, Ahab and Jehoshaphat sat on portable thrones by the gate of the city, with all the prophets in front of them prophesying good things. ¹¹Meanwhile, Zedekiah, one of the false prophets, the son of Chenaanah, had sent for two iron horns and pretended to speak for the Lord, saying to the two kings, "This is what the Lord God of Israel says, 'These two horns represent the kings of Israel and Judah. As a bull can gorge a man to death with his two horns, so these two kings will destroy the Syrian army.'" ¹²Then all the other prophets joined in and confirmed what Zedekiah had said. They told the two kings to attack the city of Ramoth in Gilead, and the Lord God of Israel would give them the victory.

¹³When the officer got to Micaiah's house he said, "Ahab wants to see you. All his prophets are telling him that he and Jehoshaphat should attack the city of Ramoth to take it back from the Syrians and that the Lord will give it to them. I would suggest that when you come, you say the same thing."

¹⁴Micaiah said, "As truly as the Lord lives, I will say only what He tells me to say." ¹⁵So they made their way to the city gate where Ahab and his prophets were. Ahab said to Micaiah, "Should I go against the Syrians to take back Ramoth or should I wait?" Micaiah said, "You've already decided to attack Ramoth no matter what the Lord says, so go ahead and see what will happen." Micaiah said this to mock Ahab. ¹⁶The king said, "How many times have I told you not to play games with me by telling me what you

think I want to hear? I want the truth."

¹⁷Then Micaiah grew serious and said, "The Lord gave me a vision in which I saw the army of Israel scattered over the hills like sheep without a shepherd. Then the Lord said to me, 'These men have lost their leader; let them return home in peace.'" ¹⁸Ahab turned to Jehoshaphat, "Didn't I tell you he never prophesies anything good about me?"

¹⁹Micaiah continued to describe his vision, "I saw the Lord sitting on His throne in heaven with all the angels standing around Him. ²⁰The Lord said to them, 'What do you think about Ahab? Should we put a stop to his wickedness? If so, how should we go about it?' One angel suggested this and another that. ²¹Then in vision I saw an evil angel and heard him say that he would entice Ahab to go to war. ²²The Lord said, 'How will you do it?' The evil angel said, 'I will make his false prophets lie to him.' The Lord said, 'Go and I'll let you entice him to go to war.' ²³So your prophets are lying to you. The Lord will not go with you to Ramoth to protect you."

²⁴Then the false prophet Zedekiah went and slapped Micaiah in the face and said, "Since when did the Spirit of the Lord God of Israel talk only to you?" ²⁵Micaiah said, "You'll find out whom the Spirit of the Lord is speaking to when you have to hide in a back room to keep from being killed." ²⁶Then Ahab said to his officers, "Take Micaiah and turn him over to Amon the mayor and to my son Joash. ²⁷Tell them to throw him into prison and give him only bread and water until I get back from fighting the Syrians. Then I'll deal with him myself." ²⁸Micaiah spoke up, "If you come back alive at all, it wasn't the Spirit of the Lord who spoke through me." Then he turned to everyone there and said, "Mark my words. Don't forget what I've just said."

Ahab Dies in Battle

²⁹So Ahab and Jehoshaphat joined forces and marched to Ramoth in Gilead

to fight the Syrians and take the city. ³⁰Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "I'd like to have a personal part in this battle instead of just directing it. So I'm going to disguise myself as an ordinary soldier. But you keep your royal robes on so the men have at least one king to look to." Jehoshaphat agreed and Ahab went into battle as one of the troops, but his men knew who he was.

³¹Benhadad, king of Syria, had told his thirty-two chariot commanders to focus on getting Ahab, no matter what happened with the lesser soldiers. ³²So the commanders ordered their troops to break through the Israelite forces and go after the king. ³³When the Syrians broke through, they said, "There's the king of Israel! After him!" Then Jehoshaphat cried out to the Lord for help, and when he did so, they realized that he was the king of Judah and turned back.

³⁴During the heat of the battle, a Syrian soldier drew his bow at random and the arrow hit Ahab in a place not covered by his armor. Ahab said to his driver, "I'm hit! Turn the chariot around and let's get out of the battle zone." ³⁵The battle continued all day, but Ahab remained just behind the front lines, encouraging his troops. He stood in his chariot, leaning against the side of it to hold himself up. Meanwhile, his blood ran down inside his armor to the floor of the chariot. After the fighting stopped, he died. ³⁶Near sundown the order went through the ranks, "Retreat to your own land and city!"

³⁷So they took Ahab's body back to Samaria and buried him there. ³⁸They washed his chariot by the city pool and dogs came and lapped up Ahab's blood just as the Lord had said. Then Amon, the mayor, released Micaiah, the prophet of God, from prison. ³⁹All the other things that Ahab did, how he decorated the palace walls with ivory and fortified the cities in outlying areas, are all recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ⁴⁰So Ahab slept with his ancestors, and his son Ahaziah became the next king.

Jehoshaphat's Reign in Judah

⁴¹Now Jehoshaphat had become king of Judah in the fourth year of Ahab, king of Israel. ⁴²He was thirty-five years old at the time and ruled in Jerusalem twenty-five years. His mother was Azubah, the daughter of Shilhi. ⁴³Jehoshaphat followed his father Asa's example and did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. But he did not destroy the pagan shrines on the hills around the city, so the people continued to worship idols and offer incense and sacrifices to them. ⁴⁴All the years Jehoshaphat reigned, he was an ally of the king of Israel.

⁴⁵The other things that Jehoshaphat did, his military exploits and his personal bravery, are all recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ⁴⁶However, he did rid the city of the male prostitutes who served at the pagan shrines that his father Asa had not destroyed.

⁴⁷During this time there was no king over the land of Edom. The country was ruled by a deputy appointed by Jehoshaphat. ⁴⁸Jehoshaphat also built a fleet of ships to sail to the land of Ophir for gold, as his ancestor Solomon had done, but his ships were wrecked in a storm at Ezion Geber and never sailed again. ⁴⁹While he was building these ships, Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, requested that his men sail with the men from Judah, but Jehoshaphat refused. ⁵⁰When Jehoshaphat died, he was buried with his ancestors in the City of David, and Jehoram, who had been ruling jointly with his father, became the next king of Judah.

⁵¹Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, became king of Israel ruling from Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat. He was co-ruler with his father for one year and reigned alone for only one year. ⁵²Ahaziah did all the wicked things his parents, Ahab and Jezebel, had done and all that his evil ancestor Jeroboam, the first ruler of the Northern Kingdom, had done. ⁵³He displeased the Lord as much as his father by his zealous worship of Baal.

2 KINGS

Elijah and King Ahaziah

1 After Ahab died, the Moabites rebelled against the oppression of Israel. ²One day Ahab's son Ahaziah, who had become king of Israel, was leaning against the lattice window in an upper story of his palace. Suddenly it gave way, and he fell, severely injuring himself. So he sent messengers to the Philistine city of Ekron, saying to them, "Go and inquire of Baalzebub, the Lord of Flies, if I will recover from my injuries." ³Then the Lord said to Elijah, "Go to Samaria and intercept Ahaziah's messengers before they reach Ekron. Say to them, 'Isn't there a God in Israel who knows the future? Why are you going to Ekron to the priests of a lifeless idol like Baalzebub?' ⁴Tell them that's an insult to the God of Israel. Also tell them this is what the Lord says about Ahaziah: 'You will never get out of bed. You will stay there until you die.'"

So Elijah went to Samaria and intercepted the messengers on their way to Ekron and told them what the Lord had said. ⁵Then the messengers turned around and went back to the palace to see the king. When Ahaziah saw them, he said, "Why have you come back? You're supposed to be on your way to Ekron." ⁶They said, "A man met us who spoke with great authority, saying, 'Go back and tell the king that it's an insult to the God of Israel to go to a spirit medium for the answer to his future. Because of this, the king will never get out of bed, but will stay there until he dies.'" ⁷The king asked, "What did the man look like?" ⁸They said, "He had lots of hair and was wearing a garment made of animal skin with a leather belt around his waist." The king said, "That was Elijah the Tishbite!"

⁹So he sent an officer with fifty men to arrest Elijah and bring him to the palace. When the officer found Elijah, he was sitting on top of a hill just outside the city. The officer demanded that Elijah come with him to see the king. Then he and his

men mocked Elijah and the God of Israel. After they had had their fun, the officer said, "Come on, you 'man of God.' The king wants to see you." ¹⁰Elijah said, "If I'm a man of God and if the God of Israel has spoken through me, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." Then fire came down from heaven as it had on Mount Carmel and consumed them.

¹¹When the captain and his men didn't come back, Ahaziah sent another captain with fifty men to arrest Elijah and bring him to the palace. The officer and his men went to Elijah with the same demand, and again they mocked him and God. After they had had their fun, the officer said, "Come on, you 'man of God.' The king wants to see you." ¹²Elijah said, "If I'm a man of God and if He has spoken through me, may fire come down from heaven and burn up you and your men." Then fire came down from heaven and consumed them all.

¹³When the second officer and his men didn't come back, the king sent a third officer with fifty men to arrest Elijah. This officer went and fell on his knees in front of Elijah and said, "Man of God, have mercy on us. We're your servants and respect the God of Israel. ¹⁴You've called down fire from heaven two times, and each time it has consumed the officers and their men. But please have mercy and go with us to see the king." ¹⁵Then the Lord said to Elijah, "Go down with them to the palace. Don't be afraid. I'll be with you." So Elijah came down the hill and went with the officer to see the king. ¹⁶He was ushered in to the king's bedroom where Ahaziah lay crippled from his fall. Elijah said, "This is what the Lord says: Because you sent messengers to consult Baalzebub to know the future instead of asking the God of Israel, you will be confined to your bed until you die. And it won't be long." Then Elijah turned and left.

¹⁷Not long afterward, Ahaziah died, just as the Lord had said he would. Ahaziah had no son of his own, so Joram, another son of Ahab, became the next king of Israel. This was in the second year of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, who was reigning jointly with his father in Judah. ¹⁸All the other things that Ahaziah did are recorded in *The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel*.

Elijah Taken Bodily to Heaven

2 The time came when the Lord was about to take Elijah to heaven bodily by a whirlwind. Early one morning as Elijah and his helper Elisha were preparing to leave Gilgal, ²Elijah said to Elisha, "The Lord wants me to go and visit our school at Bethel, but I want you to stay with our students here at this school." He said this to test Elisha's commitment. But Elisha answered, "As surely as the Lord lives, I will not leave your side." So the two of them walked the seven miles to Bethel to see how the young men were doing. ³The students at the School of the Prophets came out to meet them. A little later they said to Elisha, "Did you know that the Lord is going to take Elijah away from you today?" Elisha said, "Yes, I know. The Lord has told me, but don't tell Elijah that I know."

⁴Later that day Elijah said to Elisha, "The Lord wants me to go on to Jericho, but I want you to stay here." Elijah again was testing Elisha's commitment. But Elisha said, "As surely as the Lord is alive, I will not leave your side." So they went on to Jericho, about thirteen miles east of Bethel. ⁵At Jericho there was another school, and the students there also came out to meet them. A little later they said to Elisha, "Did you know that the Lord is going to take Elijah away from you today?" Elisha said, "Yes, I know. The Lord has told me, but don't tell Elijah that I know."

⁶By this time it was late in the afternoon and Elijah said to Elisha, "The Lord wants me to go to the Jordan River, but I want

you to stay here." For a third time Elijah was testing Elisha's commitment. But Elisha answered, "As surely as the Lord lives, I will not leave your side." So they walked together another five miles until they reached the Jordan River not far from Mount Nebo. ⁷Fifty students went with them and stood at a distance as the two men approached the Jordan. ⁸Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up and hit the water with it. The river divided, and the two of them walked over on dry ground.

⁹After they crossed, Elijah knew that the Lord would take him. So he said to Elisha, "What would you like me to do for you before I leave?" Elisha answered, "I pray that I'll receive a double portion of the Holy Spirit that the Lord has given you." ¹⁰Elijah said, "You've asked a hard thing. I don't have the power to decide that. If the Lord lets you see Him take me away, He'll give you what you asked for. But if He doesn't, He's decided not to give you what you've asked." ¹¹As they were walking along talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire pulled by fiery horses came racing toward them and separated the two men. Then a twisting wind swept Elijah up into the chariot and he was whisked away toward heaven. ¹²Elisha cried out, "Father Elijah! I see the chariots of Israel and the horsemen!" Then the chariot and the horses disappeared.

In grief, Elisha tore his outer robe in half. ¹³Then he picked up the mantle that had fallen from Elijah's shoulders and headed back to the Jordan River. ¹⁴He rolled up the mantle and said, "Where is the power of the God of Elijah?" Then he hit the water with it and the river parted as it had for Elijah. And Elisha walked across on dry ground.

¹⁵The students from Jericho saw it and said to each other, "Look! The power of the Spirit that was on Elijah is now on Elisha!" They ran to meet him and bowed in respect as they had done for Elijah. ¹⁶They asked, "Where did the Lord take your master Elijah? There are fifty of us ready to look for him. Maybe the Lord

buried him on top of one of the mountains or in a valley somewhere." Elisha answered, "There's no need for you to go looking for him. He didn't die. He was taken to heaven bodily, so you won't find his grave anywhere." ¹⁷The students insisted because they wanted to make sure that Elijah had not just died. So Elisha finally let them go. ¹⁸Three days later they came back to the school at Jericho where Elisha was and reported that they hadn't found a thing. Then Elisha said, "Didn't I tell you that Elijah was taken to heaven? But you had to go looking for him anyway."

Elisha's Miracles

¹⁹Now while Elisha was at the school in Jericho, the men of the city said to him. "As you can see, this town is well situated, but the water here is bad and as a result, people have gotten sick from it. It's even affected the soil so we can't grow good crops." ²⁰Elisha listened and said to them, "Go and bring me a new bowl filled with salt." So they did as he said. ²¹He took it and went out to the city spring and dumped the salt in it. He said, "This is what the Lord says: 'The water in this spring is now healed and never again will it cause death or keep the land from producing good crops.'" ²²From that moment, the water of the city was pure, just as Elisha had said.

²³Then Elisha left Jericho and went to visit the school at Bethel. As he was walking along, a mob of young ruffians came out of one of the towns to make fun of him and of Elijah's disappearance in a heavenly chariot which they had heard about. They shouted and cursed at Elisha, saying, "Hey, Baldy! Are you going up next? Are you going up next?" ²⁴Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Elisha. He stopped, turned to face them and said, "May the Lord punish you for what you're doing." Then two bears came out of the nearby woods and chased the young men, mauling all forty-two of them. For the next fifty years, all through

Elisha's ministry, no one dared ridicule his ministry. ²⁵After Elisha had visited the school at Bethel he went on to Mount Carmel and then returned to Samaria.

War Between Moab and Israel

3 Joram, the son of Ahab, became king of Israel in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and reigned over Israel from Samaria for twelve years. ²Although Joram did evil in the sight of the Lord, he was not as wicked as his father Ahab or his mother Jezebel. The reformatory work of Elijah and Elisha was having a marked effect on the people. This led Joram to tear down the altar and image of Baal that his father had set up. ³But he continued to worship the golden calves that his ancestor Jeroboam had made and to do all the evil things that he had done.

⁴The Moabites were under the control of Israel. They were sheep traders, and every year, they had to supply Israel with one hundred thousand lambs and wool from one hundred thousand sheep. ⁵After Ahab and Ahaziah had died and Joram had taken over, Mesha, king of Moab, rebelled against Israel. ⁶So Joram mobilized his troops and set out from Samaria to put down the Moabite rebellion. ⁷He also sent a message to Jehoshaphat, saying, "The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Can you come and help me put down this rebellion?" Jehoshaphat and his son Jehoram agreed to help and said, "We are as you are. Our people are one with your people and our horses and chariots are your horses and chariots." ⁸So they joined forces and Jehoshaphat said to Joram, "From what direction should we attack?" Joram answered, "I think we ought to take the long way around and go south through the wilderness of Edom and attack the Moabites from that direction."

⁹Joram and Jehoshaphat asked the king of Edom to join them, which he did. After marching for seven days the troops began running out of water for them-

selves and their animals. ¹⁰When the king of Israel heard about it, he said, "What? Don't tell me we don't have enough water! If that's the case, our three armies are done for. We're at the mercy of the Moabites. All they have to do is come and wipe us out. Did the Lord bring us all this way to die?" ¹¹Jehoshaphat said, "Is there a prophet of the Lord nearby to whom we could go for advice?" One of the officers of Joram said, "Elisha, son of Shaphat, lives not far from here. He was Elijah's servant and has now taken his place." ¹²Jehoshaphat said, "The Lord is with him. Let's go to see him." So the three kings went to see Elisha.

¹³When they came to him, Elisha greeted them, then said to the king of Israel, "What do you and I have in common? Why don't you go to the prophets of Baal that your father and mother worshiped?" Joram said, "I can't do that because I believe it was the Lord's plan for us to take our troops this way. But it looks as if the Lord brought us out here to hand us over to the Moabites. We want to know what to do." ¹⁴Elisha said, "Don't blame the Lord. It was your idea to take the long way around. As surely as the Lord lives whom I serve, if Jehoshaphat's troops weren't along, I wouldn't even listen to you. But because he serves the Lord, I'll see if I can find out what the Lord wants to do for you."

¹⁵Then he turned to his servant and said, "Go find a musician." Soon the servant came back with a harpist who played for the three kings to quiet their spirits.

¹⁶While the harpist was playing, Elisha was praying. The Lord spoke to him, saying, "This is what I want you to tell the kings: By this afternoon, the Lord wants your men to dig ditches all over the valley. ¹⁷Then you'll begin to see the hand of the Lord. There will be no wind or rain, but all the ditches will fill with water and there will be enough for all your troops including their animals.

¹⁸This is something very small for the Lord to do, and in addition, He'll give you

victory over the Moabites. ¹⁹You will take all their major cities and are to do what invading armies do. Cut down their fruit-bearing trees, stop up their springs and strew their fertile fields with stones."

²⁰The troops dug the ditches, and the next morning at the time of sacrifice, water came flowing down the valley from the direction of Edom, and all the ditches were filled with water.

²¹In the meantime the Moabites heard that the kings of Israel, Judah and Edom were on their way to attack them from the south. So every man, young and old, who could carry a sword was called up and stationed at the border. ²²As they looked down the valley and saw the morning sun shining on the ditches, the water looked as red as blood. ²³They said to each other, "Look! That's blood! Those kings must have gotten into a fight among themselves. Let's go down and plunder their camp and see what we can find."

²⁴As the Moabites came into the valley, the Israelites and their allies saw them coming and hid. After the Moabite troops arrived, the Israelites suddenly attacked. When the Moabites saw that they were losing the battle, they turned and ran. The Israelites went after them, invaded their land and slaughtered them unmercifully. ²⁵They not only destroyed the Moabite cities, but as the troops went, they picked up stones and threw them into the fertile fields until they were full of stones. They also stopped up the wells and cut down all the fruit-bearing trees.

Finally, only the capital Kir Hareseth was left for them to take. Then the Israelites and their allies surrounded the capital and army units equipped with slings were put on the front lines. ²⁶When the king of Moab saw that the battle for holding the city was lost, he decided to attempt to escape to Syria. He took seven hundred swordsmen and tried to break through the enemy lines, but the units armed with slings picked off the swordsmen as they came through the city gates. ²⁷When he saw that escape was futile, he

took his firstborn son who was to succeed him on the throne and sacrificed him to his god on top of the city wall. This act by their king made the people of the land despise Israel even more. So the kings regretted that they had attacked the city and returned to their own land.

Elisha and the Poor Widow's Oil

4 One day the wife of one of the men who had attended the School of the Prophets came to Elisha and said, "My husband suddenly died. You know how much he loved the Lord. But now his creditors have come and want to take away our two sons and sell them as slaves to pay our debts." ²Elisha said, "What would you like me to do for you? Tell me what you have in your house that's saleable." The young widow said, "Nothing, except a little olive oil." ³Elisha said, "Go to your neighbors and borrow all the empty jars you can, as many as they'll let you have. ⁴Take them home, close the door and have your sons help you pour the olive oil from your jar into the other jars until all of them are full."

⁵She did what Elisha had said, borrowed all the jars she could, went home and closed the door. Then with her sons handing her the jars, she began pouring oil. ⁶"Bring me another jar," she said. Her son responded, "There are no more jars." Then the oil in her jar stopped flowing. ⁷She went and told Elisha that all the jars she had borrowed were full. He said to her, "Go and sell the oil and pay off your debts, and you'll have money left over for you and your sons to live on." And that's what she did.

Elisha Raises the Rich Woman's Son

⁸One day Elisha went to the town of Shunem where a wealthy woman lived. When she heard him speak, she urged him to come to her house for a meal, which he did. He also accepted her invitation to eat with them any time he was in town. ⁹One day she said to her husband, "I can tell that Elisha is a prophet

and a holy man of God. ¹⁰Let's build a small room for him on the roof. We could put a bed, table, chair and candlestick in it and invite him to stay here whenever he's in town." Her husband liked the idea and agreed.

¹¹One day Elisha went up to his room to rest. ¹²Before lying down, he called his servant Gehazi and said to him, "Go tell the woman of the house I would like to talk to her." So Gehazi went and got her. She came and stood outside the open door wondering why the prophet had called for her. ¹³Elisha said to Gehazi, "Tell her that I appreciate all the trouble she's gone through to make a place for me to stay. Ask her if there is something I can do for her. Does she want me to put in a good word for her to the king in Jerusalem or to the army commander in charge of the city, or is there something else that she needs?" So Gehazi told her what Elisha had said. She responded, "I have all I need and I'm very comfortable living here among my own people." ¹⁴Then she left. Gehazi told Elisha what she had said. Elisha asked, "What can we do for her?" Gehazi said, "She doesn't have children, and they aren't getting any younger. I'm sure she would like to have a son of her own." ¹⁵Elisha said, "Go and ask her to come back." Gehazi did, and this time Elisha talked to her directly. ¹⁶"Gehazi told me that you have all you need, but you don't have any children. This time next year you will give birth to a son." She said, "Man of God, don't get my hopes up by lying to me." ¹⁷But she did become pregnant and about the same time the following year, she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had said.

¹⁸The child grew, and one day during harvest time, he went with his father out to the field to join the reapers. ¹⁹It was hot and suddenly the boy cried out, "My head! My head!" The father said to one of his servants, "Quick, carry him home to his mother." ²⁰The servant did as he was told. The boy's mother held him in her lap, but he lay there listless until

noon, and then he died. ²¹She carried him upstairs to Elisha's room, laid him on the prophet's bed, closed the door and left. ²²She asked her husband to let her take a servant and a donkey to go quickly to look for Elisha. ²³Her husband said, "Why do you want to go looking for him today? It's not a special Sabbath nor is it time for the festival of the new month." She said, "Don't worry. All will be well." ²⁴So he let her go. She had the servant saddle a donkey for her and then said to him, "Lead the donkey as fast as you can and don't slow down unless I tell you to."

²⁵So she and the servant left hurriedly and found Elisha at Mount Carmel about fifteen miles from Shunem. When Elisha saw her coming, he said to Gehazi, "Isn't that the Shunammite woman?" ²⁶Run and ask her if everything is all right or if something has happened to her husband or son." Gehazi ran to meet her but she avoided his questions. ²⁷When she got to Elisha, she got off the donkey, fell on her knees crying and in anguish grabbed his feet. Gehazi tried to pull her away, but Elisha said, "Don't stop her; leave her alone. She's in a lot of pain, and the Lord has not told me why." ²⁸Finally she spoke, sobbing, "Did I ask you for a son? Didn't I tell you not to get my hopes up by lying to me? Now the boy is dead."

²⁹Elisha turned to Gehazi and said, "I want you to run as fast as you can to her house. Tuck the bottom of your robe into your belt and hurry. Here, take my walking stick and when you get there lay it on the boy's face. Don't let anyone stop you, and don't stop to talk to anyone. Now go!" ³⁰The woman said, "I will not leave until you come with me." So Elisha followed her home. ³¹Meanwhile, Gehazi ran ahead and laid Elisha's walking stick on the boy's face, but there was no response. Then he ran back to meet Elisha, saying, "I did what you said, but nothing happened."

³²When Elisha got there, he went up to his room and found the dead child lying on his bed. ³³He closed the door, fell on

his knees and prayed earnestly to the Lord, asking Him to return life to the boy. ³⁴Then he got up, laid on top of the boy, face to face, eye to eye, mouth to mouth and hands to hands. As he stretched himself out on the boy's body it began to grow warm. ³⁵Elisha got up, paced the floor and continued praying to the Lord. Then he stretched himself out on the boy's body a second time. This time the boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. ³⁶Elisha got up, called Gehazi and said, "Go and get the Shunammite." Gehazi did so, and when she came, Elisha said to her, "Pick up your son; the Lord has given him back to you." ³⁷She could see that the child was alive. She fell on her knees in front of Elisha, bowing low to the ground in a gesture of extreme gratitude. Then she went over and picked up her son. Holding him close, she left the room, crying for joy.

Elisha and the Pot of Stew

³⁸Elisha returned to visit the school at Gilgal again, and he found that a severe drought had hit the area. He called for a meeting and then told Gehazi to make a large pot of stew so when the meeting was over, he and the students could eat together. ³⁹One of the students decided to help Gehazi and went out into the field to get some plants. He found a vine full of wild cucumbers and picked as many as he could carry in the fold of his robe, came back, cut them up and threw them into the pot without knowing what they were. ⁴⁰When the meeting was over Elisha and the young men sat down to eat. The stew was dished up, but when the students tasted it they cried out, "Elisha! This stew is poisonous!" And they refused to eat it. ⁴¹Elisha said, "Someone bring me some meal." When they gave it to him, he dumped it into the pot. Then he told Gehazi to give the young men a fresh serving of stew. When they tasted it, it tasted good and it didn't hurt them.

Elisha Feeds Over One Hundred Students

⁴²While he was there a man from Baal Shalishah brought Elisha twenty small loaves of barley bread baked from the firstfruits of his harvest, along with some other freshly picked heads of grain from his field. Elisha thanked him and told Gehazi to serve the bread to the students. ⁴³Gehazi said, "We have over a hundred students. That will only give each man a couple of bites!" Elisha answered, "Serve the bread. The Lord says, 'They'll have plenty to eat and there will even be some left over.'" ⁴⁴Gehazi did as he was told, and the young men ate until they were full. There was even some left over, as the Lord had said.

Naaman's Leprosy

5 Naaman was a commander of the Syrian army under King Benhadad II. He was highly respected because he was a brave soldier, and the Lord had used him to punish Israel by giving him many victories. But he had the beginning signs of leprosy. ²In one of the Syrian raids on Israel, Naaman's men carried off a young girl who became his wife's servant. ³One day she said to her mistress, "I wish my master would go to see the Lord's prophet in Samaria. He'd cure him of his leprosy." ⁴When Naaman came home, his wife told him what the girl had said. So he went to see the king and asked him what he should do.

⁵The king said, "By all means, go. I'll send a letter of introduction along with you to give to the king of Israel." So Naaman left and took with him seven hundred fifty pounds of silver, a hundred and fifty pounds of gold and ten sets of fine clothes. ⁶The letter from Benhadad to Joram, king of Israel, read, "I am sending one of my officers to you to be healed of his leprosy. His name is Naaman, and he'll tell you more about himself." ⁷When the king of Israel read the letter he was so upset that he tore his robe and said, "Does Benhadad think that I'm God?"

Does it look like I have the power of life and death? Why is he sending me this leper? Is he trying to use this as an excuse to pick a fight with me?"

⁸Elisha heard about it, so he sent a message to King Joram, "Why has the king of Israel torn his robe? Send the man to me to be healed so he can know the loving kindness of God and that there's still a prophet of the Lord in the land of Israel." So Joram sent Naaman to see Elisha. ⁹Naaman took his horses and chariots and went to Elisha's house and stood outside the door. ¹⁰The prophet sent his servant out to tell him to go and wash seven times in the Jordan River, and his skin would be restored and he would be healed.

¹¹But Naaman felt insulted and said to himself, "I thought the man would at least come out to see me, pray to his God, wave his hand over the diseased spot and heal me. But all he did was ask me to dip in the little Jordan River. ¹²We have bigger, cleaner rivers in Syria to bathe in. Why should I do it here? Even the Abana and the Pharpar rivers in the city of Damascus are cleaner than the rivers in Israel. Why didn't he tell me to wash in them?" Then he left in a rage. ¹³But his servants stopped him and said, "Wait! If the prophet had asked you to do something great, wouldn't you have done it? So why not wash in the Jordan River. You've got nothing to lose!" ¹⁴Naaman listened and decided to do as Elisha had told him. He went to the Jordan River and dipped his whole body in the water seven times. As he came up the seventh time, suddenly, his body was firm and healthy again like that of a young man. His leprosy was gone!

¹⁵With great joy he returned with his servants to Elisha's house. Elisha came out to meet him, and Naaman said, "Now I know that there is no god in all the world like the God of Israel. Please let me give you something to show my appreciation and gratefulness." ¹⁶Elisha replied, "As the Lord God of Israel lives whom I serve,

I will not let you give me something for what the Lord has done." Naaman insisted and begged Elisha to at least take something, but he refused. ¹⁷Then Naaman said, "If you won't take anything, then let me take two mule-loads of soil from Israel back home with me so I can walk on the same ground that Israel walks on, because I accept the Lord your God as my God and will never again offer sacrifices to any god but Him. ¹⁸May the Lord God of Israel forgive me for one thing. When King Benhadad goes into the temple of the god Rimmon, he asks me to go with him so he can lean on my arm, for he is old and unsteady on his feet. When he bows before his god, I have to bow with him, but I won't do it to worship. May the Lord forgive me for this."

The Greed of Elisha's Servant

¹⁹Elisha said, "The Lord understands. Go in peace." So Naaman left and had gone only a short distance ²⁰when Elisha's servant Gehazi thought, "My master was too easy on him. He should have taken everything the man offered him. As surely as the Lord lives, I'm going after this Syrian to get whatever I can." ²¹So Gehazi quickly followed Naaman. When Naaman saw him coming, he stopped his chariot, got down and asked Gehazi, "Is everything all right?" ²²Gehazi answered, "Everything's fine. It's just that my master wanted me to catch up with you to ask you for some help. Two ministerial students from the hill country of Ephraim have just come by who are very poor. Elisha was wondering if you could let them have a seventy-five pounds of silver between them and two sets of clothes."

²³Naaman said, "Of course! Here take a hundred and fifty pounds of silver, seventy-five pounds for each of them, and two sets of clothes each. He gave the silver and the clothes to two of his servants to carry because the silver was heavy. So they went with Gehazi back to Elisha. ²⁴When they came to the side of a hill

near Elisha's house, Gehazi said to Naaman's servants, "Thank you so much for your help. I can take care of this from here." And he sent them away. ²⁵Then he hid the gifts and went on to the prophet's house. When he walked in the door, Elisha said to him, "Where were you?" Gehazi lied, "Nowhere. I've been here all the time."

²⁶Then Elisha said, "Why are you lying? Wasn't I there in spirit when you ran after Naaman and he stopped his chariot to greet you? Was this the time to take money or clothes? Is it right to profit from the loving kindness of God and use it to buy vineyards, olive groves, flocks and herds or to hire servants for yourself? ²⁷Naaman's leprosy will now be on you and on each generation of your descendants." Immediately Gehazi developed leprosy, and he left Elisha's house with patches of skin as white as snow.

The Floating Ax Head

6 One day the students from the School of the Prophets at Jericho said to Elisha, "The place where we meet is too small for us. ²Let's go to the Jordan River and cut some wood to enlarge these classrooms." Elisha agreed. ³Then one of them said, "Why don't you come with us?" Elisha said, "All right, I'll come."

⁴So he went with them. When they got there, they began cutting down trees. ⁵As one of the students was chopping down a tree, the head of his ax flew off the handle into the river. He cried out, "Oh, no! It was borrowed!" ⁶Elisha asked, "Where did it fall?" and the student showed him. Elisha cut a stick, threw it into the water where the ax head had fallen, and the iron ax head came floating to the top. ⁷Elisha said, "Quick! Get it, before it floats away!" The student reached out and grabbed it.

The Syrian Army Blinded

⁸During this time, King Benhadad II of Syria was conducting border raids into Israel with great success. After confer-

ring with his officers he carefully picked a place to set up camp.⁹ Then Elisha sent word to Joram, king of Israel, "Don't go near that place, because the king of Syria is waiting there in ambush."¹⁰ So the king warned his troops not to go near there as Elisha had said. This happened time and time again.

¹¹Benhadad really got upset over this. So he called his officers together, and said, "Which one of you has been telling the king of Israel about our plans?"¹² One of the officers answered, "Not one of us, Your Majesty. It's Elisha the prophet who tells King Joram everything we plan, even in the privacy of your tent."¹³ Benhadad said, "Then let's go get him. Find out where he is and bring him here." The officers sent out spies and learned that Elisha lived in the little town of Dothan, about ten miles northeast of Samaria.¹⁴ Then the king of Syria sent a detachment to Dothan to get Elisha and bring him back with them. They left that night, and by morning, they had surrounded the whole town.

¹⁵When Elisha's servant got up and went out to get wood to make breakfast, he saw that the Syrian troops with their horses and chariots had surrounded the place. He came running back into the house and said frantically to Elisha, "The Syrians have surrounded the whole town! What will we do?"¹⁶ Elisha said, "Don't be afraid. We have a stronger force on our side than they have on theirs."¹⁷ Then Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open my servant's eyes so he can see." The Lord answered Elisha's prayer, and his servant looked outside and saw the surrounding hills full of horses and chariots of fire.¹⁸ As the Syrian troops streamed into town heading for Elisha's house, Elisha prayed, "Lord, take away their sight." The Lord answered Elisha's prayer and the whole detachment instantly became blind.¹⁹ Then Elisha went out to meet them as they were groping their way down the street and said to them, "This really isn't the city where

you want to go. Come, follow me, and I'll take you to the man your king is really after." So they followed him and he led them to Samaria.

²⁰After they got there, Elisha asked the Lord to open their eyes. The Lord did and when the men looked around to see where they were, they saw that they were in Samaria, surrounded by Israelite troops.²¹ The king of Israel said to Elisha, "Should I kill them?"²² Elisha said, "No, that's not what the Lord wants you to do. We don't even kill men we capture in combat, much less men like these. Feed them well, because I'm sure they're hungry after marching most of the morning. Let them eat and drink, and then send them back to their units."²³ So that's what the king did. He ordered a feast for them and after they had finished eating, he sent them back to Benhadad. This so impressed the Syrian king that he ordered all raids on Israel stopped.

The Siege of Samaria

²⁴But a few years later, Benhadad decided to wage an all-out war against Israel and he and his troops surrounded Samaria.²⁵ It wasn't long before the city ran out of food. But the siege continued and the famine became so severe that a donkey's head sold for two pounds of silver, and half a pint of pigeon droppings sold for two ounces of silver.²⁶ One day as Joram was walking along the city wall inspecting the troops, a woman called up to him, "Help me, Your Majesty! Help me!"²⁷ The king said, "If the Lord doesn't do something to help us, there's nothing I can do. I cannot get grain from an empty threshing floor or wine from an empty winepress."²⁸ But what's your trouble?"

She replied, "This other woman said to me, 'Let's eat your baby first, then we'll eat mine.'²⁹ I finally agreed and cooked my baby to keep the rest of the family from dying, then the next day we were supposed to do the same with her baby. I told her, 'It's your turn.' But she had hidden her baby and refused to share him

with us.”³⁰ When the king heard that, he tore his robe in horror. When he did, the people saw that he was wearing sackcloth underneath, and they realized that he truly sympathized with them.³¹ Then he said, “May the Lord strike me dead, if I don’t take off Elisha’s head for not warning me ahead of time about this siege.”

³² Now Elisha was in his house not far from Samaria talking with some of the city fathers and leaders of Israel. Before the king and his men got there, Elisha interrupted the conversation and said, “Our king is sending someone here to cut off my head. Let’s lock the door. His executioner is almost here and the king is not far behind.”³³ Before they finished their discussion, the officer knocked on the door, but they wouldn’t let him in. Soon the king came and demanded that they open the door. When they did, he said to them, “I want Elisha! Why should I keep waiting for the Lord to do something? The people demand action, and I intend to do something to help them.”

7 Elisha said, “In twenty-four hours the siege will end. The Lord says, ‘By this time tomorrow, ten pounds of the best wheat flour or twenty pounds of the best barley flour will sell for as little as two-fifths of an ounce of silver, right outside the city gates.’² One of the king’s officers said, “That could never happen. Do you think the Lord will rain wheat and barley from heaven just to help us?” Elisha answered, “Because you doubt what God says, you will see it happen, but you won’t eat any of it.” The king decided to wait one more day.

The Syrians Break the Siege and Flee

³ Late that afternoon four men with leprosy were sitting outside the city gate. They said to each other, “Why sit here until we die?”⁴ They won’t let us into the city to beg for food because they hardly have enough to eat themselves. If we stay here, we’ll starve to death. Let’s go over

to the Syrians. The worst they can do is kill us, but they might give us something to eat and let us live.”

⁵ As it began to get dark, the men made their way over to the Syrians. When they got there they found the camp empty—not a single soldier anywhere.⁶ The Lord had caused the Syrians to hear what sounded like a huge army with horses and chariots coming to rescue Samaria. When the Syrians heard this they had said to each other, “The king of Israel has hired Hittites and Egyptians to attack us. Let’s get out of here!”⁷ So they ran for their lives and left everything behind—horses, donkeys, equipment and plenty of food.⁸ Just after this, the four lepers reached the camp and found it empty. They went into one tent which was filled with food. They ate and drank, then took the silver, gold and clothing they found and hid them. They did the same thing in the next tent.

⁹ After hiding some more things, they said to each other, “This isn’t right. We can’t keep all this for ourselves. Let’s go back to Samaria and tell the king what we’ve found. If we wait until daylight, the Lord will surely punish us for not sharing with others.”¹⁰ So they ran back to the city in the dark and at the gate, called out to the guards, “We went to ask the Syrians for food and found the whole camp empty. No one is there! But the horses, donkeys and all the equipment and tents are intact! Come and see!”¹¹ The guards shouted the news to the people in the palace.¹² The king was already in bed. He got up and said to his officers, “I’ll tell you what’s happening. The Syrians know that our people are starving, so they have left their camp and hidden, thinking that we would come out to see why their camp was empty. Then they’ll attack and take the city without a fight.”¹³ One of the officers spoke up, “Let’s send some men on the five horses we’ve got left to scout things out. If they’re caught and killed, they’ll only die a day or so earlier, because if nothing happens soon, we’ll all be dead.”

¹⁴The king agreed and sent out two chariots and four horses. He said to the drivers, "Go and find out what happened, but be careful." ¹⁵So the men rode off and found the camp of the Syrians completely empty. They followed their trail for twenty miles all the way to the Jordan River. It was strewn with equipment and clothes that the Syrians in their haste had thrown away. So the men headed back to Samaria and reported to the king just as it began to dawn.

¹⁶When the people were told what had happened, they rushed out the city gates and looted the camp of the Syrians. That day ten pounds of the best wheat flour or twenty pounds of the best barley sold for two-fifths of an ounce of silver, just as the Lord through Elisha had said. ¹⁷The king had put the same officer in charge of the city gates who had gone with him to see Elisha the day before, and when he opened the gates to let the people out, he was knocked down and trampled to death. So he died and did not even taste the food. ¹⁸Elisha had said to the king, "Tomorrow ten pounds of wheat flour or twenty pounds of barley flour will sell for two-fifths of an ounce of silver." ¹⁹The king's officer had retorted, "That will never happen. Do you think the Lord will rain wheat and barley from heaven just to help us?" Elisha answered, "Because you doubt what God says, you will see it happen, but you will not eat any of it." ²⁰And it happened exactly as Elisha had predicted, for the people trampled the officer to death at the city gate.

The King Restores the Widow's Land

8 Before the siege of Samaria, the Lord had told Elisha that there would be a famine in the land, so he had warned the Shunammite woman, "You need to leave and find another place to live because a severe famine is coming to this part of the country. It will last for seven years." ²Though the woman had lost her husband, she took her family and went to live with the Philistines in the fertile

plain west of the mountains. ³At the end of seven years she returned and found that her house had been confiscated because it had been empty. So she went to the king to ask for it back.

⁴When she got to Samaria, the king was talking to Elisha's servant Gehazi, asking him about all the great things that Elisha had done. ⁵Just as Gehazi was telling how Elisha had raised the son of a Shunammite woman to life, the woman came in to ask the king about her house. When Gehazi saw her, he said to the king, "My lord, there's the woman I'm telling you about, the one whose son was raised to life." ⁶The king asked her to come forward and tell him exactly what had happened. So she did. Then she asked him for her house. The king called for one of his officials and said to him, "See that this woman gets back everything that belongs to her, including whatever income there was from the crops that her land may have produced while she was gone."

The Death of the Syrian King

⁷After Elisha had healed Naaman and had told Joram, king of Israel, to feed the Syrian troops, the Lord told him to go to Damascus to see Benhadad II, King of Syria, who was seriously ill. When the king heard that Elisha was coming, he said to Hazael, one of his trusted officers, ⁸"Take a gift and go to meet Elisha and ask him to find out from the God of Israel if I'll get well from this sickness." ⁹Hazael loaded forty camels with the finest goods that Damascus produced and went to meet Elisha. He greeted him, saying, "Your servant, King Benhadad, has sent these gifts to you and would like you to ask the God of Israel whether he'll recover from his illness or not." ¹⁰Elisha said, "Thank him for his gifts, but I don't need them. Tell him that his disease is not fatal, but that he will soon die by other means."

¹¹Then Elisha stared at Hazael with such a horrified look that Hazael felt very uneasy. All of a sudden Elisha started cry-

ing. ¹²Hazael said, "Why are you crying?" Elisha said, "Because I know the evil that you'll do to Israel. You'll be the next king of Syria and will invade our country, set fire to our cities, kill our young men, smash our babies against the rocks and rip open our pregnant women." ¹³Hazael said, "I'm a nobody. How could I ever become king?" Elisha said, "The Lord has shown me that you will be king."

¹⁴Then Hazael went back to Damascus and Elisha returned to Israel. When Hazael got back to the king, Benhadad, who by now was very weak, said to Hazael, "Tell me, what did Elisha say?" Hazael answered, "He told me that your disease is not fatal." ¹⁵The next day Hazael went in to see the king, took a thick cloth from the head of the bed, dipped it in water as if to cool the king's face, but held it there, smothering him until he died. Then Hazael proclaimed himself king of Syria.

Jehoram's Reign in Judah

¹⁶In the fifth year of the reign of Ahab's son Joram as king of Israel, Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, became king of Judah. ¹⁷Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he came to the throne and ruled Judah from Jerusalem for eight years. ¹⁸He did the same evil things that the sons of Ahab were doing in Israel and sinned greatly against the Lord. He was led into this by Athaliah his wife who was Ahab's daughter. ¹⁹But because of the promise the Lord had made to David, He was not willing to destroy Judah.

²⁰When Jehoshaphat died and Jehoram, who had ruled jointly with his father, became king, the Edomites rebelled against the heavy taxation that Judah had imposed on them. ²¹Then Jehoram took all his chariots and engaged the Edomites in battle across the border at Zair. The Edomites surrounded Jehoram and his chariot forces, but during the night the king and his men were able to break through the Edomite lines. Though scattered, they were able to make

their way back home. ²²From then on the Edomites rebelled against the heavy-handed domination of Judah. Soon afterward the city of Libnah also revolted and became independent. ²³All the other things that Jehoram did are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ²⁴Jehoram reigned only eight years and he died. They buried him in the royal tombs of the kings of Judah in Jerusalem and his son Ahaziah ruled in his place.

Ahaziah's Reign in Judah

²⁵It was in the twelfth year of the reign of King Joram (Israel's count), that Ahaziah began his reign in Judah. ²⁶Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king and he ruled Judah from Jerusalem for only one year. His mother was Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and granddaughter of King Omri. ²⁷Ahaziah did as much evil in the sight of the Lord as Ahab's sons because of the influence of his mother Athaliah.

²⁸Ahaziah joined forces with his uncle Joram against Hazael, to take back the city of Ramoth in Gilead. During the battle Joram was severely wounded. ²⁹So he left and went to his other palace in Jezreel to recover. Ahaziah stayed with the troops and took Ramoth back from the Syrians. Then on the way home he stopped at Jezreel to see how Joram was doing.

Jehu Anointed King of Israel

9 At this time the prophet Elisha called for one of the students at the School of the Prophets and said to him, "Run as fast as you can to Ramoth in Gilead with this little jar of olive oil. ²When you get there, look for a man named Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat and grandson of Nimshi. He's one of Joram's top officers. When you find him, tell him that I sent you, and ask to see him alone. ³Get him into a room by himself, pour some oil on his head and say, 'The Lord anoints you king of Israel.' Then open the door and run. Get out of there as fast as you can!"

⁴So the young man headed quickly for

Ramoth in Gilead with the oil that Elisha had given him. ⁵When he got there he found some army officers in an outdoor meeting. He said, "I have a message from Elisha for one of the officers." Jehu answered, "I'm Jehu. Which one of us is it for?" The young man replied, "For you, sir." ⁶Jehu got up and went inside with the young man. Then the young man poured oil on Jehu's head and said, "The Lord God of Israel says, 'I anoint you king of Israel. ⁷You are to destroy the house of Ahab because the time has come for me to punish Jezebel for killing my servants and my prophets. ⁸The whole house of Ahab must perish, including the king. Every male must be put to the sword whether he's young or old, bond or free. ⁹The house of Ahab will come to an end just as did the house of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and the house of Baasha, the son of Ahijah. ¹⁰As for Jezebel herself, she must not be buried, but dogs will eat her body outside her palace in Jezreel.'" Then the young man opened the door and ran.

¹¹When Jehu came out, one of the officers said, "Is everything all right? What did this madman have to say that was such a secret?" Jehu said, "You know how these people are. They say a bunch of nothing." ¹²The officer said, "Stop avoiding the question. Tell us what he said." Then Jehu said, "All right, I'll tell you. He poured oil on my head and said, 'The Lord God of Israel anoints you king of Israel.'" ¹³When they heard this all the officers stood, took off their cloaks and spread them on the stairs. As Jehu stood on the top step, they blew the trumpet and shouted, "Jehu is king!"

King Joram of Israel Killed

¹⁴So Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat and grandson of Nimshi, was proclaimed king of Israel in place of Joram. Israel's main fighting force was still stationed at Ramoth in Gilead in case Hazael, king of Syria, decided to counterattack. ¹⁵King Joram had been wounded in the battle at

Ramoth and had come to Jezreel to recover. Jehu said to his fellow officers, "If you accept me as your king, then don't go to Jezreel and tell what has happened. Stay with me." ¹⁶Then he got in his chariot and took off for Jezreel to see Joram who was there recovering, and Ahaziah, king of Judah, who was visiting him.

¹⁷When the watchman on the city wall by the tower of Jezreel saw Jehu and his men in the distance, he called out, "I see chariots coming this way!" When the king got the message, he said to his guards, "Send out a horseman to find whether this means peace or war." ¹⁸The man rode out and when he met Jehu, he shouted over to him on his chariot, "Are you coming to Jezreel for peace or war?" Jehu shouted back, "It's none of your business! Fall in behind me!" And the man did. Then the watchman on the wall of Jezreel shouted, "The man isn't coming back!" ¹⁹So the king sent out a second horseman to see whether this meant peace or war. When the man got there and shouted the same question to Jehu, Jehu shouted back, "It's none of your business! Fall in behind me!" And the man did. ²⁰The watchman in Jezreel shouted, "This man isn't coming back either! And the driving of the lead chariot looks like the driving of Jehu, the grandson of Nimshi, for he's driving like a madman!"

²¹Joram said, "Quick! Get my chariot ready!" Then Ahaziah told his men to get his chariot ready. So the two kings rode out together, each in his own chariot, to see Jehu. They met near the field that once belonged to Naboth, the Jezreelite, whom Jezebel had killed just because Ahab wanted his property. ²²King Joram shouted to Jehu, "Are you coming in peace?" Jehu shouted back, "How can there be peace as long as the witchcraft and idolatry of your mother Jezebel prevails throughout the country!" ²³Joram got the message, turned his chariot around and headed back to the city. As he went he shouted to Ahaziah, "This is treason!" ²⁴Jehu drew his bow and hit

Joram between the shoulders, and the arrow went straight into his heart. He slumped over in his chariot and died. ²⁵Then Jehu shouted to Bidkar, the chariot officer behind him, "Pull aside and get the king's body out of the road. Dump it in the field that belonged to Naboth. Remember when we rode beside Ahab, and the prophet Elijah came to see him? ²⁶Do you recall what the prophet said? 'In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth they will lick up the blood of your son.' So pick up the body and throw it in Naboth's field."

King Ahaziah of Judah Killed

²⁷When Ahaziah, the king of Judah, saw all this, he turned his chariot around and headed toward Beth Haggan intending to go to Jerusalem. Jehu went after him, shouting to his men, "Go after him and kill him!" They shot and wounded him as he was going up to Gur near Ibleam but he got away. Then he changed his course from the mountainous region to the level plain of Megiddo. From there he escaped toward the south. They finally caught him near Samaria and brought him to Megiddo where Jehu had him executed. ²⁸Ahaziah's servants took his body back to Jerusalem in his chariot and buried him in the royal tombs in Jerusalem.

²⁹It was in the eleventh year of King Joram in Israel (Judah's count) that Ahaziah had become king of Judah.

Queen Jezebel Killed

³⁰When Jehu arrived in Jezreel, Jezebel heard about it. So she painted her eyes, arranged her hair and stood watching the street from a window of the palace. ³¹As Jehu's chariot came through the palace gates, she called to him, "You're just like Zimri! He killed King Baasha! Now you've killed your master just like that murderer did! Are you coming in peace or not?" ³²Jehu looked up at her and shouted, "Who up there is on my side? Who?" Two or three eunuchs looked

down from the window. ³³When they did, Jehu shouted up at them, "Throw her down!" So they picked up Jezebel and threw her out the window. As she hit the pavement her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses, and Jehu drove his chariot over her body.

³⁴Then he and his men went inside and sat down to eat. When they finished, he said to his men, "Go and take that woman's body and bury it. After all, she was a king's daughter." ³⁵They went outside but found nothing left except her skull and the bones of her hands and feet. The city dogs had already eaten her body and carried parts of it throughout the city. ³⁶So they went back and said to Jehu, "There's no body left, only the woman's skull and some bones." Jehu remembered aloud, "This is what the Lord told Elijah, that dogs would eat her body on the palace grounds in Jezreel. ³⁷He also said that pieces of her body would be found all over the city so that no one could point to a place and say, 'Here's where Jezebel is buried.' It has happened, just as the Lord said."

Ahab's Sons Killed

10 There were seventy sons of Ahab living in Samaria. So Jehu wrote a letter and sent a copy to the officials of the city and to the guardians of Ahab's descendants which said, ²"Since Joram is dead and you're in charge of Ahab's descendants and have horses and chariots and live in a fortified city, ³choose the most worthy descendant of Ahab and make him king. Then get ready to fight for him." Jehu did this to find out whose side they were on. ⁴When they read the letter, they were terrified and said, "If Jehu killed two kings who couldn't defend themselves against him, how can we?"

⁵So the palace managers, the city governor, the elders and the guardians of Ahab's descendants sent a message to Jehu, saying, "We're on your side and we'll do anything you say. But we will not choose someone as king. You do what-

ever you think best.”⁶ Jehu sent a message back to them, “If you’re on my side and are ready to do what I say, then bring the heads of Ahab’s sons to me in Jezreel by tomorrow morning.” Altogether there were seventy male descendants of Ahab in and around the city being supported by the people.⁷ When the city fathers got Jehu’s letter they took all seventy princes, executed them, put their heads in baskets and sent them to Jehu in Jezreel.

⁸The messengers arrived in Jezreel the next day and told Jehu that they had the heads of Ahab’s seventy sons in baskets as he had requested. Then he said to his men, “Take the heads and put them in two piles by the city gate and leave them there until tomorrow morning.”⁹ The next day Jehu went out and stood by the city gate and said to the leaders of the people, “I want you to know that you’re not guilty of the death of your king. I’m the one who killed him. But who killed the rest of Ahab’s sons? The people in Samaria.¹⁰ I want to remind you of what the Lord told us through the prophet Elijah.¹¹ He said that the house of Ahab would be destroyed and that his chief supporters, his friends and his priests would also die. No one would survive. I’ve been asked by the Lord to carry out that prophecy, and I intend to do so.”

Relatives of Ahaziah Killed

¹²Then Jehu left and headed for Samaria. At Beth Eked, called the Shepherd’s Camp, he met some of the relatives of Ahaziah and said to them, “Who are you?”¹³ They said, “We’re sons of Ahaziah’s brothers and are on our way to Jezreel to pay our respects to King Joram and his mother Jezebel.”¹⁴ Jehu said to his men, “Take them.” So his men took them and executed them by the shepherd’s well at Beth Eked, all forty-two of them. There were no survivors.

The Rest of Ahab’s Family Killed

¹⁵Then Jehu and his men continued on

to Samaria. On the way they met Jehonadab, the son of Recab. Jehu greeted him, “Are you with me or against me?” Jehonadab said, “I’m with you.” Jehu said, “Good. Give me your hand.” Jehonadab did, Jehu helped him up into his chariot and said to him,¹⁶ “Come with me to Samaria and see my zeal for the Lord God of Israel.” Then they took off.¹⁷ When Jehu got to Samaria, he killed all those who were left from Ahab’s family. No one survived. This was what the Lord through Elijah had said would happen.

Worshippers of Baal Killed

¹⁸Then Jehu called the people together and said to them, “If you saw Ahab serve Baal, you haven’t seen anything yet.¹⁹ I want all the prophets and priests of Baal and all those who minister to him to come together for a gigantic feast. We’re going to have a festival in honor of Baal such as you’ve never seen. There will be more sacrifices than you can imagine. Be sure that no one who ministers to Baal stays away. If he does and I find out, I’ll kill him.” Jehu was lying because he wanted to get everyone together in one place and kill them all at one time.²⁰ Jehu said, “I proclaim a day of worship in honor of Baal.”²¹ Then he sent word throughout Israel announcing the time and place for this special day, and all those who ministered to Baal and served him came to Samaria. Not one of them stayed home. They all crowded into the temple of Baal and filled the place to overflowing.²² Jehu said to the caretaker, “Bring out robes for those who worship Baal.” He did.²³ Then Jehu and Jehonadab, son of Recab, went inside and Jehu said to the ministers of Baal, “Look around and make sure that no one is here who worships the Lord. If so, he should leave.”²⁴ Then the priests brought sacrifices and other offerings into the heathen temple. Jehu had posted eighty men outside with swords and told them, “If you let any of the people inside escape, it’ll be your life for theirs.”

²⁵A priest of Baal made the first burnt offering. Once the worship was under way, Jehu went outside and ordered his officers and men to go in and kill everyone who was there. So they went in with drawn swords, killed everyone there and dragged their bodies outside. Then they went back into the inner shrine of the temple, ²⁶took out the sacred pillar and set it on fire. ²⁷They tore down the temple of Baal, and what was left of it, the people later used as a public restroom.

²⁸So for a while Jehu wiped out all Baal worship from Israel. ²⁹But he didn't turn away from the other evil practices that Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, had started. He continued to worship the two golden calves that Jeroboam had set up at Bethel and Dan. ³⁰Then the Lord said to Jehu, "Because you've put an end to Baal worship and made sure that no descendant of Ahab will ever again sit on the throne of Israel, I will guarantee the kingdom to you and your descendants for four generations." ³¹In spite of this, Jehu did not give up his wicked ways or keep the commandments of the Lord with all his heart. He continued to promote worship of the golden calves that Jeroboam had started.

The Death of Jehu

³²Then the Lord began to reduce the size of Israel's territory by letting Hazael, the king of Syria, take some of it. ³³He took all territory east of Jordan, the whole land of Gilead and Bashan as far south as the Aroer River where the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh lived. ³⁴Everything else that Jehu did, all his victories, are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ³⁵When Jehu died he was buried with his fathers in Samaria, and Jehoahaz his son became king. ³⁶Jehu had reigned over Israel from Samaria for twenty-eight years.

Queen Athaliah Reigns in Judah

11 When Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel and the mother of King Ahaziah, heard that Jehu had killed her son, she ordered all the male descendants of David executed. She was determined that if her own offspring couldn't rule over Judah, neither would any descendant of David. ²But Jehosheba, the half-sister of Ahaziah, took her infant nephew Joash, the son of Ahaziah, and his nurse and hid them in the bedroom of her house. So Joash was the only descendant of David who was not executed. ³Jehosheba was the wife of the high priest, so Joash and his nurse lived at the Temple for the next six years while Athaliah the queen mother ruled Judah.

The Boy Joash Crowned King of Judah

⁴In the seventh year of Athaliah's reign, Jehoiada the high priest, husband of Jehosheba, asked the captains of the palace guards, the foreign mercenaries and the royal bodyguards to come to the Temple. He made them take an oath to the Lord not to tell what he was about to show them. Then he brought out young Joash, the only surviving descendant of David and the rightful king of Judah. ⁵He said to the captains, "Those of you who are assigned to duty this coming Sabbath are to divide into three units. ⁶One third of you will guard the entrance to the palace, one third will be at the Sur Gate leading from the palace to the Temple and the other third by the gate at the rear of the palace. ⁷Those of you who are scheduled to be off this Sabbath shall come and stand guard inside the Temple because we will make Joash our new king. ⁸Station yourselves around the young prince with spears and shields that I'll give you, and kill anyone who dares to fight. Then go with the young king and protect him wherever he goes."

⁹The officers agreed to do everything that Jehoiada the high priest had commanded. Each officer took his men who

were beginning their Sabbath duty and those who were off duty and gave them their assignments. ¹⁰Then Jehoiada gave the officers, and their off-duty men who had come, spears and shields left from David's army. These had been kept in the Temple. ¹¹The off-duty men stationed themselves inside the Temple facing east toward the entrance. They lined up several ranks deep in front of the sacrificial altar from the northern to the southern corner of the courtyard, protecting the little prince. ¹²Then Jehoiada brought young Joash out, put a crown on his head and gave him a copy of the law containing the covenant of the Lord. He anointed him and proclaimed him king. Then all the people who had come to worship clapped their hands and shouted, "Long live the king!"

The Death of the Queen

¹³Athaliah the queen heard this noise coming from the Temple on Sabbath, so she went there to find out what was going on. ¹⁴When she arrived, she saw young Joash standing between the pillars at the entrance to the Sanctuary with a crown on his head, her own officers and bodyguards with their spears and shields in front of him and trumpeters beside him. The people were rejoicing and shouting, "Long live the king!" Then Athaliah tore her robes and shouted, "Treason!" ¹⁵Jehoiada the high priest saw Athaliah and ordered the officers to go after her and kill her and anyone who tried to defend her. But he told them not to kill her in the Temple courtyard. ¹⁶So they caught Athaliah as she was trying to escape through the palace stables and killed her there.

¹⁷Then Jehoiada renewed God's covenant between the Lord, the king and his people that they would worship God and Him alone. He also had the king and his people make a covenant between them to be loyal to each other. ¹⁸Then the people went over to the temple of Baal and tore it down. They crushed the

altars and the images of Baal and killed Mattan the high priest of Baal in front of the destroyed altars. While this was happening Jehoiada asked some of the guards to stay at the Temple. ¹⁹He took the rest of the officers and their men, together with the young king, to the palace. They passed the guards on duty without trouble and went on into the palace where Joash took his seat on the throne. ²⁰All the people rejoiced over their new king and the city was at peace because Athaliah, the queen mother, was dead. ²¹Young Joash (also called Jehoash) was only seven years old when he began to reign.

Joash Orders the Temple Repaired

12 It was in the seventh year of the reign of Jehu, king of Israel, that Joash became king of Judah and he ruled from Jerusalem for forty years. His mother's name was Zibiah from the city of Beersheba. ²Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and Jehoiada the high priest taught him what to do. ³But some of the places of pagan worship were still allowed to function and some people went there to offer sacrifices and to burn incense.

⁴However, soon after Joash became king, he called in the priests of the Lord and said to them, "Set aside all the money that the people bring to the Lord, such as census payments, pledges from vows and money from thank offerings. ⁵I want the funds to be used for repairing the Temple of the Lord. Each of you on duty is responsible to work with the treasurers to see that these funds are not used for anything else." ⁶But during the next twenty-three years, the work had gone ahead only halfheartedly. ⁷Then Joash called in Jehoiada and the other priests and said to them, "Why hasn't more been done to repair the Temple all these years? From now on you are to turn the money you get from the treasury over to me, and I'll personally see to it that the Temple is repaired." ⁸The

priests agreed and gave the king the money that the people had brought to the Temple. And the responsibility for overseeing the repairs was taken away from them.

⁹Then Jehoiada took a chest, bored a hole in the lid and put it near the sacrificial altar and later at the entrance to the courtyard. The priests put the money the people gave into the chest. ¹⁰After a large amount of money had been collected, the priests would call Jehoiada the high priest and the king's secretary and they would come and count the money and tie it up in bags. ¹¹Then they recorded the amount they gave to the king's men in charge of repairing the Temple. They, in turn, paid those working for them, such as carpenters, masons, stonemasons and builders. ¹²The construction supervisors also used the money to buy timbers, stones and any other items needed for repairs. ¹³The money was not spent for extra silver basins, wick trimmers, sprinkling bowls, trumpets and other items of silver or gold used in worship. ¹⁴It was used to pay the workmen and to buy the necessary building materials for repairing the Temple. ¹⁵Jehoiada, the high priest, and the royal secretary did not require an accounting of the money from the construction supervisors because they were honest men. ¹⁶The money that came in from restitution payments and from the monetary value of sin offerings was not used to repair the Temple but went to pay the priests as directed by the king.

King Hazael of Syria Threatens Jerusalem

¹⁷About this time, Hazael, king of Syria, attacked the city of Gath in the land of Judah and took it, then turned to attack Jerusalem. ¹⁸Then Joash took all the offerings of silver and gold that his ancestors Jehoshaphat, Jehoram and Ahaziah had given to the Lord and what he had given the Lord over the years, together with the silver and gold already found in the Temple and in the palace, and sent it

all to Hazael as payment for not attacking Jerusalem. Hazael accepted it and took his troops and went back home.

The Death of King Joash

¹⁹All the other things that Joash did are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ²⁰In his last years some of his officials plotted against him and assassinated Joash in his house at Millo, a suburb of Jerusalem on the road going to Silla. ²¹Those responsible were Jozacar (also called Jozabad or Zabad for short), son of Shimeath, and Jehozabad, son of Shomer (also called Shimrith). Joash was buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem, and Amaziah his son reigned in his place in Judah.

Jehoahaz's Reign in Israel

13 In the twenty-third year of Joash, king of Judah, Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, became king of Israel and ruled from Samaria for seventeen years. ²Like his ancestor Jeroboam, Jehoahaz did evil in the sight of the Lord and continued to lead Israel into sin. He never did change his ways. ³The Lord was very displeased with him and let Israel come under the control of Hazael, king of Syria, and also under his son Benhadad III, who defeated Israel time and time again. ⁴Then Jehoahaz prayed to the Lord and asked for His help. The Lord listened because He saw how severely the king of Syria was oppressing the Israelites, and He decided to answer Jehoahaz's prayer, even though he had not changed all his evil ways.

⁵So the Lord sent the king of Assyria to rescue Israel by defeating the Syrians and bringing them under his control. Then the Israelites enjoyed peace once again and could live securely in their own houses. ⁶However, they didn't stop their wickedness but continued to commit the sins that the house of Jeroboam had led them into. Even the sacred tree dedicated to Asherah, the mother goddess of fertility, still stood in the middle of Samaria. ⁷After many battles with

Syria, the army of Israel was reduced to fifty horsemen, ten chariots and ten thousand fighting men. The rest of the army had been destroyed by the king of Syria. ⁸The other things that Jehoahaz accomplished are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ⁹He died and was buried next to his forefathers in the city of Samaria, and his son Jehoash ruled in his stead.

Jehoash's Reign in Israel

¹⁰In the thirty-seventh year of Joash, king of Judah, Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz, became king of Israel and ruled for sixteen years. ¹¹He also did evil in the sight of the Lord and continued in the wicked ways of his ancestor Jeroboam and led Israel still deeper into sin. He never repented or changed his ways. ¹²All the things that Jehoash did, including his victorious war against Amaziah, the king of Judah, are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ¹³Jehoash died and was buried next to his ancestors in the city of Samaria.

The Death of Elisha

¹⁴One of the things that happened during the reign of Jehoash was that the prophet Elisha came down with a fatal illness. When Jehoash the king went to see him and saw how sick he was, he wept and said, "My father, my father! You have been more valuable to Israel than all our horsemen and chariots!" ¹⁵Elisha said to him, "Go and get a bow and some arrows." And the king did. ¹⁶When the king came back, Elisha said, "Take your bow and get ready to shoot. When you do, I'll place my hands over your hands and we'll do it together. ¹⁷Then he told the king to open the window that faced east toward the cities beyond Jordan under Syrian control. He placed his hands over the kings' hands and said, "Shoot!" and the king did. Elisha said, "That was an arrow for the Lord. It was His arrow of victory. You will be the arrow He will use to defeat the king of Syria at the battle of

Aphek." ¹⁸Again he said, "Now take the rest of the arrows and hit the ground with them." The king struck the ground three times and stopped. ¹⁹The prophet was upset with him and said, "You should have hit the ground at least five or six times to show your determination. Then the Lord could have used you to defeat the Syrians and completely destroy them. But now the Lord can use you to defeat the Syrians only three times."

²⁰Then Elisha died and was buried. Every spring, bands of Moabites would invade Israel. ²¹One time they came when the Israelites were in the midst of a funeral. The people saw the Moabites coming and quickly threw the body into Elisha's tomb and ran. As soon as the body touched the bones of Elisha, the man came back to life, stood up and walked out.

War Between Israel and Syria

²²All through the earlier reign of Jehoahaz, Hazael of Syria had oppressed Israel. ²³But the Lord was merciful to Israel in spite of their wicked ways and had compassion on them because of the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He did not abandon Israel nor did He stop caring for His people. ²⁴Eventually, King Hazael of Syria died and his son Benhadad III took over. ²⁵Then Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz, fought against Benhadad and took back the cities and towns that had been taken from his father. Three times Jehoash defeated the Syrians just as Elisha the prophet had said.

Amaziah's Reign in Judah

14 In the second year of Jehoash, king of Israel, Joash, king of Judah, died and his son Amaziah began to reign. ²Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled from Jerusalem for twenty-nine years. His mother was Jehoaddin from Jerusalem. ³He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father Joash had done, but

not as well as his ancestor David. ⁴He worshiped the Lord, but he tolerated other places of worship in the country where the people brought their offerings and sacrificed to other gods. ⁵Once he had control of the country, he executed the officials who had murdered his father. ⁶He did not execute the sons of his father's assassins because it was not allowed by the law of Moses. The law says, "Fathers are not to be executed for the sins of their sons, nor are sons to be executed for the sins of their fathers."

⁷Amaziah defeated ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt after they attacked Judah. He also took the mountain city of Sela by storm and changed its name to Jaktheel (later called Petra).

⁸Then he sent messengers to Jehoash, king of Israel and grandson of Jehu, challenging him to a fight. ⁹But Jehoash sent back this message: "Once a thorn bush in the mountains of Lebanon asked a cedar of Lebanon to give his daughter in marriage to his son. But then a wild animal came along and trampled down the thorn bush. ¹⁰Just because you defeated the Edomites, don't become arrogant. Stay at home and glory in your victory. Why ask for trouble and bring disaster on yourself and your people?"

¹¹But Amaziah wouldn't listen. So Jehoash attacked Jerusalem, and the two kings faced each other in battle at Beth Shemesh in the land of Judah. ¹²Judah was defeated, and every man in Amaziah's army turned and ran for home. ¹³It was during this battle that Jehoash captured King Amaziah of Judah, who had succeeded his father Joash and his grandfather Ahaziah to the throne. Then Jehoash marched from Beth Shemesh to Jerusalem and tore down the city wall from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate, a section of about six hundred feet. ¹⁴Before returning to Samaria, he also took all the silver, gold and valuable articles he could find in the Temple and the royal treasury, plus a number of hostages. But he did

leave Amaziah as king in Jerusalem.

¹⁵Everything else that Jehoash did and all his victories, including his victory over Amaziah, are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ¹⁶When Jehoash died they buried him next to his fathers in the city of Samaria, and his son Jeroboam II, who had ruled jointly with his father, became the next king.

¹⁷Amaziah, king of Judah, lived for another fifteen years after the death of Jehoash, king of Israel. ¹⁸The other accomplishments of Amaziah are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ¹⁹Some officials in Jerusalem laid a plot to kill Amaziah. When he heard about it he fled to Lachish, but his assassins followed him and killed him there. ²⁰They brought his body back to Jerusalem on a horse and buried him next to his fathers in the section of the city called the City of David. ²¹Then the people of Judah took Azariah, the sixteen-year-old son of Amaziah, and made him king of Judah. He was also called Uzziah and had been made co-regent when his father was captured by Jehoash, King of Israel. ²²After he became sole ruler, he took the city of Elath on the Gulf of Aqabah away from the Edomites, rebuilt it and once again made it part of Judah.

Jeroboam II's Reign in Israel

²³In the fifteenth year of the reign of Amaziah, King of Judah, Jehoash, King of Israel, died, and his son Jeroboam II became king in Samaria. Jeroboam ruled the Northern Kingdom for forty-one years. ²⁴He did evil in the eyes of the Lord and followed the example of his ancestor Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who had led the people of Israel into sin. ²⁵He reclaimed the territory of Israel that his enemies had taken from Hamath Pass in the north to the Dead Sea in the south. The Lord had told him through the prophet Jonah that He would do this for him. ²⁶God had seen how His people in Israel, both bond and free, were suffering bitterly and there was no one to help them.

²⁷He would not let Israel be completely destroyed, but had compassion on them and saved them from their enemies through Jeroboam, the son of Jehoash.

²⁸Everything that Jeroboam II did, including his military achievements in recovering the territories of Israel with such cities as Damascus and Hamath, are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ²⁹Jeroboam died and was buried next to his fathers in the royal tombs in Samaria. His son Zechariah became the next king of Israel.

Uzziah's Reign in Judah

15 In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam II, king of Israel, Azariah (also known as Uzziah), the son of Amaziah, began to rule in Judah. ²He was only sixteen years old when he became co-regent with his father. Altogether he ruled for fifty-two years. His mother was Jecoliah from Jerusalem. ³Uzziah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord just as Amaziah his father and Joash his grandfather had done, ⁴except he did not remove the pagan shrines from Judah, and the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there. Even so, the Lord did not forsake Uzziah but gave him many military victories. ⁵However, Uzziah assumed priestly privileges and went into the Holy Place to burn incense. Then the Lord smote him with leprosy, and he was relieved of all his duties, though he was given a house to live in. His son, Jotham, took charge of the country and governed as co-regent until his father died. ⁶All the things that Uzziah did and all his victories are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ⁷They buried him near his father in Jerusalem, and his son Jotham became king.

Zechariah's Reign in Israel

⁸It was in the thirty-eighth year of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam II, became king of Israel. He ruled for only six months. ⁹He did evil in the eyes of the Lord as his fathers had

done. He didn't turn away from the many sins which his ancestor Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, had caused Israel to commit. ¹⁰Now Shallum, the son of Jabesh, plotted against Zechariah, followed him to the city of Ibleam and struck him down in public, killing him. Then he proclaimed himself king, even though he was not of the royal line of Jehu. ¹¹Everything that Zechariah did in his short reign is recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ¹²So the word of the Lord to Jehu was fulfilled when He said that his descendants would be on the throne of Israel for only four generations.

Shallum's Reign in Israel

¹³Shallum took the throne of Israel in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah, king of Judah, and ruled for only one month. ¹⁴Menahem, the son of Gadi, from Tirzah went to Samaria and struck down Shallum and killed him and took the throne. ¹⁵Everything that Shallum did in his brief reign is recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ¹⁶On his way to Samaria, Menahem attacked the city of Tiphshah and killed everyone living there because they had refused to open the gates and let him in. He showed no mercy, even to pregnant women but ripped them open while they were still alive. He did the same thing in surrounding villages.

Menahem's Reign in Israel

¹⁷It was in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Menahem became king of Israel, and he ruled the country for ten years. ¹⁸He did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn from the wickedness of his ancestor Jeroboam, son of Nebat, who led Israel into sin. ¹⁹So the Lord allowed Tiglath Pileser III, the king of Assyria (also called King Pul), to invade Israel. Then Menahem gave him thirty-seven tons of silver to gain his favor and to remain as king of Israel. ²⁰Menahem got this silver from rich men in Israel by forcing each one to pay an extra fifty pieces of

silver in taxes. In addition Menahem also agreed to pay the king of Assyria an annual tribute of silver, gold and fabric. So Tiglath Pileser kept Menahem on as king of Israel and withdrew to his own country. ²¹Everything else that Menahem did is recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. ²²He died and was buried beside his fathers in Samaria, and his son Pekahiah took his place.

Pekahiah's Reign in Israel

²³It was in the fiftieth year of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Pekahiah, son of Menahem, became king of Israel, but he ruled for only two years. ²⁴Pekahiah also did evil in the sight of the Lord and did not turn away from the sins his ancestor Jeroboam, son of Nebat, had caused the people of Israel to commit. ²⁵Pekah, son of Remaliah, one of his top officers, took fifty men from Gilead, went to the fortified royal palace in Samaria and, along with Argob and Arieah, assassinated Pekahiah and took over as king. ²⁶Everything that Pekahiah did is recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

Pekah's Reign in Israel

²⁷It was in the fifty-second year of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Pekah became king of Israel. He actually ruled only eight years, but counting the twelve years he controlled part of Israel, made a total of twenty years. ²⁸But he did evil in the sight of the Lord and did not turn from the sins that his ancestor Jeroboam, son of Nebat, had caused Israel to commit.

²⁹Pekah refused to continue to pay tribute to the Assyrians as Menahem had done. So Tiglath Pileser, the king of Assyria, invaded Israel and took the cities of Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh and Hazor. His armies swept across the territories of Gilead, Galilee, Zebulun and Naphtali and took many captives with them back to Assyria. ³⁰It was in the twentieth year of Jotham, who was ruling Judah, that Hoshea, the son of Elah, killed Pekah, the king of Israel, and

proclaimed himself king. ³¹Everything that Pekah did, his alliance with Syria against the king of Assyria and his war against Judah are all recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

Jotham's Reign in Judah

³²In the second year of Pekah as king of Israel, Jotham began his reign as king of Judah. ³³He was twenty-five years old when he became king and ruled for sixteen years, plus another four years assisted by Ahaz his son. His mother's name was Jerusha, the daughter of Zadok. ³⁴He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord just as his father Uzziah had first done. ³⁵But not all the shrines of pagan worship were removed from Judah. The people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense in those places. Jotham did continue some of the building projects that his father had started, and he also rebuilt the upper gate of the Temple of the Lord. ³⁶Everything that Jotham did is recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ³⁷It was during his reign that Pekah, king of Israel, and Rezin, king of Syria, formed an alliance against Assyria and tried to force Judah to join them. ³⁸Jotham died and was buried alongside his fathers in Jerusalem and his son Ahaz succeeded him as king.

Ahaz's Reign in Judah

16 It was in the seventeenth year of Israel that Ahaz became king of Judah. ²Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign with his father, and he ruled from Jerusalem for sixteen years. He did not follow his father's example but did evil in the eyes of the Lord. ³He followed the example of the kings of Israel and even offered his infant son as a burnt offering to Baal, imitating the cruel practices of the Canaanites and others whom the Lord had driven out of the land. ⁴There was hardly a pagan shrine or altar where Ahaz did not offer sacri-

fices and burn incense, whether on top of a mountain or under some sacred tree.

⁵During his reign Pekah king of Israel and Rezin king of Syria marched against Ahaz and attacked Jerusalem, but could not defeat him. ⁶Rezin did take the city of Elath. He drove out the people of Judah and let the Edomites move in and reclaim the city as their own. ⁷When Ahaz heard that he was about to be attacked again by Pekah king of Israel and Rezin king of Syria, he sent word to Tiglath Pileser, king of Assyria, asking for help. ⁸He took silver and gold from the Temple and from the royal treasury and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria. ⁹So Tiglath Pileser marched against the king of Syria, took Damascus, executed the king and deported many of his people, scattering them across Assyria all the way to Kir.

¹⁰Ahaz went to Damascus to meet the king of Assyria. While there, he saw an impressive altar and sent a miniature model of it back home to Uriah the priest with instructions to make one just like it and put it in the courtyard of the Temple. ¹¹Uriah did as he was told and finished the altar according to specifications before Ahaz returned. ¹²When Ahaz saw the altar, he was very pleased. He inspected it and decided to offer sacrifices on it. ¹³He offered whole burnt offerings and grain offerings on it, poured drink offerings over the sacrifices and sprinkled the blood of peace offerings against the altar the way the priests did. ¹⁴Ahaz ordered the new altar to replace the bronze altar of the Lord. So this altar sat in the courtyard in a straight line with the entrance to the Holy Place instead of the Lord's altar, which he had moved just to the north of it. ¹⁵Then Ahaz ordered Uriah the priest to offer the morning and evening sacrifices on this new, large altar. He ordered his own burnt offerings, grain offerings and drink offerings, as well as those of the people to be offered there. The king also told the priests to sprinkle the blood of the fellowship offerings on the sides of this new

altar and to use the Lord's altar only for prayers and for requesting His guidance.

¹⁶And Uriah the priest did as he was told.

¹⁷The king needed a present for the king of Assyria. So he took the bronze side panels from the carts holding the ten small basins and the twelve bronze oxen supporting the huge basin, replacing them with a base of stone. ¹⁸He removed the royal family's covered platform from the Temple that had been used for Sabbath worship and closed the royal entryway into the Temple. He did all this because he anticipated a visit from Tiglath Pileser to Jerusalem. ¹⁹Everything else that Ahaz did is recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ²⁰Ahaz died and was buried beside his fathers in the royal tombs in Jerusalem, and his son Hezekiah became the next king.

Hoshea's Reign in Israel

17 It was in the twelfth year of Ahaz, king of Judah, that Hoshea overthrew Pekah and proclaimed himself the next king of Israel. He ruled the country from Samaria for nine years. ²He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, but he was not as bad as the kings of Israel before him. ³Hoshea paid tribute to the king of Assyria, first to Tiglath Pileser, who claimed to have put him on the throne in Israel, and then to Shalmaneser, the new king of Assyria. ⁴When Shalmaneser found out that Hoshea had made an alliance with the king of Egypt and had stopped paying tribute to Assyria, he marched against Israel, captured Samaria and put Hoshea in prison.

The Northern Kingdom Falls

⁵Shalmaneser invaded the entire land of Israel and besieged Samaria for nearly three years. ⁶In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured the city of Samaria and took the people of Israel to Assyria. He settled some of them in the city of Halah, others near the Habor River in the district of Gozan and still

others in various cities and towns in the territory of the Medes.

⁷The Lord allowed all this to happen because Israel had sinned so abominably. He had brought them out of Egypt, from under the power of Pharaoh, but they had turned to other gods. ⁸They followed the example of the heathen people around them whom the Lord had driven from the land because of their terrible wickedness. Now His own people were doing the same things. They also followed the example of their leaders and kings who introduced them to many other evil ways. ⁹The people of Israel secretly built places of worship all over the country for their gods, from the large fortified cities to the small villages. ¹⁰They set up images of the fertility goddess Asherah and stone pillars to their gods on the tops of mountains and under every large tree. ¹¹They burned incense to their gods at these places of worship. They followed the example of the local people in other ways connected with such worship which greatly displeased the Lord.

¹²They knew that the Lord had told them not to worship idols, but they defiantly did it anyway. ¹³He had warned them again and again, sending prophets to both the house of Judah and the house of Israel, saying to the people, "Turn from your wickedness and obey the Lord. Keep His commandments and laws which He gave to your fathers when you first came out of Egypt. Listen to the messages He has sent to you through His prophets." ¹⁴But they refused to listen and turned against the Lord just as stubbornly as their fathers had who didn't trust God. ¹⁵They rejected the covenant He had made with their forefathers and the warnings He had sent them. They worshiped pagan gods, imitating the practices of the nations around them. Soon they became like them even though the Lord had warned them, "Do not do as they do." ¹⁶They totally turned away from God's commandments and made

two idols in the shape of young bulls from melted metal. They also made images of the mother goddess Asherah. They followed astrology and worshiped Baal. ¹⁷They even sacrificed their newborn sons and daughters to these gods, practiced witchcraft, consulted demons and did every wicked thing imaginable, greatly displeasing the Lord. ¹⁸So God removed His protection from Israel, but not from Judah at that time.

¹⁹Judah had also turned away from the Lord and didn't keep His commandments. They followed the example of their brothers in Israel, but not to the same extent. ²⁰The Lord turned away from Israel and gave them into the hands of their enemies who plundered their country.

²¹Years before, the Lord had separated Israel from Judah and made Jeroboam king. But Jeroboam had led the Israelites away from the Lord and into idolatry, which grew even worse as the years went by. ²²Israel persisted in their idolatry and wickedness and did not turn from the sins that Jeroboam introduced them to. ²³They continued in their evil ways in spite of the Lord's repeated warnings until He stepped in. They refused to listen, so their country was invaded and they were taken into exile by the Assyrians and scattered throughout the empire, never again to have a land of their own.

People From Assyria Settle in Israel

²⁴Then the king of Assyria brought people in from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva (or Ivvah), Hamath and Sepharvaim to settle in the cities of Israel, including the city of Samaria. ²⁵When they first moved in they didn't honor the God of Israel, so the Lord allowed lions and other wild animals among them and some of the people were killed. ²⁶They said to the king of Assyria, "The people you asked to settle in Israel didn't honor the God of Israel, so He sent lions and other wild animals among them and some of the people have been killed. They don't know how

to honor the Lord of that country.”
²⁷Then the king ordered that one of the priests from the exiled Israelites be sent back home to teach the settlers how to honor the Lord. ²⁸So one of the priests from among the exiles went back and settled in Bethel and taught these new people what to do to honor the God of Israel.

²⁹However, each group of people who settled in Israel brought along their own gods and set them up in the shrines the Israelites had built. ³⁰The people from Babylon set up Soccoth Benoth; the people from Cuth set up Nergal; those from Hamath set up Ashima; ³¹the Avvites set up the gods Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites set up Adrammelech and Anammelech and sacrificed their newborn to them. ³²When they were told about the God of Israel by the priest who lived in Bethel, they chose priests from among themselves to offer sacrifices to the Lord at the pagan places of worship. ³³This was the way they tried to honor the God of Israel while still honoring the gods they had brought with them. ³⁴They continued this practice and worshiped the God of Israel but did not keep His commandments, ordinances or laws that He had given to the descendants of Jacob.

³⁵When the Lord God had made His covenant with the children of Israel, He had said to them, “Do not worship other gods or bow down to them. Do not serve them or offer sacrifices to them. ³⁶The Lord brought you out of the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm. He is the One you are to worship and offer your sacrifices to, and Him alone. ³⁷Be sure you keep my commandments, my ordinances and my laws that I have given you. Do not worship the gods of the land into which you’re going. ³⁸Don’t forget the covenant that I made with your forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and with you. Do not worship other gods. ³⁹Worship the Lord and Him alone. He is the One who will deliver you from your enemies and give you peace.” ⁴⁰But even after those who came to resettle Israel

heard what the Lord had told His people, they still didn’t change their ways.

⁴¹So while they worshiped God, they also worshiped idols and continued in their wickedness, and their children and grandchildren continued to do the same thing.

Hezekiah’s Reign in Judah

18 In the third year of Hoshea, king of Israel, Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, became joint ruler with his father as king of Judah. ²He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign alone and ruled the country for twenty-nine years. His mother’s name was Abi (or Abijah), the daughter of Zechariah. ³Hezekiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord just as his ancestor David had done. ⁴He destroyed the pagan places of worship, crushed the sacred pillars and cut down the poles of the goddess Asherah. He also destroyed the bronze snake that Moses had made in the wilderness because the people had been burning incense to it and had named it Nehushtan, The Bronze God.

⁵Hezekiah put his trust in the God of Israel as no other king of Judah before or after him. In this way he was like his ancestor David. ⁶He held on to the Lord and did not turn aside from following Him. He kept the commandments given to Moses. ⁷The Lord blessed Hezekiah in everything he did. Then Hezekiah rebelled against the king of Assyria and refused to serve him. ⁸He defeated the Philistines from the smallest town to the largest fortified city, including the city of Gaza and its surrounding villages.

⁹In the fourth year of Hezekiah’s co-regency as king of Judah, and in the seventh year of Hoshea, king of Israel, Shalmanezar, king of Assyria, attacked Samaria. ¹⁰During the third year of the siege, Samaria fell to the Assyrians. This happened near the end of the sixth year of Hezekiah’s co-regency and the ninth and last year of Hoshea’s reign in Israel. ¹¹Shalmanezar deported the people of

Israel to Assyria and settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the cities and towns of the Medes. ¹²All this happened because they did not obey the Lord their God; they broke His covenant with them and ignored all that Moses had told the Israelites to do. They refused to listen or obey.

¹³In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's full reign, Sennacherib, the new king of Assyria, attacked the fortified cities of Judah and took many of them. ¹⁴Then Hezekiah sent a message to the king of Assyria who had just taken Lachish, about thirty miles southwest of Jerusalem. Hezekiah said, "I have done wrong by rebelling against you. I'll pay whatever tribute you demand." Sennacherib demanded all the silver and gold that Hezekiah had, and Hezekiah gave it to him—ten tons of silver and one ton of gold. ¹⁵He gave him all the silver and gold found in the Temple and in the royal treasury as he had promised. ¹⁶He even stripped the gold off the doors and doorposts of the Temple, which had been put there to honor the Lord, and gave that gold to the king of Assyria.

King Sennacherib of Assyria Invades Judah

¹⁷But Sennacherib refused to withdraw from the country. Instead he sent two high-ranking officials and his top military commander with a large force to attack Hezekiah and take Jerusalem. They came up from Lachish and occupied the road by Washerman's Field near the Upper Pool. ¹⁸The field commander and two officials went to the gate of Jerusalem and called for Hezekiah. Then Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah and palace administrator, Shebna the royal secretary, and Joah son of Asaph and in charge of the royal archives, went out to meet them.

¹⁹Rabshakeh, the Assyrian official who could speak Hebrew, was spokesman for the group. He said to them, "Tell your king that this is what Sennacherib, the great king of Assyria, says: 'On what are

you basing this great confidence of yours? ²⁰Is it based on your power and military skill? Do you think you can rebel against the military might of Assyria? Who can save you? ²¹Are you going to depend on Egypt? The king of Egypt is like a walking stick that you lean on and it breaks. You can't depend on him to hold you up. ²²Are you going to depend on your God? You have destroyed all the high places and altars where your people used to worship Him and have made them worship only at the altar in Jerusalem. Do you think your God is pleased with this? ²³Come, let's make a deal. We'll give you two thousand horses if you can put two thousand men on them. But you can't. ²⁴You're no match for even the lowest-ranking Assyrian officer and his men, much less against the whole army of Assyria, even if you could get Egypt to help you with chariots and horsemen. ²⁵Besides, do you think I have taken all your fortified cities on my own? No, the Lord your God, through His own prophet, said that Assyria should come and punish both Israel and Judah. And He has helped me do it.'"

²⁶When the Assyrian official finished, Eliakim, Shebna and Joah said to Rabshakeh, "Please talk to us in Aramaic; we can understand it. Don't talk to us in Hebrew because the people sitting on the wall are listening to us." ²⁷Then Rabshakeh said, "It wasn't only to you and your king that Sennacherib was speaking. He also sent me to speak to your people, including those sitting on the wall. If we besiege your city, you are all doomed to eat your own filth and drink your own urine."

²⁸Then he shouted in Hebrew loud enough to be sure that the people could hear him, "Listen to what Sennacherib, the great king of Assyria, is telling you. ²⁹He says, 'Don't let Hezekiah lead you into thinking that he can save you. It will never happen. ³⁰Don't let him tell you to trust the Lord to deliver you out of the hands of the Assyrian army. That isn't

possible. ³¹Don't listen to Hezekiah. Listen to what the king of Assyria has to say. Come out of the city and peacefully surrender to me. Then I will allow you to eat from your own grapevine and fig tree and drink water from your own well ³²until I come back to resettle you in a land much like your own. It has a lot of vineyards and produces rich harvests of grain. It's a land of olives and honey. So why should you die? Don't let Hezekiah fool you into thinking that the Lord will deliver you. ³³Have the gods of any other nation delivered their people out of the hands of the king of Assyria, including the God of the Northern Kingdom of Israel?

³⁴Where were the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where were the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah? Did the God of Israel save Samaria and her people? ³⁵Can you point to any god who has saved his people from the great king of Assyria? Then what makes you think that the Lord your God will deliver Jerusalem?"

³⁶But the people sat on the wall and said nothing, because Hezekiah had told them not to answer the Assyrians, no matter what they said. ³⁷Then Eliakim, Shebna and Joah went back into the city to see Hezekiah. They tore their robes in anguish and told him everything the Assyrians had said.

Isaiah's Counsel

19 When Hezekiah heard what the Assyrians had said, he tore his robe in distress and put on sackcloth. Then he went to the Temple to pray. ²He also asked Eliakim, Shebna, Joah and the chief priests to wear sackcloth and go to the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, to see if there was any word from the Lord.

³They said to Isaiah, "Hezekiah wants us to tell you that today is a day of disgrace and embarrassment for Israel. We are like a woman who comes to the point of delivery and can't give birth to her baby because she's too weak. ⁴The king of Assyria sent two of his officials and his top commander with a large army to take

Jerusalem and defeat the God of Israel. May the Lord hear their insults and punish them for their arrogance. So pray for the remnant of our people who are left."

⁵When Isaiah heard what the messengers of Hezekiah had to say, ⁶he said to them, "Tell Hezekiah that this is what the Lord says: 'Don't be afraid of the king of Assyria and don't let the insults of his officials disturb you. I heard what they said about me.

⁷I will cause Sennacherib to hear a rumor about trouble back home that will make his spirit tremble. He will return to his own country and after he gets there, I will cause him to fall by the sword.'"

Hezekiah's Prayer

⁸Meanwhile, Rabshakeh and the two officials heard that Sennacherib had taken Lachish and was on the move. So they left Jerusalem to find out if what they had heard was true. It was. Sennacherib had taken his troops to Libnah, about twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem. ⁹He had heard that an Egyptian army under King Tirhakah from Ethiopia was coming to attack him. So he had marched his men over to Libnah to keep the Egyptians from helping Hezekiah. When the officials he had sent to Jerusalem came to him at Libnah and told him that the people refused to surrender, he sent them back with a letter to Hezekiah which said: ¹⁰"Don't let your God fool you. Don't depend on what your God says when He tells you that you won't fall into my hands. ¹¹Haven't you heard what the kings of Assyria have done to other countries? Do you think you can do any better? ¹²Did the gods of Gozan, Haran and Rezeph deliver their people? What happened to the inhabitants of Betheden in Telassar? All of them were killed! ¹³And what happened to the kings of the cities of Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah?"

¹⁴When Hezekiah got the letter from the king of Assyria, he read it, then went into the Temple and spread it before the Lord. ¹⁵Then he prayed, "O Lord God of

Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you are the only true God, the One who is over all the kingdoms of this world. You created the heavens and the earth. ¹⁶Open your ears and listen to how this man Sennacherib is insulting you. Open your eyes and see the terrible predicament your people are in. ¹⁷It's true that the kings of Assyria have conquered all these countries and destroyed their cities. ¹⁸They took the gods of these nations and destroyed them and threw them in the fire because they were gods of wood and stone carved by man's own hand. ¹⁹But you are the living God. You are our God, the Lord God of Israel. Deliver us from the hands of the Assyrians so everyone will know you, and only you, are the one true God."

***The Word of the Lord
Against Sennacherib***

²⁰Then the Lord sent a message to Hezekiah through the prophet Isaiah, saying, "I have heard your prayer concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria. ²¹This is my answer to him: 'The virgin daughter of Zion mocks you. The daughter of Jerusalem tosses her head in scorn. ²²Do you realize whom you have insulted? Do you know against whom you have raised your voice and lifted up your eyes with pride? Against me, the God of Israel! ²³Your messengers have blasphemed me. You said that with your chariots you have conquered my cities on the highest mountains in Lebanon. You said that you cut down the biggest cedars, the finest cypress, the choicest pines and that you have penetrated the deepest forests. ²⁴You said that you dug wells in countless foreign countries and drank from the waters of many lands. You said that since the mountains and deserts couldn't stop you, neither would the rivers of Egypt.

²⁵'Haven't you heard that I control the destiny of nations? Don't you know that I planned what would happen before you were born? I was the One who helped

you conquer fortified cities and turn them into piles of stone. ²⁶The people who lived in those cities were powerless to stand against you. They were afraid of you and confused. They were like tender plants in the field, like gardens on rooftops scorched by the sun before they mature. They fell at your onslaught.

²⁷'But I know all about you. I know where you live, and I know your comings and goings. I know how furious you are against me. ²⁸Because of your arrogance and anger, I will put a hook in your nose and a bit in your mouth. I will make you return home the same way you came.'

²⁹'As for you, Hezekiah, this will be a sign to you: This year your people will find enough to eat from what grows wild in the field and the next year from what springs from that. Then in the third year they will plant their own grain and harvest it. They will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ³⁰The remnant of Judah will flourish like plants that put their roots deep into the soil and produce rich harvests. ³¹Jerusalem will survive the siege because of God's strong love for His people. A remnant will come out of Jerusalem and a band of survivors out of Mount Zion. The power of God almighty will accomplish this.

³²"The Lord says about Assyria: 'The king of Assyria will neither enter Jerusalem nor shoot even one arrow against it. His troops will not lift their shields against the daughter of Zion, neither will they build a siege ramp against her walls. ³³He will return home the way he came and will not touch this city. ³⁴I will defend Jerusalem and save it for my name's sake and the sake of my servant David.'

An Angel Defeats Sennacherib's Army

³⁵That same night the Lord sent an angel into the Assyrian camp who killed one hundred and eighty-five thousand men. When the people of Judah got up the next morning and looked out over the wall, the Assyrians were all dead.

³⁶When Sennacherib heard what had happened to the army at Jerusalem, he withdrew from guarding the approach to Egypt and returned with his men to Nineveh by the same route he had come. ³⁷One day back home while he was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer came in and killed him with their swords. Then they escaped to the land of Ararat, and Esarhaddon, another of Sennacherib's sons, became the next king.

Hezekiah Healed

20When Sennacherib, king of Assyria, first invaded Judah, Hezekiah was very ill and almost died. The prophet Isaiah went to see him and said, "The Lord says you should put your house in order because you won't recover from this illness. You will soon die."

²When Hezekiah heard that, he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, ³"O Lord, you know how I've tried to obey you and how I love you with all my heart. I've tried to do what's right and good in your eyes." Then the king began to cry bitterly. ⁴After Isaiah had given the Lord's message to the king, he left. But before he crossed the courtyard, the Lord said to him, ⁵"Go back to Hezekiah and say to him, 'This is what the Lord, the God of your ancestor David says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will heal you. The day after tomorrow you'll be up, strong enough to go to the Temple to worship me. ⁶I will add fifteen years to your life and will deliver Jerusalem from the hand of the Assyrians. I will defend this city for the sake of my name and for the sake of my servant David.'" ⁷So Isaiah turned around and told Hezekiah what the Lord had said. He also told the king's servants to make a poultice of figs and put it on the infection and their master would get well. They did what Isaiah said and the king began to recover.

⁸Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What

sign can you give me so I can know that the Lord will completely heal me and that the day after tomorrow I'll be strong enough to go to the Temple to worship Him?" ⁹Isaiah said to him, "The Lord will give you a sign that He will heal you and it will be a sign that can only come from Him. Would you like Him to move the shadow on the palace stairway forward ten steps or back ten steps?" ¹⁰Hezekiah said, "It's easier for the sun to go down and for the shadow to increase. So if the sign is from the Lord, then let the sun come back and the shadow on the stairway shorten by ten steps." ¹¹Then Isaiah prayed to the Lord and the Lord shortened the shadow on the stairway by ten steps.

The Babylonians Visit Hezekiah

¹²While all this was happening, Merodach-Baladan, the deposed king of Babylon, was looking for allies to fight against the Assyrians who had taken over his country. He learned from his astronomers about the change on the sundial and the reason for it, so he sent envoys to Hezekiah with a present congratulating him on his recovery and asking about the God who could perform such miracles. ¹³Hezekiah welcomed the envoys, but instead of telling them what great things the Lord had done for him, he showed off the riches of Jerusalem, including all the silver, gold, rare spices and oil stored in the royal treasury, as well as everything in his armory. There was nothing that Hezekiah didn't show them. ¹⁴After they left, Isaiah came to see Hezekiah and said, "What did these visitors see while they were here? And where did they come from?" The king said, "They came from some distance and risked their lives to get here. They were envoys from the deposed king of Babylon." ¹⁵Isaiah said, "But what did they see?" Hezekiah answered, "I showed them everything. There's nothing in my palace, in the royal treasury and in the armory that I didn't show them. I wanted Jerusalem to look good in their eyes."

¹⁶Isaiah said, "Now hear the word of the Lord: ¹⁷The time will come when the Babylonians will rise up against the Assyrians and become a world power. Then they will come against Jerusalem and take all the treasures you and your fathers have so carefully stored up. They will take everything you have shown them to Babylon. Nothing will be left. ¹⁸Even some of your own sons will be taken captive and castrated and will serve as eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." ¹⁹Hezekiah realized that what he had done was wrong and repented of his sin. When he learned that the Lord's message also meant that there would be peace and security at least during his lifetime, he said, "The Lord is kind and full of mercy."

The Death of Hezekiah

²⁰Everything that Hezekiah did, his great deeds and how he built the tunnel that brought water from the Gihon spring into the city to form the Pool of Siloam is recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ²¹Hezekiah died and was buried beside his fathers, and his son Manasseh became the next king.

Manasseh's Reign in Judah

21 Manasseh was conceived after Hezekiah was healed. His father appointed him as co-regent and successor, so when he was twelve years old, he began to rule and reigned for a total of fifty-five years. His mother was Hephzibah, a woman whom the Lord delighted in. ²He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord and followed the example of the original inhabitants of the land whom the Lord had driven out. ³He rebuilt the pagan places of worship that his father Hezekiah had destroyed. He built altars to Baal and erected wooden poles to the fertility goddess Asherah just like Ahab, the wicked king of Israel had done. He even bowed down and worshiped the sun, moon and stars and served them. ⁴He built altars in the

Temple though the Lord had told the children of Israel never to do so because He alone was to be worshiped there. ⁵He built altars to the sun, moon and stars in both courts of the Temple.

⁶He sacrificed his infant son as a burnt offering. He practiced witchcraft and sorcery, and brought back mediums through whom he consulted the spirits, though the Lord had forbidden this under penalty of death. Manasseh did much evil to provoke the Lord to anger. ⁷He took one of the carved poles made for Asherah, the mother goddess of fertility, and set it up in the Temple, though the Lord had said to David and Solomon, "I will put my name on this Temple and on Jerusalem, for I have chosen this city to be mine out of all the cities in Israel. ⁸I will not drive out my own people from the land that I promised to give them as long as they obey me and keep my commandments and do what Moses told them to do." ⁹But Manasseh didn't listen and led the children of Israel into greater and greater sins until they were even worse than the heathen nations of the land whom the Lord had driven out.

¹⁰Then the Lord said to Isaiah and the other prophets, ¹¹"Manasseh, king of Judah, has greatly sinned. He has done more detestable sins than the Amorites ever did and has led the people into doing the same. ¹²Therefore, this is what the Lord God of Israel says: 'I will bring such destruction on Jerusalem and Judah that everyone who hears about it will sit up and take notice. ¹³I will use the same measuring line for Jerusalem that I used for Samaria, the same plumb line that I used on the house of Ahab. I will pick up Jerusalem and wipe it dry as one wipes a dish, wiping it and then turning it upside down and wiping it on the other side. ¹⁴I will depart from the remnant of my people and turn them over to their enemies. They will be attacked, and their enemies will plunder their land. ¹⁵My people have done evil ever since their fathers first came out of Egypt and worshiped a golden calf and

have done so to this very day.’”

¹⁶Manasseh killed many innocent people, including the prophets who delivered the Lord’s messages to him, even the prophet Isaiah whom he had sawed in half. He also persecuted those who listened to the prophets until the streets of Jerusalem were covered with blood from one end of the city to the other. In addition, he led Judah into great evil.

¹⁷Everything that Manasseh did, including his wickedness, is recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ¹⁸Manasseh died and slept with his ancestors. He was buried in the palace garden, which originally belonged to a man called Uzza. Then Amon, named after the Egyptian sun-god Amen, ruled in his father’s stead.

Amon’s Reign in Judah

¹⁹Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he ruled Judah for only two years. His mother was Meshullemeth, the daughter of Haruz, from the city of Jotbah. ²⁰He followed in his father’s footsteps and did evil in the eyes of the Lord. ²¹He worshiped the idols his father had made and bowed down to the sun, moon and stars. ²²He turned away from the God of his ancestors and neither kept the Lord’s commandments nor walked in His ways. ²³His officials plotted against him and assassinated him in his own palace. ²⁴Then the people killed all those who had assassinated him and made his son Josiah king. ²⁵Everything that Amon did is recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ²⁶They buried him in his tomb in the garden of Uzza and Josiah ruled in his father’s place.

Josiah’s Reign in Judah

22 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign and he ruled Judah from Jerusalem for thirty-one years. His mother was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah, from the city of Bozkath. ²He did what was right in the

eyes of the Lord following David’s example, not turning to the right or to the left.

The High Priest Finds the Book of the Law

³In the eighteenth year of his reign while Josiah was having the Temple repaired, he sent Shaphan, the royal secretary, with a message to the high priest. ⁴Josiah said to Shaphan, “Go to see Hilkiah and get a report on how much money the priests have collected from the people entering the Temple. ⁵Then tell him to take the money and give it to the men in charge of restoring the Temple so they can pay the workers. ⁶The carpenters, masons and other workers should be paid, and the supervisors need money to buy the necessary timber and stone. ⁷They are good, honest men and don’t need to keep a special account for me of every last penny they spend.”

⁸That same day Hilkiah, the high priest, told Shaphan, the royal secretary, that he had found a copy of the book of the law written by Moses buried in the debris of the Temple. He gave it to Shaphan to read for himself. ⁹Shaphan read parts of it and got so excited, he decided to take it to the king. Hilkiah said, “Wait. Tell the king that his servant has emptied the chests of money the priests collected and has given it to the workers and supervisors at the Temple for wages and materials as he requested.” ¹⁰Then Shaphan went and showed the king the book of the law that Hilkiah the priest had found in the Temple. Josiah asked him to read some of it to him.

¹¹When the king heard about the blessings and curses that were written in the book and the consequences that follow disobedience, he tore his royal robe in anguish and said to Shaphan, ¹²“This is terrible. Go and get Hilkiah the high priest, Achbor, the son of Micaiah, Asaiah my personal attendant and your son Ahikam. ¹³Then go to the prophetess and find out from the Lord what all this means. The people of Judah have a right

to know what is written because they haven't heard the law read to them since the days of my great-grandfather Hezekiah, and that's been almost a hundred years ago. If I understand it right, the Lord is greatly displeased with us as a people because of what our fathers did, and they have passed their lifestyle of disobedience on to us."

¹⁴So Shaphan, Hilkiah, Achbor, Asaiah and Ahikam went to see Huldah the prophetess who lived and taught in the new northern section of Jerusalem called The Second Quarter. She was the wife of Shallum who was in charge of the vestments of the priests as well as the royal wardrobe. ¹⁵She welcomed them, and they told her what had happened.

She then said to them, "The Lord God of Israel says, 'Go back and give the king this message: ¹⁶Your understanding of what is written is correct. I will destroy Jerusalem and bring disaster on this place and on the people just as it says in the book of the law that you have read. ¹⁷The people have turned away from me and have made gods for themselves. They have offered sacrifices to these idols and worshiped them. They have sinned greatly by such wickedness. Something must be done to stop this, and I will see that it is done.'"

¹⁸Then Huldah added, "Also give the king this message from the Lord: 'Concerning the words you read, ¹⁹because you took them to heart and humbled yourself and showed your grief over what would happen to Jerusalem and to the people and prayed and wept in my presence, ²⁰I will not destroy Jerusalem or bring disaster on my people during your lifetime. You will live in peace and be buried beside your fathers right here in Jerusalem.'" Then the men left and took her messages to the king.

Josiah Restores True Worship

23 Then Josiah called all the leaders of Jerusalem and Judah and Benjamin together. ²They went to the

Temple of the Lord. The priests, the prophets and the people of Jerusalem, rich and poor alike, all went with him. Then the king read to them from the book of the law written by Moses which Hilkiah the high priest had found. ³Josiah stood on a platform by the royal pillar in front of all the people. He renewed the covenant of the Lord promising to keep His commandments, His laws and statutes with all his heart, soul and mind. The people followed his example and also pledged themselves to keep the Lord's covenant and to put into practice what was written in the book.

⁴Then the king ordered Hilkiah the high priest, his assistants and the Temple guards to clear the house of the Lord of all objects that had been made for worshipping Baal, Asherah and the sun, moon and stars. He had them take these objects outside the city to the Kidron Valley, burn them and carry the ashes out of the land of Judah all the way to Bethel and scatter them there. ⁵He removed from office the pagan priests who had been appointed by the former kings of Judah to burn incense on various hills throughout the land and around Jerusalem, and those who had been appointed to offer sacrifices to Baal and to the sun, moon and stars and to constellations in the heavens. ⁶He took the pole of the fertility goddess Asherah out of the Temple, down to the Kidron Valley outside of Jerusalem and burned it, then pounded the ashes into dust and scattered them over the graves of those who had sacrificed to her.

⁷He also tore down the apartments of the male prostitutes who practiced the Canaanite fertility rites in the Temple of God and the apartment complex where women did weaving for Asherah, the mother goddess of fertility. ⁸He recalled all priests from the high places, from Geba to Beersheba, where they had been burning incense. He destroyed pagan shrines where these priests had been serving. He also tore down the altars to the left of the

Gate of Joshua going to the governor's house. ⁹Even though these priests were not allowed to serve at the Lord's altar in Jerusalem, they were given a share in the Temple offerings and ate unleavened bread with the rest of the priests.

¹⁰Josiah tore down the pagan altar in Topheth in the Hinnom Valley near Jerusalem where people had offered their infant sons and daughters to the god Molech. ¹¹He burned the chariots that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun-god and got rid of the horses which drew them that were housed in the Temple courtyard not far from the apartment of Nathan Melech, a city official. ¹²King Josiah tore down altars which the kings of Judah had built on the roof of the palace above the private apartment of King Ahaz. He also broke down the altars that King Manasseh had built in the two courts of the Temple. He smashed these altars to pieces and scattered the rubble throughout the Kidron Valley. ¹³He tore down the altars built on the high places east of Jerusalem on the southern slope of the Mount of Olives (also called the Mount of Corruption). This was where Solomon had built altars for Ashtoreth the nude sex goddess of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the hated god of the Moabites, and for Molech (Milcom), the cruel god of the Ammonites. ¹⁴He crushed the stone pillars and cut down all the wooden poles set up for the goddess Asherah. He had human skulls and bones brought in and scattered all over the ground where the people came to worship her.

¹⁵Josiah also tore down the altar at Bethel that Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, had set up. He ground the stones into dust because this was the altar where people had been led into sin. He set the place on fire, including the poles set up for Asherah. ¹⁶When Josiah first got there he noticed some graves on the hillside. He ordered them dug up, had the bones removed and burned them on the altar before he destroyed it. This was ex-

actly what one of the prophets had told Jeroboam would happen. ¹⁷Then the king said, "Whose tombstone is that over there?" The men of the city said, "It marks the burial place of the prophet from Judah who predicted all these things." ¹⁸Josiah said, "Leave his grave alone. Don't disturb his bones or the other prophet from Samaria who invited the prophet from Judah home to eat." ¹⁹Josiah even went up to Samaria and destroyed all the pagan temples that the kings of Israel had built there just as he had done in Bethel. ²⁰He killed the pagan priests serving at those temples and burned their bones on those altars, then returned to Jerusalem.

²¹Josiah then issued a proclamation for the people to get ready to keep the Passover as written in the book of the law given to them by Moses. ²²Not since the days of the first judges nor during the days of the kings of Israel and Judah was the Passover kept the way it was kept by the people of Jerusalem under Josiah. ²³All this took place in the eighteenth year of Josiah.

²⁴He also got rid of all mediums and those who practiced witchcraft and destroyed all the idols in the land of Judah, even those in people's homes. He carried out what was written in the book of the law which Hilkiah, the high priest, had found when they were repairing the Temple. ²⁵There was no king before Josiah or after him who obeyed the Lord so fully with all his heart and soul and mind and strength. He vigorously saw to it that all the laws of Moses were properly carried out.

Judgment on Judah

²⁶But all this did not change the Lord's mind about Jerusalem and Judah because of the terrible things Josiah's grandfather Manasseh had done when he led the people into sacrificing their infants to Molech. ²⁷The Lord had said, "I will do to Judah and Jerusalem what I did to Israel. I will let the people be deported by their enemies

and will turn away from Jerusalem and from the Temple which I said was mine and which was built to honor me.”

Josiah Dies in Battle

²⁸All of Josiah’s works of reformation are recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ²⁹Some years later Josiah decided to help Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, the father of Nebuchadnezzar, who had come to power and was ruling much of the Assyrian Empire. The king of Assyria was holding out against the king of Babylon and had asked Necho, king of Egypt, to come up to Carchemish by the Euphrates River to help him. Josiah marched out to stop Necho, and their armies met at Megiddo. Josiah was defeated. He was also severely wounded, and they took him back to Jerusalem where he died. ³⁰They buried him beside his fathers in the royal tombs of the kings of Judah. Then the people made Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, king in place of his father.

³¹Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king. He ruled Judah for only three months. His mother’s name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah, a man from the city of Libnah. ³²Jehoahaz did evil in the sight of the Lord as his wicked ancestors had done. ³³On the way back from his defeat at Carchemish by the Babylonians, the king of Egypt asked Jehoahaz to meet him at Riblah in the land of Hamath. When Jehoahaz got there, Necho took him prisoner. Then he demanded from the people seven thousand and five hundred pounds of silver and seventy-five pounds of gold. ³⁴Then he made Jehoahaz’s brother, Eliakim, king of Judah in his father’s place and changed his name to Jehoiakim. He took Jehoahaz in chains to Egypt, and he died there.

Jehoiakim’s Reign in Judah

³⁵Jehoiakim agreed to pay Necho the silver and gold he demanded, and he taxed the people to get it. Everyone had to pay according to his income and property value. ³⁶Jehoiakim was twenty-five

years old when he became king, and he ruled for eleven years. His mother’s name was Zebidah, the daughter of Pedaiiah, from the city of Rumah. ³⁷He disobeyed the Lord just as his ancestors had done.

Nebuchadnezzar Invades Judah

24 Jehoiakim submitted to Babylon’s control of Judah for three years, then he rebelled. So Nebuchadnezzar, crown prince of Babylon, invaded the land. He attacked Jerusalem and forced Jehoiakim to submit to him, then headed toward Egypt. When Nebuchadnezzar received word that his father had died, he hurried back across the desert to become the next king. He told his troops to bring the treasures and captives with them, which included Daniel and his three friends. ²The Lord had allowed not only the Babylonians to invade the land of Judah, but also the Arameans, the Moabites and the Ammonite tribesmen. This was what He had told the people of Judah would happen.

³The Lord permitted these things to come on Judah because of the terrible sins of Manasseh which had brought on the nation’s downfall. ⁴He had killed many innocent people including prophets of the Lord, such as Isaiah. The streets of Jerusalem were often covered with innocent blood and the Lord could not overlook such unrestrained violence and evil. ⁵Everything else that Jehoiakim did is recorded in The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. ⁶Jehoiakim died, and his son Jehoiachin took his place. ⁷The king of Egypt who was defeated by Nabopolassar at Carchemish never again challenged the Babylonians nor did he try to defend the territory in Judah which he claimed as his own and which Nebuchadnezzar had taken. So the Babylonians controlled all the territory from the River Euphrates in the north to the borders of Egypt in the south.

Jehoiachin Taken Captive

⁸Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he ruled for only three months. His mother's name was Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan from Jerusalem. ⁹He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord as his father had done.

¹⁰When Nebuchadnezzar heard that Judah had rebelled against him, he again invaded the land and besieged Jerusalem. ¹¹This time he took personal command of the situation and joined his generals in the attack. ¹²Then Jehoiachin, together with the queen mother, his attendants, his officers and the leaders of Judah surrendered to him. It was in the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign that he captured Jehoiachin and took him in chains to Babylon as a war trophy.

¹³This time Nebuchadnezzar took all the remaining gold articles that Solomon had made for the Temple and all the treasures from the palace. ¹⁴He also took with him to Babylon all the royal princes, the army officers and their men and all the craftsmen and metal workers he could find. Altogether he took ten thousand people with him back to Babylon. Only the poorest people were left in Jerusalem. ¹⁵He even took Jehoiachin's mother, his wives, his advisers and the leading men of Judah, including the prophet Ezekiel. ¹⁶The king of Babylon took with him the entire force of Judah's seven thousand soldiers, all of whom were trained for war, and one thousand craftsmen and metal workers. The other two thousand were civil and religious leaders.

Zedekiah's Reign in Judah

¹⁷Then he made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, the new king of Judah and changed his name to Zedekiah. ¹⁸Zedekiah, the brother of Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, was twenty-one years old when he began to reign and he ruled the country for eleven years. Their mother was Hamutal, wife of Josiah and daughter of Jeremiah, a man from Libnah. ¹⁹He

did evil in the eyes of the Lord as his brothers, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, had done. ²⁰All this happened to Jerusalem and Judah because the people had forsaken the Lord. So they were banished from the land and from the presence of the Lord in His Temple. Zedekiah didn't learn from all of this but rebelled against the Lord and against the king of Babylon.

The Fall of Jerusalem

25 In the ninth year of Zedekiah on the tenth day in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem a third time. He surrounded the city and built siege works all around it. Then he sent parts of his army against other cities in Judah. ²The siege continued for more than two years into the eleventh year of Zedekiah. ³During the final year there was no food in the city and people suffered greatly from hunger. Mothers even ate their own babies.

⁴On the ninth day of the fourth month that year, Nebuchadnezzar's men succeeded in making a breach in the wall. Then Zedekiah decided to escape with some of his men by way of the royal gardens through the small gate connecting the old and new walls. They ran in the direction of the Jordan Valley, ⁵but the Babylonians went after them and overtook them in the plains of Jericho. All Zedekiah's men scattered and left him alone. ⁶So the Babylonians captured him and took him north to Riblah where Nebuchadnezzar was preparing for his attack on the city of Tyre to let him decide what to do with Zedekiah. ⁷The king of Babylon ordered that Zedekiah's sons be executed in front of him. Then they put out Zedekiah's eyes and took him to Babylon in bronze chains.

⁸On the seventh day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar sent Nebuzaradan, the commander of his bodyguard and personal aide, from Riblah back to Jerusalem to carry out his other orders. ⁹Nebuzaradan set fire to the Temple, the

royal palace and other important buildings. He also set fire to all the houses in Jerusalem. ¹⁰He then ordered the army to tear down the walls of the city. ¹¹He took with him those who remained in Jerusalem and those living near the city, as well as those who had surrendered to the Babylonians during the siege. ¹²He left only the very poorest of the people to work the vineyards and fields.

¹³He ordered his men to break up the two bronze pillars by the Sanctuary and take them, plus the little bronze carts and basins, as well as the huge bronze basin. ¹⁴He took everything that was bronze with him to Babylon, the shovels, pots, wick trimmers and bowls used to catch the blood of the sacrifices, as well as those used for incense. ¹⁵He also took everything that was made of gold or silver, including the censers and sprinkling bowls, which had not been taken before. ¹⁶There was so much bronze that it could not be weighed. This included the two bronze pillars which Solomon had made for the Temple, the little carts and basins, as well as the huge basin. ¹⁷Each pillar was thirty-three feet high with a four-and-a-half foot crown which had one hundred pomegranates on it, ninety-six of which could easily be counted.

¹⁸Nebuzaradan also took with him Seraiah the high priest, Zephaniah the next priest in rank, and the three most important Temple officials. ¹⁹From the city he took the officer in charge of the few soldiers that were left, his assistant in charge of the army's records, five of Zedekiah's personal advisers and sixty other important people. ²⁰Nebuzaradan took all of them to Riblah where Nebuchadnezzar and his men were camped. ²¹The king had them all executed and buried at Riblah. Then the people of Judah were led away from their homeland into captivity.

Gedaliah Made Governor of Judah

²²A few people were left in Judah, so

Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam and grandson of Shaphan, as governor. ²³Some of the army officers and their men escaped from Jerusalem and scattered throughout the country just before Nebuchadnezzar took the city. When they heard that he had appointed Gedaliah governor, they came out of hiding and met Gedaliah at his capital in Mizpah. The four officers who came with their men were: Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, Johanan the son of Kareah, Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah, a Maacathite (also called Jezaniah). ²⁴Gedaliah took an oath to assure them that if they would quietly settle in the land and serve the king of Babylon they would have nothing to fear from the Babylonians.

²⁵In the seventh month of that same year, however, Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, the grandson of Elishama, who was of royal descent, took ten men and assassinated Gedaliah. He also put to death the men of Judah who had supported him and the Babylonian guards stationed at Mizpah. ²⁶Then all the people of Judah who lived nearby, rich and poor, together with the other three officers and their men, escaped to Egypt. They were afraid to stay in Judah because of the Babylonians.

Jehoiachin Released From Prison

²⁷In the thirty-seventh year of the imprisonment of King Jehoiachin in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar died and his son Evil-Merodach (or Amel Marduk) took over. On the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month, he released Jehoiachin from prison. ²⁸Jehoiachin was now an old man. Amel Marduk spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor among other captive kings in Babylon. ²⁹So Jehoiachin took off his prison clothes, and for the rest of his life, he ate regularly at the king's table. ³⁰The king also gave Jehoiachin a daily expense allowance as long as he lived.

1 CHRONICLES

From Adam to Abraham

1 These are the genealogical tables of the people of God from Adam to Abraham and on to his great-grandson Judah. Adam was the father of Seth, who was the father of Enosh. ²Then came Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, ³Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech and Noah. ⁴The sons of Noah were Shem, Ham and Japheth.

⁵The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech and Tiras. ⁶The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath and Togarmah. ⁷The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim (or Rodanim).

⁸The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt (or Mizraim), Put and Canaan. ⁹The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabta, Raamah and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan. ¹⁰Cush was the father of Nimrod, who became a mighty warrior and who took over the land later known as Assyria and Babylon.

¹¹Mizraim was the father of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, ¹²Pathrusites and Casluhites who were forerunners of the Philistines and the Caphtorites.

¹³Canaan was the father of the Sidonians through Sidon his firstborn, and of the Hittites, ¹⁴Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, ¹⁵Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, ¹⁶Arvadites, Zemarites and Hamathites.

¹⁷The sons of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad (or Arphaxad), Lud, Aram, Uz, Hul, Gether and Meshech. ¹⁸Arpachshad was the father of Cainan, who was the father of Shelah, the father of Eber. ¹⁹Eber had two sons: Peleg (meaning Divided, because it was in his day that people separated themselves into different language groups) and Joktan. ²⁰Joktan was the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, ²¹Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, ²²Obal, Abimael, Sheba, ²³Ophir, Havilah and Jobab. All these were the sons of Joktan.

²⁴A shortened line from Shem, the son

of Noah, down to Abraham is as follows: Shem, Arpachshad, Cainan, Shelah, ²⁵Eber, Peleg, Reu, ²⁶Serug, Nahor, Terah ²⁷and Abram (later renamed Abraham).

²⁸Abraham married Sarah and he had two sons: Ishmael by Hagar as a surrogate mother, and Isaac by Sarah herself.

The Family of Ishmael

²⁹The sons of Ishmael were Nebaioth his firstborn, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, ³⁰Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, ³¹Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. All these were sons of Ishmael.

The Family of Keturah

³²After Abraham's wife Sarah died, he married Keturah and his sons through her were Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. The sons of Jokshan were Sheba and Dedan. ³³The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida and Eldaah. All these were Abraham's descendants through Keturah.

The Family of Isaac

³⁴Isaac was Abraham's son through Sarah. Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob. ³⁵The sons of Esau were Eliphaz, Reuel, Jeush, Jalam and Korah. ³⁶The sons of Eliphaz: Teman, Omar, Zepho (or Zephi), Gatam, Kenaz, Timna and Amalek. ³⁷The sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah and Mizzah.

The Inhabitants of Edom

³⁸The sons of Seir were Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer and Dishan. These were the original inhabitants of Edom known as Horites or Hurrians. ³⁹The sons of Lotan: Hori and Homam. Lotan's sister was Timna. ⁴⁰The sons of Shobal: Alvan (or Alian), Manahath, Ebal, Shepho and Onam. The sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah. ⁴¹The son of Anah was Dishon. The sons of Dishon were Hemdan (or Hamran), Eshban, Ithran and Cheran. ⁴²The sons of Ezer: Bilhan,

Zaavan and Jaakan (or Akan). The sons of Dishan were Uz and Aran.

The Kings of Edom

⁴³These were the kings who ruled in Edom before there were any kings in Israel. The first was Bela, the son of Beor, who ruled the land from the city of Dinhabah. ⁴⁴When Bela died, Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah, became the next king. ⁴⁵When Jobab died, Husham from the region of Teman succeeded him. ⁴⁶When Husham died, Hadad, son of Bedad, who had defeated the Midianites on the plains of Moab, succeeded him. He ruled the country from Avith. ⁴⁷When Hadad died, Samlah from Masrekah succeeded him. ⁴⁸When Samlah died, Shaul from Rehoboth by the River Euphrates became king. ⁴⁹When Shaul died, Baal Hanan the son of Achbor, succeeded him. ⁵⁰When Baal Hanan died, Hadad became king. He ruled the land from the city of Pai. His wife was Mehetabel, daughter of Matred and granddaughter of Me Zahab. ⁵¹Then Hadad also died.

The chiefs of the tribes in Edom were: Timna, Aliah (also known as Alvah), Jetheth, ⁵²Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, ⁵³Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, ⁵⁴Magdiel and Iram.

The Family of Jacob

2 The twelve sons of Jacob, who was Isaac's son, were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, ²Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad and Asher.

From Judah to David

³The sons of Judah were: Er, Onan and Shelah. These three were born to him by a Canaanite woman called Bathshua. Er, Judah's firstborn, was so wicked in the Lord's sight that the Lord took his life. ⁴Judah's daughter-in-law Tamar, Er's widow, bore him Perez and Zerah. So altogether Judah had five sons.

⁵The sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. ⁶Zerah had five sons, Zimri, Ethan,

Heman, Calcol and Dara (or Darda). ⁷The sons of Carmi were Achan (or Achar) who brought trouble on Israel by taking things from Jericho which were to be destroyed as an offering to God and who was then stoned in the Valley of Achor, ⁸and Ethan whose son was Azariah.

⁹The sons of Hezron were Jerahmeel, Ram and Chelubai (or Caleb). ¹⁰Ram was the father of Amminadab who was the father of Nahshon, an important leader in the tribe of Judah. ¹¹Nahshon was the father of Salmon, Salmon of Boaz, ¹²Boaz of Obed, and Obed of Jesse. ¹³Jesse was the father of Eliab, who was his firstborn, followed by Abinadab, Shimea, ¹⁴Nethanel, Raddai, ¹⁵Ozem, and the seventh living son was David. ¹⁶Their sisters were Zeruiah and Abigail. Zeruiah's sons were Abishai, Joab and Asahel. ¹⁷Abigail was the mother of Amasa, whose father was an Ishmaelite named Jether.

The Family of Hezron

¹⁸Caleb, the son of Hezron, married Azubah (also known as Jerioth). She bore him three sons: Jeshur, Shobab and Ardon. ¹⁹When Azubah died, Caleb married Ephratah and she bore Hur. ²⁰Hur was the father of Uri and Uri the father of Bezalel.

²¹When Hezron, the father of Caleb, was sixty years old he married the daughter of Makir, the father of Gilead, and she bore him a son named Segub. ²²Segub was the father of Jair who took over twenty-three villages in Gilead and called them The Settlements of Jair. ²³Later Geshur and Aram took these settlements (called Havvoth Jair) and the city of Kenath, plus its sixty smaller fortified towns. The people who lived there were all descendants of Makir, the father of Gilead. ²⁴After Hezron died in Caleb Ephratah, his wife Abijah bore him a son called Ashhur, who became the father of Tekoa.

The Family of Jerahmeel

²⁵The sons of Jerahmeel, Hezron's firstborn, were Ram his firstborn, Bunah,

Oren, Ozem and Ahijah.²⁶ Jerahmeel also married Atarah, who was the mother of Onam.²⁷ The sons of Ram, Jerahmeel's firstborn, were Maaz, Jamin and Eker.²⁸ The sons of Onam were Shammai and Jada. The sons of Shammai were Nadab and Abishur.²⁹ Abishur married Abihail, who bore him Ahban and Molid.³⁰ The sons of Nadab were Seled and Appaim. Seled died without having any sons.³¹ Appaim was the father of Ishi, Ishi of Sheshan and Sheshan of Ahlai.³² The sons of Jada, Shammai's brother, were Jether and Jonathan. Jether died without having any sons.³³ The sons of Jonathan were Peleth and Zaza. All these were the descendants of Jerahmeel.³⁴ Sheshan had only daughters. He had an Egyptian servant named Jarha,³⁵ so he gave one of his daughters to him and she bore a son called Attai.³⁶ Attai was the father of Nathan, who was the father of Zabad,³⁷ Zabad of Ephlal, Ephlal of Obed,³⁸ Obed of Jehu, Jehu of Azariah,³⁹ Azariah of Helez, Helez of Eleasah,⁴⁰ Eleasah of Sismai, Sismai of Shallum,⁴¹ Shallum of Jekamiah, and Jekamiah of Elishama.

The Family of Caleb

⁴²The sons of Caleb, the brother of Jerahmeel, were Mesha, his firstborn, who was the father of Ziph, and Mareshah, who was the father of Hebron.⁴³ The sons of Hebron were Korah, Tappuah, Rekem and Shema.⁴⁴ Shema was the father of Raham and Raham of Jorkeam. Rekem was the father of Shammai,⁴⁵ Shammai of Maon, and Maon of Beth Zur.⁴⁶ Caleb's sons by his concubine Ephah were: Haran, Moza and Gazez. Haran also had a son named Gazez.⁴⁷ The sons of Jahdai were Regem, Jotham, Geshan, Pelet, Ephah and Shaaph.⁴⁸ Caleb's sons by his concubine Maacah were Sheber and Tirhanah.⁴⁹ Later she bore him two more sons: Shaaph and Sheva. Shaaph was the father of Madmannah and Sheva was the father of Machbenah and Gibeab. Caleb also had a daughter by Maacah named

Achsah.⁵⁰ All these were the descendants of Caleb.

Now the sons of Hur, who was the firstborn of Caleb's wife Ephratah, were Shobal, who was the father of Kiriath Jearim,⁵¹ Salma, who was the father of Bethlehem, and Hareph, who was the father of Beth Gader.⁵² Shobal, the father of Kiriath Jearim, founded a city by that name. He also was the ancestor of the people of Haroeh and half of the Manahathites.⁵³ Other people who descended from Shobal through Kiriath Jearim were the Ithrites, Puthites, Shumathites and Mishraites. From these also came the Zorathites and Eshtaolites.⁵⁴ Salma, the father of Bethlehem, was an ancestor of the Netophathites, those who lived in Atroth Beth Joab, the other half of the Manahathites, the Zorites,⁵⁵ and the Tirathites, Shimeathites and Sucathites, who were skilled writers living in the city of Jabez. The Kenites were descendants of Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, whose land was promised to Abraham. They intermarried with the Rechabites who were descendants of Hammath and later settled in the territory of Judah.

The Family of David

3 These were the sons of David born to him while he was ruling over Judah from Hebron: the first, Amnon by Ahinoam from Jezreel; the second, Daniel by Abigail from Carmel; ²the third Absalom by Maacah the daughter of King Talmai of Geshur, the fourth, Adonijah by Haggith; ³the fifth, Shephatiah by Abital; and the sixth, Ithream by Eglah.⁴ These sons were born to David in Hebron during the seven years and six months he reigned as king over the tribe of Judah. Then David became king over all Israel and moved to Jerusalem where he ruled for thirty-three years.⁵ These were the sons born to him there: Solomon, Shimea (or Shammua), Shobab and Nathan. These four were by Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam (or

Ammiel). ⁶David also had the following nine sons by his other wives: Ithar, Elishua, Elpalet, ⁷Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, ⁸Elishama, Eliada and Eliphelet. ⁹So there were thirteen sons born to David by his wives while he was in Jerusalem, not counting those sons who were born to his concubines. David also had a daughter named Tamar.

The Family of Solomon

¹⁰These are the kings of Judah who descended from David: Solomon, then his son Rehoboam, his son Abijah, his son Asa, his son Jehoshaphat, ¹¹his son Jehoram, his son Ahaziah, his son Joash, ¹²his son Amaziah, his son Azariah (or Uzziah), his son Jotham, ¹³his son Ahaz, his son Hezekiah, his son Manasseh, ¹⁴his son Amon and his son Josiah. ¹⁵Josiah had four sons: Johanan the firstborn, the second Jehoiakim (or Eliakim), the third Zedekiah and the fourth Shallum (or Jehoahaz). ¹⁶Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin became the next king, followed by his uncle Zedekiah, the younger brother of Jehoiakim. Zedekiah was the twentieth and last king to reign over Judah.

The Family of Jeconiah

¹⁷Jehoiachin was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and carried to Babylon. His descendants were Shealtiel, ¹⁸Malchiram, Pedaiah, Shenazzar, Jekamiah, Hoshama and Nedabiah. ¹⁹The sons of Pedaiah were Zerubbabel and Shimei. Later Zerubbabel became the adopted son of Shealtiel, who had no sons. The sons of Zerubbabel were Meshullam and Hananiah, and they had a sister called Shelomith. ²⁰He also had five other sons: Hashubah, Ohel, Berechiah, Hasadiah and Jushab Hesed. ²¹Hananiah had two sons: Pelatiah and Jeshaiah. Jeshaiah was the father of Rephaiah, his son was Arnan, his son Obadiah and his son Shecaniah. ²²Shecaniah had a son, Shemaiah, who had five sons: Hattush, Igal, Bariah, Neariah and Shaphat.

So Shecaniah had six descendants. ²³Neariah had three sons: Elieoenai, Hizkiah and Azrikam. ²⁴Elieoenai had seven sons: Hodaviah, Eliashib, Pedaiah, Akkub, Johanan, Delaiah and Anani.

The Family of Judah

4 The descendants of Judah through his son Perez were Hezron, Carmi, Hur and Shobal. ²The son of Shobal was Reaiah, who was the father of Jahath, and Jahath was the father of Ahumai and Lahad. These were the ancestors of the Zorathites. ³Now the son of Hur was Etam and his three sons were Jezreel, Ishma and Idbash, and their sister's name was Hazzeleponi. ⁴Hur had two other sons, Penuel and Ezer. Penuel was the father of Gedor and Ezer was the father of Hushah. Hur himself was the firstborn son of Caleb and Ephratah and his descendants founded the city of Bethlehem.

⁵The son of Perez was Hezron and one of his descendants was Ashur, the founder of Tekoa. Ashur had two wives, Helah and Naarah. ⁶Naarah bore him four sons: Ahuzzam, Hopher, Temeni and Haahashtari. ⁷Helah also bore him four sons: Zereth, Izhar (or Zohar), Ethnan and Koz. ⁸Koz was the father of Anub and Zobebah (or Hazzobedah) and the ancestor of those families who eventually descended from Aharhel, the son of Harum. ⁹From this family line came a man named Jabez who was a most honorable man. His mother named him Jabez, meaning Pain, because his birth was so painful. ¹⁰Jabez prayed to the Lord, "O Lord God of Israel, bless me with much land. Stay with me and keep me from harm and from causing others pain, so my name will lose its meaning." The Lord heard his prayer and gave him what he had asked for.

¹¹Chelub was the brother of Shuhah and had a son named Mehir who was the father of Eshton. ¹²Eshton was the father of Beth Rapha, Paseah and Tehinnah who was the father of Ir Nahash. They all settled in Rechah. ¹³Kenaz was the brother of Caleb and he had two sons, Othniel

and Seraiah. Othniel's sons were Hathah and Meonothai. ¹⁴Meonothai was the father of Ophrah. Seraiah was the father of Joab, who was the father of Geharashim. They all lived in the Craftsmen's Valley.

¹⁵Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, had three sons: Iru, Elah and Naam. The son of Elah was Kenaz. ¹⁶Jehallelel's sons were Ziph, Ziphah, Tiria and Asarel. ¹⁷Ezrah's sons were Jether, Mered, Ephraim and Jalon. Mered's wife Bithiah was a daughter of the king of Egypt. She gave birth to Miriam, Shammai and Ishbah who was the father of Eshtemoa. ¹⁸Mered's Judean wife bore him three sons: Jered who became the father of Gedor, Heber the father of Socoh, and Jekuthiel the father of Zanoah. All these were Mered's sons from his Egyptian wife Bithiah and from his Judean wife. ¹⁹Hodiah married the sister of Naham. Their descendants included Keilah the Garmite and Eshtemoa the Maacathite.

²⁰The sons of Shimon were Amnon, Rinnah, Ben Hanan and Tilon. Ishi's sons were Zoheth and Ben Zoheth. ²¹The sons of Shelah were Er the father of Lecah, Laadah the father of Mareshah (who was the ancestor of the line of weavers who settled in the town of Beth Ashbea), ²²Jokim, (the ancestor of those who settled in Cozeba), and Joash and Saraph (who, according to ancient records, married women from Moab and settled in Jashubi Lehem). ²³Others settled in Netaim and Gederah and worked in the pottery factories owned by the king.

The Family of Simeon

²⁴The descendants of Simeon were Nemuel, Jamin, Jarib, Zerah and Shaul. ²⁵Shaul's son was Shallum, his son Mibsam and his son Mishma. ²⁶Mishma was the father of Hammuel, Hammuel of Zaccur and Zaccur of Shimei. ²⁷Shimei had sixteen sons and six daughters, but his brothers didn't have many children, so the tribe of Simeon never got as big as the tribe of Judah. ²⁸The descendants of

Simeon lived in these cities: Beersheba, Moladah, Hazar Shual, ²⁹Bilham, Ezem, Tolad, ³⁰Bethuel, Hormah, Ziklag, ³¹Beth Marcaboth, Hazar Susim, Beth Biri and Shaaraim (or Sharuhin). All these cities belonged to Simeon until the time of David when they were given to Judah. ³²Then there were the cities of Etam, Ain, Rimmon, Tochen and Ashan. ³³These cities and their surrounding villages stretched as far south as Baal (or Baalathbeer). This is according to their own genealogical records.

³⁴Here are the leaders of the various family groups: Meshobab, Jamlech and Joshah, the son of Amaziah. ³⁵Then there was Joel, and also Jehu the son of Joshibiah and grandson of Seraiah and great-grandson of Asiel, ³⁶and Elioenai, Jaakobah, Jeshohaiah, Asaiah, Adiel, Jesimiel, Benaiah, ³⁷and Ziza, the son of Shiphi who was the son of Allon, the son of Jedaiah, the son of Shimri, the son of Shemaiah.

³⁸These family groups continued to grow and a number of their people eventually moved west. ³⁹Some moved as far as Gedor (or Gerar) toward the land of the Philistines all the way up to the eastern side of the valley in search of pasture for their flocks. ⁴⁰They found rich pastures there and the country was wide open, quiet and peaceful. Ham's descendants had formerly lived there. (Ham was a son of Noah.) ⁴¹It was in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah, that the above-named families moved west. When they got there, they destroyed the Meunites and Hamites by setting fire to their tents. Then they settled in the land because it was good for pasture. ⁴²Five hundred Simeonites led by Pelatiah, Neariah, Rephaiah and Uzziel, the descendants of Ishi, invaded the hill country to the south going toward Mount Seir in the land of Edom. ⁴³They killed the remaining Amalekites who had survived the wars of Saul and took the land and settled there.

The Family of Reuben

5 Reuben was the firstborn of Jacob, but because he had sexual relations with one of his father's concubines, he lost the rights and privileges of the firstborn which were given to Joseph. ²Even though Joseph was given the rights of the firstborn, the tribe of Judah became the strongest and gave the royal line of David to Israel. ³The descendants of Reuben, the firstborn of Jacob, were Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron and Carmi. ⁴Then there was Joel, his son Shemaiah, his son Gog, his son Shimei, ⁵his son Micah, his son Reaiah, his son Baal and ⁶his son Beera (a strong leader among the Reubenites whom King Tiglath Pileser of Assyria took into exile). ⁷The following were leaders of family groups according to the genealogical records of Reuben: First was Jeiel, then Zechariah, ⁸and Bela the son of Azaz, the son of Shema, the son of Joel. These family groups settled in the area from the cities of Aroer north to Nebo and on to Baal Meon. ⁹To the east they took in Gilead up to the edge of the desert that stretches to the Euphrates River. They needed all this land because they had huge herds of livestock which had multiplied while they were in Gilead. ¹⁰During the reign of Saul the Reubenites attacked the Hagrites, defeated them and took over their territory east of Gilead.

The Family of Gad

¹¹The Gadites also lived in the land of Gilead just north of the Reubenites and as far east as Salecah. ¹²Joel was the leader of the most important Gadite family group, Shapham of the next one, and Janai and Shaphat were the leaders of the family groups in Bashan. ¹³Other leaders of family groups were: Michael, Meshullam, Sheba, Jorai, Jacan, Zia and Eber. ¹⁴These were the descendants of Abihail, the son of Huri, the son of Jaroah, the son of Gilead, the son of Michael, the son of Jeshishai, the son of Jahdo, the son of Buz. ¹⁵The head of all

these clans was Ahi, the son of Abdiel, the grandson of Guni. ¹⁶The Gadites lived in the land of Bashan and Gilead and took in all the outlying villages and pastures of Sharon. ¹⁷This was according to the family records of the Gadites which were compiled during the reign of Jotham, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, king of Israel.

¹⁸The tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh had a total of forty-four thousand, seven hundred and sixty trained men fit for military service. These men could handle sword and shield as well as bow and arrow and were trained for close combat. ¹⁹They went to war against the Hagrites and against the tribes of Jetur, Naphish and Nodab. ²⁰During the battle they pleaded with God for help and He answered their prayers because they trusted in Him. So they defeated the Hagrites and their allies and took their land and settled there. ²¹They also captured fifty thousand camels, two hundred fifty thousand sheep, two thousand donkeys and one hundred thousand prisoners of war. ²²Many enemy troops were killed because the Lord fought for His people and the battle was His. Then these Israelite tribes settled the land and lived there until the Assyrians came and deported them.

The Family of Manasseh East of Jordan

²³The half tribe of Manasseh that settled there became very large. They claimed the land from Bashan in the south to Baal Hermon on the slopes of Mount Hermon in the north which the inhabitants call Senir. ²⁴The leaders of the family groups of Manasseh were: Ephraim, Ishi, Eliel, Azriel, Jeremiah, Hodaviah and Jahdiel. All of these were outstanding military men, brave in battle and leaders of large family groups. ²⁵But they were not true to the God of their fathers and worshiped the fertility gods of the people of the land whom God had driven out because of their wickedness. ²⁶That's why

God stirred up the spirit of Tiglath Pileser, king of Assyria, who came and took the Reubenites, Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh away. He settled them in the areas of Halah, Habor, Hara and Gozan on the Khabur River between Haran and Nineveh.

The Family of Levi

6 The sons of Levi were Gershon, Kohath and Merari. ²The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. ³The children of Amram: Aaron, Moses and Miriam. The sons of Aaron: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ⁴Eleazar was the father of Phinehas, Phinehas of Abishua, ⁵Abishua of Bukki, Bukki of Uzzi, ⁶Uzzi of Zerariah, Zerariah of Meraioth, ⁷Meraioth of Amariah, Amariah of Ahitub, ⁸Ahitub of Zadok, Zadok of Ahimaaz, ⁹Ahimaaz of Azariah, Azariah of Johanan, ¹⁰Johanan of Azariah, who served as priest in the Temple Solomon built in Jerusalem, ¹¹Azariah was the father of Amariah, Amariah of Ahitub, ¹²Ahitub of Zadok, Zadok of Shallum, ¹³Shallum of Hilkiah, Hilkiah of Azariah, ¹⁴Azariah of Seraiah and Seraiah of Jehozadak. ¹⁵Now Jehozadak was among those who were deported by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, when the Lord sent him against Judah and Jerusalem.

¹⁶The three sons of Levi—Gershon, Kohath and Merari—all had sons. ¹⁷Gershon had Libni and Shimei. ¹⁸Kohath had Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel, as mentioned above. ¹⁹Merari had Mahli and Mushi. The following are the names of the leaders of the various family groups among the Levites according to their ancestry: ²⁰The descendants of Gershon were his son Libni, his son Jehath, his son Zimmah, ²¹his son Joah, his son Iddo, his son Zerah and his son Jeatherai. ²²The descendants of Kohath were his son Amminadab (or Izhar), his son Korah, his son Assir, ²³his son Elkanah, his son Ebiasaph, his son Assir, ²⁴his son Tahath, his son Uriel, his son Uziah, his son

Shaul. ²⁵The descendants of Elkanah were his sons Amasai and Ahimoth. ²⁶Ahimoth's son was Elkanah, his son Zophai, his son Nahath, ²⁷his son Eliab, his son Jeroham, his son Elkanah and his son Samuel. ²⁸Samuel had two sons: Joel and Abijah. ²⁹The descendants of Merari were his son Mahli, his son Libni, his son Shimei, his son Uzzah, ³⁰his son Shimea, his son Haggiah and his son Asaiah.

The Temple Musicians

³¹After David brought the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Abinadab at Kiriath Jearim to Jerusalem, he appointed a number of men to serve as musicians at the place of worship. ³²They took turns ministering to the Lord even before Solomon built the Temple. ³³These are the men and their descendants who served as musicians: From the Kohathites there was Heman, he leader of the first choir. His ancestry began with his father Joel, the son of Samuel, ³⁴the son of Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Eliel, the son of Toah, ³⁵the son of Zuph, the son of Elkanah, the son of Mahath, the son of Amasai, ³⁶the son of Elkanah, the son of Joel, the son of Azariah, the son of Zephaniah, ³⁷the son of Tahath, the son of Assir, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, ³⁸the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, the son of Jacob who was called Israel. ³⁹Heman's associate in music and leader of the second choir was Asaph, the son of Berechiah, the son of Shimea, ⁴⁰the son of Michael, the son of Baaseiah, the son of Malchijah, ⁴¹the son of Ethni, the son of Zerah, the son of Adaiah, ⁴²the son of Ethan, the son of Zimmah, the son of Shimei, ⁴³the son of Jahath, the son of Gershon, the son of Levi, the son of Jacob. ⁴⁴Ethan was another associate of Heman and was the leader of the third choir. He was the son of Kishi, the son of Abdi, the son of Malluch, ⁴⁵the son of Hashabiah, the son of Amaziah, the son of Hilkiah, ⁴⁶the son of Amzi, the son of Bani, the son of Shemer, ⁴⁷the son of Mahli,

the son of Mushi, the son of Merari, the son of Levi, the son of Jacob. ⁴⁸Their fellow Levites were given other responsibilities in connection with the worship services.

The Family of Aaron

⁴⁹Aaron's descendants were the ones who served as priests, offering incense and sacrifices to the Lord that were burned on the altar. They also were responsible for carrying out all worship services in the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, including the sacrifices by which to make atonement for the sins of the people. They did all this according to the instructions given to Moses by the Lord. ⁵⁰The descendants of Aaron through his son Eleazar were his son Phinehas, his son Abishua, ⁵¹his son Bukki, his son Uzzi, his son Zerariah, ⁵²his son Meraioth, his son Amariah, his son Ahitub, ⁵³his son Zadok, and his son Ahimaaz.

The Cities of the Levites

⁵⁴Here is a list of the settlements assigned to the descendants of Levi through his son Kohath and on through Aaron, for the lot fell on them first: ⁵⁵In Judah, the city of Hebron with its surrounding pasturelands, ⁵⁶but the villages with their fields were given to Caleb, the son of Jephunneh. ⁵⁷Hebron also was a city of refuge. Other cities given to Aaron's descendants through Kohath were Libnah, Jattir, Eshtemoa, ⁵⁸Hilen, Debir, ⁵⁹Ashan, Juttah and Beth Shemesh with their pasturelands. ⁶⁰The tribe of Benjamin gave them Gibeon, Geba, Alemeth and Anathoth with their pasturelands. Altogether there were thirteen cities in Judah and Benjamin given to the descendants of Kohath.

⁶¹They also were given ten cities in with the half-tribe of Manasseh east of Jordan. ⁶²The descendants of Gershon, son of Levi, were given thirteen cities from the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and Manasseh west of Jordan. ⁶³The descendants of Merari, son of Levi,

were given twelve cities from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Zebulun. ⁶⁴All the cities and pasturelands that the Israelites gave to the Levites and their descendants were determined by drawing lots. ⁶⁵The cities and pasturelands from the tribes of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin also were determined by drawing lots.

⁶⁶Other Kohathite families were given the following cities with their pasturelands in the tribe of Ephraim: ⁶⁷Shechem a city of refuge in the hill country, Gezer also a city of refuge, ⁶⁸Jokmeam, Beth Horon, ⁶⁹Aijalon and Gath Rimmon together with their pasturelands. ⁷⁰From the tribe of Manasseh west of Jordan the descendants of Kohath were given Aner and Bileam with their pasturelands.

⁷¹The descendants of Gershon were given the following cities with pasturelands: Golan in Bashan and Ashteroth, both in the territory belonging to the half-tribe of Manasseh east of Jordan. ⁷²The tribe of Issachar gave Kedesh, Daberath, ⁷³Ramoth and Anem with their pasturelands. ⁷⁴The tribe of Asher gave Mashal, Abdon, ⁷⁵Hukok and Rehob with their pasturelands. ⁷⁶The tribe of Naphtali gave Kedesh in Galilee. Hammon and Kiriathaim with their pasturelands. ⁷⁷The descendants of Merari were given the following cities from the tribe of Zebulun: Jokneam, Kartah, Rimmon (or Rimmono) and Tabor with their pasturelands. ⁷⁸The tribe of Reuben east of Jordan gave Bezer near the desert, Jahzah, ⁷⁹Kedemoth and Mephaath with their pasturelands. ⁸⁰From the tribe of Gad they received Ramoth in Gilead, Mahanaim, ⁸¹Heshbon and Jazer with their pasturelands.

The Family of Issachar

7 The sons of Issachar were Tola, Puah, Jashub and Shimron. ²Tola had six sons: Uzzi, Rephaiah, Jeriel, Jahmai, Ibsam and Shamuël, all of whom were leaders of family groups. The descendants of Tola were famous soldiers and by the time of David, they had a well-

trained fighting force of twenty-two thousand, six hundred men. ³The son of Uzzi was Izrahiah. Izrahiah had four sons: Michael, Obadiah, Joel and Isshiah, and each one of these five men was a chief. ⁴They had so many wives and children that it wasn't long before they had a fighting force of thirty-six thousand men, all trained for war. ⁵The official updated records of the tribe of Issachar showed a total fighting force of eighty-seven thousand men.

The Family of Benjamin

⁶Benjamin had three sons: Bela, Becher and Jediel. ⁷The sons of Bela were Ezbon, Uzzi, Uzziel, Jerimoth and Iri, all of whom were leaders of family groups. The genealogical records from the tribe of Benjamin lists a total of twenty-two thousand and thirty-four men trained for war. ⁸The sons of Becher were Zemirah, Joash, Eliezer, Elioenai, Omri, Jeremoth, Abijah, Anathoth and Alemeth. ⁹Their genealogical records include a total of twenty thousand, two hundred fighting men. ¹⁰The son of Jediel was Bilhan. The sons of Bilhan were Jeush, Benjamin, Ehud, Chenaanah, Zethan, Tarshish and Ahishahar. ¹¹All these were leaders of family groups and famous soldiers. They had seventeen thousand, two hundred men trained for war. ¹²Huppim and Shuppim were the sons of Ir, and Hushim (or Shuham) was the son of Aher; all belonged to the tribe of Benjamin.

The Family of Naphtali

¹³Naphtali, the son of Jacob by Bilhah, had four sons: Jahzeel (or Jahziel), Guni, Jezer and Shallum (or Shillem).

The Family of Manasseh West of Jordan

¹⁴Manasseh had two sons: Asriel and Makir, both by his Aramean concubine. Makir's son was Gilead. ¹⁵Makir married Maacah, the sister of Huppim and Shuppim. Zelophehad was the grandson

of Makir through his son Gilead, but Zelophehad had daughters only. ¹⁶Makir's wife Maacah gave him two more sons: Peresh and Sheresh. Sheresh had two sons: Ulam and Rakem. ¹⁷The son of Ulam was Bedan. These were descendants of Gilead, son of Makir, son of Manasseh. ¹⁸Gilead's sister Hammolecheth gave birth to Ishhod, Abiezer and Mahlah. ¹⁹The sons of Shemida were Ahian, Shechem, Likhi and Aniam.

The Family of Ephraim

²⁰The descendants of Ephraim were his son Shuthelah, his son Bered, his son Tahath, his son Eleadah, ²¹his son Tahath, his son Zabad, his son Shuthelah. Ezer and Elead were killed when they went down to Gath to fight the Philistines to take their cows and sheep. ²²Ephraim mourned for them a long time, and family members came from everywhere to comfort him. ²³It was after this that Ephraim's wife bore him a son whom he named Beriah, meaning Misfortune. ²⁴Ephraim's daughter was Sheerah. She built the towns of Lower and Upper Beth Horon as well as Uzzen Sheerah. ²⁵Ephraim also had a son called Rephah, his son was Resheph, his son Telah, his son Tahan, ²⁶his son Ladan, his son Ammihud, his son Elishama, ²⁷his son Nun and his son Joshua. ²⁸The territory which they took and settled in included Bethel with its surrounding villages, all the land to the east as far as Naaran and to the west as far as Gezer and the villages around it. It also included the cities of Shechem and Ayyah and the villages around them. ²⁹The descendants of Manasseh settled in the cities of Beth Shan, Taanach, Megiddo and Dor and the villages around them. This is where the descendants of Joseph, the son of Jacob, lived.

The Family of Asher

³⁰Asher had four sons: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi and Beriah. He had one daughter called Serah. ³¹The sons of Beriah were Heber and Malchiel, who was the father

of Birzaith. ³²Heber had three sons: Japhlet, Shomer and Hotham. He had one daughter named Shua. ³³The sons of Japhlet were Pasach, Bimhal and Ashvath. ³⁴The sons of Shomer: Ahi, Rohgah, Hubbah and Aram. ³⁵The sons of Hotham (or Helem): Zophah, Imna, Shelesh and Amal. ³⁶The sons of Zophah: Suah, Harnepher, Shual, Beri, Imrah, ³⁷Bezer, Hod, Shamma, Shilshah, Ithran and Beera. ³⁸The sons of Ithran (or Jether): Jephunneh, Pispah and Ara. ³⁹The sons of Ara (or Ulla): Arah, Hanniel and Rizia. ⁴⁰All these were descendants of Asher and were leaders of family groups as well as outstanding military men. There were twenty-six thousand men listed in Asher's genealogy who were trained for war.

The Family of Benjamin

8 Benjamin had five sons: Bela, the firstborn, then Ashbel, Aharah, ²Nohah and Rapha. ³The sons of Bela were Addar, Gera, Abihud, who was the father of Ehud, ⁴then there was Abishua, Naaman, Ahoah, ⁵Gera, Shephuphan and Huram. ⁶The sons of Ehud were the leaders of the family groups living in Geba. They were forced out and went to live in Manahath. ⁷Their leaders were Naaman, Ahijah and Gera, the father of Uzza and Ahihud. Gera was the one who led the families to Manahath. ⁸Shaharaim divorced his wives, Hushim and Baara, and went to live in the land of Moab. ⁹While there he married Hodesh who gave him seven sons: Jobab, Zibia, Meshah, Malcam, ¹⁰Jeuz, Sachia and Mirmah all of which were leaders of family groups. ¹¹Before he divorced Hushim, she gave him two sons: Abitub and Elpaal. ¹²The sons of Elpaal were Eber, Misham and Shemed. Shemed was the one who built the cities of Ono and Lod with their surrounding villages. ¹³Elpaal's two other sons were Beriah and Shema, both leaders of family groups who lived in Aijalon. They drove out the inhabitants of Gath. ¹⁴Beriah's sons were Ahio, Shashak, Jeremoth,

¹⁵Zebadiah, Arad, Eder, ¹⁶Michael, Ishpah and Joha. ¹⁷Elpaal's other sons were Zebadiah, Meshullam, Hizki, Heber, ¹⁸Ishmerai, Izliah and Jobab. ¹⁹The sons of Shimei were Jakim, Zichri, Zabdi, ²⁰Elienai, Zillethai, Eliel, ²¹Adaiah, Beraiah and Shimrath. ²²The sons of Shashak: Ishpan, Eber, Eliel, ²³Abdon, Zichri, Hanan, ²⁴Hananiah, Elam, Anthothijah, ²⁵Iphdeiah and Penuel. ²⁶The sons of Jeroham were Shamsherai, Shehariah, Athaliah, ²⁷Jaareshiah, Elijah and Zichri. ²⁸All these were heads of families who according to their genealogical records lived in Jerusalem.

²⁹Jeiel (or Aziel), governed the city of Gibeon and had a son by the same name. Jeiel's wife was Maacah. ³⁰His firstborn was Abdon, then came Zur, Kish, Baal, Ner, Nadab, ³¹Gedor, Ahio, Zecher ³²and Mikloth, who was the father of Shimeah. They all lived near their relatives in Jerusalem. ³³Ner was the father of Kish, the father of Saul, the father of Jonathan, Malchishua, Abinadab and Ishbosheth (or Eshbaal). ³⁴The son of Jonathan was Mephibosheth, who was the father of Micah. ³⁵The sons of Micah were Pithon, Melech, Tarea and Ahaz. ³⁶Ahaz was the father of Jehoaddah. Jehoaddah was the father of Alemeth, Azmaveth and Zimri. Zimri was the father of Moza. ³⁷Moza was the father of Binea, Binea of Raphah, Raphah of Eleasah and Eleasah of Azel and Eshek. ³⁸Azel had six sons: Azrikam, Bocheru, Ishmael, Sheariah, Obadiah and Hanan. ³⁹The sons of his brother Eshek were: Ulam, the firstborn, then Jeush and Eliphelet. ⁴⁰The sons of Ulam were known for their bravery and were extremely skilled in handling the bow and arrow. Altogether Ulam and his sons had one hundred and fifty sons and grandsons, all of whom belonged to the tribe of Benjamin.

People Who Returned From Captivity

9 Everyone in the country was listed according to their family in the genealogical records of either Israel or

Judah. Years later the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were deported by Assyria and ceased to exist as a nation. The people of the southern kingdom of Judah were taken into exile by Babylon, but after seventy years they returned home. ²In the first group to come home to their property were those from Israel who before the exile had settled in Judah, as well as priests, Levites and Temple workmen.

³Those from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh who had settled in Jerusalem were the following: ⁴Uthai, who was the son of Ammihud, the son of Omri, the son of Imri, the son of Bani, the son of Perez, the son of Judah. ⁵There also was Asaiah a descendant of Shelah, the son of Judah, and his extended family, known as the Shilonites. ⁶Then there was Jeuel, a descendant of Zerah, another son of Judah, and six hundred and ninety in that grouping. ⁷The descendants of Benjamin who returned from Babylon were Sallu, the son of Meshullam, the son of Hodaviah, the son of Hassenuah. ⁸Then there was Ibneiah, the son of Jeroham, and Elah, the son of Uzzi who was the son of Michri, and also Meshullam, the son of Shephatiah, who was the son of Reuel, the son of Ibnijah. ⁹In this first return there were nine hundred and fifty-six families who came back from Babylon. According to their genealogical records they all belonged to the tribe of Benjamin.

The Priests at Jerusalem

¹⁰The priests who came back were Jedaiah, Jehoiarib, Jachin, ¹¹and Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub who had been in charge of the Temple. ¹²Then there was Adaiah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Pashur who was the son of Malchijah, and Maasai, the son of Adiel, the son of Jahzerah, the son of Meshullam, who was the son of Meshillemith, the son of Immer. ¹³At this time there were one

thousand, seven hundred and sixty priests as heads of families who came back to work in the Temple, but not all settled in Jerusalem.

The Levites at Jerusalem

¹⁴The Levites who came back were Shemaiah, the son of Hasshub, who was the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah a descendant of Levi's son Merari. ¹⁵There also was Bakbakkar, Heresh, Galal and Mattaniah, who was the son of Mica, the son of Zichri, the son of Asaph. ¹⁶Then there was Obadiah, the son of Shemaiah, who was the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun, and also Berekiah, the son of Asa, who was the son of Elkanah who lived in one of the villages of the Netophathites.

The Temple Guards

¹⁷The Temple guards who came back to Jerusalem were Shallum, Akkub, Talmon, Ahiman and all their families. Shallum was the one in charge. ¹⁸These guards were Levites who had been stationed at the King's Gate, the eastern gate going into the Temple, through which the king comes. ¹⁹Shallum, the son of Kore, the son of Ebiasaph, who was the son of Korah, plus his fellow guardsmen all of whom were descendants of Korah. These families had always been responsible for guarding the entrance to the Sanctuary, even when it was still a tent in the wilderness. ²⁰In the past, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, had been in charge of the Sanctuary guardsmen. The Lord was with him. ²¹Zechariah, the son of Meshelemiah, was also one of the priests in charge of the Sanctuary. ²²Altogether there were two hundred and twelve men chosen to serve as guards. Their names are recorded in the genealogical records according to where they lived. They were assigned their specific duties by David and some even earlier by the prophet Samuel. ²³They and their descendants first

guarded the Sanctuary and later the Temple. ²⁴The custom was to station them on all four sides of the Sanctuary, east, west, north and south. ²⁵Every week their fellow guardsmen would come in from the villages and take their turn at guard duty. ²⁶The four chief guardsmen were Levites, and their responsibilities included looking after the storage rooms in the Temple and the supplies that were kept there. ²⁷These men lived near the Temple because they had the key to lock it at night and open it in the morning.

Other Levite Responsibilities

²⁸Other Levites were in charge of the utensils used in worship and checked them in and out as they were needed. ²⁹Still others were assigned to take care of the furnishings of the Temple and the flour, unfermented wine, olive oil, incense and spices. ³⁰While the Levites stored the spices, the priests had the responsibility of preparing the holy ointment. ³¹A Levite called Mattithiah, the firstborn of Shallum (a descendant of Korah) was in charge of baking the thin cakes of flour and olive oil used in the offerings. ³²The descendants of Kohath were in charge of preparing the twelve loaves of sacred bread that were placed on the table in the Holy Place each Sabbath.

³³Some Levites served as musicians. When the leaders of these groups were on duty they stayed in rooms in the Temple. They were not assigned other duties because they were on call day and night. ³⁴According to the genealogical records, the men mentioned above were heads of family groups and lived in Jerusalem.

The Family of Saul

³⁵The ancestors and descendants of King Saul were as follows: Jeiel governed the city of Gibeon and lived there with his son. His wife's name was Maacah. ³⁶His firstborn son was Abdon, then came Zur, Kish, Baal, Ner, Nadab, ³⁷Gedor, Ahio, Zechariah and Mikloth.

³⁸Mikloth was the father of Shimeam. Their descendants lived in Jerusalem near their other relatives. ³⁹Ner was the father of Kish, the father of Saul. Saul was the father of Jonathan, Malchishua, Abinadab and Ishbosheth. ⁴⁰The son of Jonathan was Mephibosheth, who was the father of Micah. ⁴¹The sons of Micah were Pithon, Melech, Tahrea and Ahaz. ⁴²Ahaz was the father of Jadah (or Jehoadah). Jadah was the father of Alemeth, Azmaveth and Zimri. Zimri was the father of Moza. ⁴³Moza was the father of Binea, Binea of Raphaiah, Raphaiah of Eleasah and Eleasah of Azel. ⁴⁴Azel had six sons: Azrikam, Bocheru, Ishmael, Sheariah, Obadiah and Hanan.

The Death of Saul and His Sons

10 The Philistines fought against the Israelites on Mount Gilboa and defeated them. Many Israelites were killed and the rest of them fled. ²The Philistines chased Saul and his men and killed three of his sons, Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua. ³The fighting grew heavy around Saul, and one of the Philistine archers got close enough to wound him with an arrow. ⁴Realizing how bad his injury was, Saul said to his armor bearer, "Pull out your sword and run it through me before these godless Philistines come to ridicule and abuse me until I die."

But his armor bearer was afraid to touch the king and refused to do it. So Saul took his own sword, held the point against his body and fell on it. ⁵When his armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died. ⁶So Saul, three of his sons and all his other relatives who fought in that battle with him, died. ⁷When the rest of the Israelite army in the valley camped by the spring of Jezreel saw that Saul and his men were defeated and heard that he and his sons were dead, they left the towns and villages where they were camped and the Philistines moved in.

⁸The next day when the Philistines went through the battlefield on top of

the mountain to strip the dead of their valuables. they found Saul and his sons. ⁹They cut off Saul's head, stripped him of his armor and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to carry the good news to their people who, in turn, thanked their idols. ¹⁰They put Saul's armor as a trophy in the temple of their gods and his head in the temple of Dagon. ¹¹When the inhabitants of the city of Jabesh in Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, ¹²they sent their bravest men to get his body and the bodies of his sons and bring them back to Jabesh for burial. There the people buried Saul and his sons under the great oak. Then they fasted and mourned for seven days.

¹³Saul was defeated and killed by the Philistines because he had been unfaithful to the Lord and refused to obey—to the point of consulting a witch for advice. ¹⁴He hadn't asked the Lord what to do, so the Lord let him be killed and then turned the kingdom over to Jesse's son David.

David Made King Over Israel

1 David first made his home in Hebron, the capital of Judah. Seven years later, the leaders of Israel went to see him and said, "We are of the same flesh and blood. ²In the past, even when Saul was still our king, you were the one who led Israel into battle and brought us our victories. We know that the Lord has chosen you to lead Israel and to be our next king." ³So David made a covenant with the leaders of Israel and they anointed him to be their king. David then became king of all Israel just as the Lord had said he would when He spoke through Samuel.

The City of David

⁴David and his men who came from all parts of Israel attacked the city of Jebus in order to claim it as their capital. The Jebusites who lived there said to David, ⁵"You'll never get inside our city." The city was located on Mount Zion and was

built like a fortress. But David captured it and renamed it Jerusalem. ⁶During the campaign David said to his men, "The first one who gets into the city and kills the gate keepers so we can come in will become commander-in-chief." Joab, the son of David's sister Zeruah, led his men into the city through a water shaft and became David's commander-in-chief. ⁷So David moved from Hebron to Jerusalem and proclaimed it the capital of all Israel, but the people called it the City of David. ⁸He expanded the city to the north to include the fortress of Millo and then commissioned Joab to oversee the restoration of the rest of the city. ⁹David became more and more powerful because the Lord Almighty was with him.

David's Mighty Warriors

¹⁰The people throughout Israel, together with David's mighty men, gave him their support just as the Lord had promised. ¹¹Here is a list of David's warriors: Jashobeam, the son of Hachmoni, the leader of The Famous Three. He raised his sword and spear against three hundred whom he killed in one battle and eight hundred altogether.

¹²Next among The Famous Three was Eleazar, son of Dodai, the Ahohite. ¹³He fought alongside David against the Philistines at the battle of Pas Dammim (or Ephes Dammin). He and David took their stand against the advancing Philistines in a field of barley while the other troops fled. ¹⁴They stopped in the middle of the field and fought off the Philistines and the Lord gave them the victory. Third of The Famous Three was Shammah, the son of Agee, the Hararite, who fought off a whole army of Philistines all by himself.

¹⁵Three other men of a group called The Mighty Thirty were with David in the cave near Adullam when the army of the Philistines camped in the valley of Rephaim. ¹⁶A Philistine garrison was stationed in Bethlehem. ¹⁷David longed for a drink of water from home and said, "O that I could have a drink of water from

the well at Bethlehem!" ¹⁸So these three broke through the lines of the Philistines, drew water from the well by the gate of Bethlehem and brought it back to David. When he realized what they had done to get it, he refused to drink it and poured it out on the ground as a precious offering to the Lord. ¹⁹He said, "God forbid that I should drink this water. It would be like drinking the blood of these men." Because they had risked their lives to get the water, David wouldn't drink it. Such were the exploits of these three valiant men.

²⁰Abishai, the brother of Joab, was leader of The Mighty Thirty. He was not afraid to use his sword and spear against three hundred Philistines, all of whom he killed. He was the bravest of this group of thirty. ²¹Abishai was a mighty warrior, and he became as famous as The Famous Three.

²²Benaiah from the city of Kabzeel was another one known for his bravery. He killed two mighty Moabite warriors and went down into a pit on a day that snow had fallen and killed a trapped lion. ²³He also killed an Egyptian giant who was seven-and-a-half feet tall and who carried a huge spear. Benaiah attacked the giant with a club, took the spear from his hand and killed him with it. ²⁴These were just a few things that Benaiah did to win a name for himself. He became as famous for his exploits as were The Famous Three. ²⁵David made him commander of his bodyguard, even though he wasn't included with The Famous Three.

²⁶Here is a list of some of the mighty warriors that David had over the years: Asahel the brother of Joab, Elhanan the son of Dodo from Bethlehem, ²⁷Shammoth the Harorite, Helez the Pelonite, ²⁸Ira the son of Ikkesh from Tekoa, Abiezer from Anathoth, ²⁹Sibbecai the Hushathite (also known as Mebunnai), Ilai the Ahoite, ³⁰Maharai the Netophathite, Heled (or Heleb) the son of Baanah the Netophathite, ³¹Ithai the son of Ribai from Gibeah in Benjamin, Benaiah the Pira-

thonite, ³²Hurai (or Hiddai), from the valley near Gaash, Abiel the Arbathite, ³³Azmaveth the Baharumite, Eliahba the Shaalbonite, ³⁴Hashem the Gizonite, Jonathan the son of Shammah (or Shagee) the Hararite, ³⁵Ahiam the son of Sacar (or Sharar) the Hararite, Eliphal the son of Ur, ³⁶Hepher the Mecherathite, Ahijah the Pelonite, ³⁷Hezro (or Hezrai) the Carmelite, Naarai the son of Ezbai, ³⁸Joel the brother of Nathan, Mibhar the son of Hagri, ³⁹Zekek the Ammonite, Naharai the Beerothite who was the armor bearer of Joab, the commander-in-chief, ⁴⁰Ira and Gareb, the two Ithrites, ⁴¹Uriah the Hittite, Zabad the son of Ahlai, ⁴²Adina the son of Shiza the Reubenite, a leader among the Reubenite men with his own group of thirty, ⁴³Hanan the son of Maacah, Joshaphat the Mithnite, ⁴⁴Uzzia the Asherathite, Shama and Jeiel the sons of Hotham the Aroerite, ⁴⁵Jediael the son of Shimri, and his brother Joha the Tizite, ⁴⁶Eliel the Mahavite, Jeribai and Joshaviah the sons of Elnaam, Ithmah the Moabite, ⁴⁷Eliel, Obed and Jaasiel the Mesobaite.

David's Loyal Followers

12 While David was living in the Philistine-controlled city of Ziklag to escape from Saul, many experienced warriors joined him who had helped him in battle. ²They were armed with bows and could shoot arrows or sling stones with either the right or the left hand. These men were from Benjamin, the same tribe that Saul came from. ³They were under the command of Ahiezer and Joash, the sons of Shemaah from Gibeah. Other outstanding warriors were: Jeziel and Pelet the sons of Azmaveth, Beracah, Jehu the Anathothite, ⁴Ishmaiah the Gibeonite, a mighty warrior and one of The Mighty Thirty and a leader in his own right, Jeremiah, Jahaziel, Johanan, Jozabad the Gederathite, ⁵Eluzai, Jerimoth, Bealiah, Shemariah, Shephatiah the Haruphite, ⁶Elkanah, Isshiah, Azarel, Joezer and Jashobeam the Korahites, ⁷Joelah and Zebadiah the sons of Jeroham from Gedor.

⁸Some Gadites had joined David and his men while they were hiding in the wilderness. They were brave warriors trained for battle and experts in handling swords and shields. Their determination and their beards made them appear as fierce as lions, and they were as sure-footed and quick as mountain goats. ⁹Ezer was their leader, Obadiah was next in command and from there the chain of command went on down to Eliab, ¹⁰Mishmannah, Jeremiah, ¹¹Attai, Eliel, ¹²Johanah, Elzabad, ¹³Jeremiah and Machbannai. ¹⁴Some of these Gadites were put in charge of hundreds and others of thousands. ¹⁵They were the same men who had crossed the Jordan during the first month of the year when it reached flood stage and then drove out the settlers in the valleys on both sides of the river.

¹⁶When David and his men were in the wilderness, thirty men from Benjamin and Judah came to join him. ¹⁷David went out to meet them and said, "If you're coming in peace to help me, you're certainly welcome. But if you're joining me to betray me to my enemies even though I've done nothing to hurt you, the God of our fathers knows it and will punish you."

¹⁸Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Amasai, leader of these thirty men, and he said to David, "We are yours, son of Jesse. Success to you and to all those who are with you. God is on your side and we know it." So David welcomed them and made them leaders in his army.

¹⁹Also some men from Manasseh went to join David when King Achish asked him to march with them against Saul. But David didn't have to fight against Saul because the Lord moved on the hearts of the Philistine commanders, and they realized that during the battle he could easily defect to Saul. So they sent him away. ²⁰It was then that the following leaders from Manasseh deserted Saul and joined David: Adnah, Jozabad, Jediahel, Michael, Jozabad, Elihu and

Zillethai, who back home had been officers in charge of thousands. ²¹They helped David fight the Amalekites who had plundered Ziklag while David and his men were away, and later they became important officers in David's forces. ²²Almost every day new men joined David until he had quite a large and formidable army.

David's Army

²³When he moved from Ziklag to Hebron in Judah, a large number of experienced officers and men came to David to make him king in place of Saul. ²⁴From Judah came six thousand, eight hundred battle-hardened men armed with shields and spears. ²⁵From Simeon came seven thousand, one hundred experienced fighters. ²⁶From Levi came four thousand, six hundred. ²⁷Jehoiada, a descendant of Aaron, came with three thousand, seven hundred. ²⁸Zadok, a very capable young officer, came with twenty-two officers from his clan. ²⁹Only three thousand came from Benjamin because most of the tribe remained loyal to Saul who was a Benjamite. ³⁰From Ephraim came twenty thousand, eight hundred fighters, all of whom were famous among the Ephraimites. ³¹From West Manasseh came eighteen thousand chosen men determined to make David king. ³²From Issachar came two hundred top officers who knew what to do in battle and the right time to do it. They came with their men. ³³From Zebulun came fifty thousand experienced soldiers who could use every type of weapon and who were totally committed to David. ³⁴From Naphtali came one thousand officers and thirty-seven thousand men with shields and spears. ³⁵From Dan came twenty-eight thousand, six hundred men ready for battle. ³⁶From Asher came forty thousand experienced fighters. ³⁷From the tribes of Reuben, Gad and East Manasseh on the other side of Jordan, one hundred and twenty thousand.

³⁸All these were experienced men

trained for battle. They came to Hebron all of one mind and were determined to make David king, as were the rest of Israel. ³⁹The men spent three days at Hebron celebrating the coronation of David, eating and drinking the food that their fellow countrymen had provided. ⁴⁰From as far away as Issachar, Zebulun and Naphtali, people came with donkeys, camels, mules and oxen loaded with food. They brought huge amounts of flour, figs, raisins, unfermented wine and olive oil, as well as cattle and sheep. All this was an expression of joy felt by the people throughout the country over their new king.

The Ark Moved From Kirjath Jearim

13 After David became king of all Israel and moved from Hebron to Jerusalem, he consulted with his officers over hundreds and thousands about bringing the Ark of the Lord there. ²Then he said to the people, "If you approve and if it's the will of God, let's send word to all the tribes and to the priests and Levites throughout the country that whoever wants to can come and join us as we bring the Ark of the Lord to Jerusalem. ³Then let's go to Kiriath Jearim, which is only about seven miles from here, and get the Ark. It's been there for almost forty years, and we haven't been going there to ask for God's counsel. Let's bring it here to give us the guidance we need as we begin our new nation." ⁴The people agreed with David because what he suggested seemed the right thing to do.

⁵So David invited the people of Israel from all over the country, from the Shihor River on the border of Egypt in the south to the Hamath Pass in the north, to come and join in the celebration of moving the Ark of God from Kiriath Jearim to Jerusalem. ⁶Then David and the people went to Kiriath Jearim (or Baalah), to get the Ark of God. This is where the mighty God of Israel appeared between the cherubim, and that is why it is called the Ark of

God. ⁷The Levites moved the Ark out of Abinadab's house. They set it on a new cart like the one the Philistines had made when they sent the Ark back to Israel after capturing it during the days of Samuel. Then they asked Abinadab's sons Uzzah and Ahio, to take charge of the oxen and the cart. ⁸David and the people came with joy before the Lord, singing praises to Him accompanied by harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals and trumpets.

⁹Now according to the instructions that the Lord had given to Moses, the Ark was to be carried on the shoulders of the Levites and not to be transported on a cart. They got as far as the threshing floor of Chidon (or Nacon) when the oxen stumbled and Uzzah, who was living in open sin, reached out and grabbed the Ark to steady it. ¹⁰When he did that, the Lord struck him down, because only the priests were supposed to touch the Ark, and Uzzah knew it. So he died in the presence of the Lord beside the Ark of God. ¹¹David was not happy with what the Lord had done and questioned His justice. So David named the place Perez Uzzah, meaning, The Punishment of Uzzah.

¹²David was now afraid to move the Ark any farther. He said, "How can I take the Ark of the Lord to Jerusalem when we're all afraid of what might happen to us?" ¹³So he decided to leave it right there. They carefully moved it to the house of Obed Edom the Gittite who was a Korahite Levite and a native of the city of Gath Rimmon. ¹⁴So the Ark of God stayed at the house of Obed Edom for three months before David got up enough courage to try to move it again. During this time the Lord greatly blessed Obed Edom and his family in everything they did.

David Makes Jerusalem His Capital

14 Hiram, king of the coastal city of Tyre, sent messengers to David in Jerusalem offering to provide him with cedar logs, stone cutters and carpenters whenever he got ready to build his

palace. David gladly accepted his offer. ²He knew that it was the Lord who had made him king over Israel and who was blessing the country for the sake of His people whom He loved.

³After David made Jerusalem his capital and was established as king of all Israel, he followed the custom of other kings and took more wives and concubines and had many sons and daughters.

⁴These are the names of some of his sons born in Jerusalem: Solomon, Shammua (or Shimea), Shobab, Nathan, ⁵Ibhar, Elishua, Elpalet (who died young), ⁶Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, ⁷Elishama, Beeliada and Eliphelet.

The Philistines Defeated

⁸When the Philistines heard that David had become king of Israel, they called up all their troops and marched against Israel looking for him. David heard about it and went out to fight against them. ⁹The Philistines began plundering villages in the Valley of Rephaim. ¹⁰Then David prayed to the Lord, "Should I attack the Philistines? Will you go with me?" The Lord said, "Go, and I'll help you defeat them." ¹¹So David and his men attacked the Philistines at Baal Perazim and defeated them. Then he said, "The Lord helped me break out against my enemy and overwhelm their forces like a flood." That's why the place is called Baal Perazim meaning The God Who Breaks Out Against His Enemies. ¹²The Philistines fled so quickly that they left their idols behind. David ordered his men to gather them up and burn them.

¹³Before long, the Philistines came back and started plundering the villages again. ¹⁴Once more David asked the Lord what to do. The Lord said, "This time don't meet their forces head on as you did before, but circle around them and prepare to attack them from the side by the mulberry trees. ¹⁵When you get there, wait until you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the trees, then

move out to battle, because this means that I'm marching out ahead of you to defeat the Philistines." ¹⁶David did what the Lord said and defeated the Philistines from Gibeon to Gezer. ¹⁷After this David's fame spread everywhere, and the Lord made all the surrounding nations afraid of him.

The Ark Finally Brought to Jerusalem

15 David began building houses and expanding the city of Jebus, which he had taken from the Jebusites. He renamed it Jerusalem, but the people called it the City of David. It was there that he prepared a place for the Ark of God and set up a tent for it. (The original Sanctuary tent that Moses had made was still standing in Gibeon.) ²After three months, David decided to try again to bring the Ark of God to Jerusalem. He said to the people, "This time we will not place the Ark of the Lord on a cart but the Levites will carry it because the Lord told Moses this is how it should be done." ³Again he invited the people of Israel to come and take part in the joyous occasion of bringing the Ark of the Lord to Jerusalem. ⁴He also asked the descendants of Aaron and the Levites to come and help.

⁵One hundred and twenty descendants through Kohath came together under the direction of Uriel, ⁶two hundred and twenty descendants through Merari under the direction of Asaiah, ⁷one hundred and thirty descendants through Gershon under the direction of Joel, ⁸two hundred descendants through Elizaphan under the direction of Shemaiah, ⁹eighty descendants through Hebron under the direction of Eliel, ¹⁰and one hundred and twelve descendants through Uzziel under the direction of Amminadab. ¹¹Then David called in Zadok and Abiathar, the high priests, and Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel and Amminadab, the Levites, and talked to them.

¹²He said, "You are all leaders and heads of Levite families. I want you to con-

secrete yourselves and get ready to bring the Ark of the Lord to Jerusalem and set it in the place I prepared for it. ¹³This time you must carry the Ark on your shoulders as the Lord wants us to and not place it on a cart as we did the first time. That's why the Lord was so displeased with us. I want the priests to supervise everything to make sure it's done right."

¹⁴So the priests and the Levites consecrated themselves and got ready to bring the Ark of the Lord to Jerusalem. ¹⁵They went to the house of Obed Edom where the Ark was and carried it with poles on their shoulders exactly as the Lord had told Moses it should be done.

¹⁶David had also told the leaders of the Levites to appoint some of their number to sing joyful praises to the Lord and other Levites to accompany them with lyres, harps and cymbals. ¹⁷So the Levites appointed Heman son of Joel, his relative Asaph son of Berechiah, and Ethan the Merarite who was the son of Kushaiah. ¹⁸The second group included Zechariah, Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed Edom and Jeiel. ¹⁹Heman, Asaph and Ethan were to play the bronze cymbals, ²⁰Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah and Benaiah were to play the composition called "Alamoth" on the high-pitched lyres. ²¹Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed Edom, Jeiel and Azaziah were to play the composition of the eighth octave of Sheminith on the low-pitched lyres. ²²Chenaniah was put in charge of the choir because he was a talented singer.

²³Berechiah and Elkanah were chosen as guards of the Ark. ²⁴The priests Sheb-aniah, Joshaphat, Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah, and Eliezer were asked to walk ahead of the Ark and blow the trumpets. Obed Edom and Jehiah were the other two guards.

²⁵Then David, the leaders of Israel and the commanders of the units of a thousand, went to Obed Edom's house and

brought the Ark of the Lord to Jerusalem with great rejoicing. ²⁶The Lord blessed the Levites for carrying the Ark. After six paces, they sacrificed a young bull and a fattened sheep as an expression of thanksgiving until seven of each had been sacrificed. ²⁷David wore a plain white linen sleeveless garment like the priests wear. Over that he wore a linen robe, as did the musicians and Levites who were carrying the Ark.

²⁸So the people of Israel brought the Ark of the Lord to Jerusalem with shouts of joy, accompanied by the sound of rams' horns, trumpets, cymbals, lyres and harps. ²⁹As they came into the city, David's wife Michal, the daughter of Saul, watched from the window of her house. When she saw the king of Israel jumping for joy before the Lord, she was embarrassed by his undignified behavior. When the ceremonies were over she scolded him for what he had done.

The Ark Placed in the Tent

16 They brought the Ark to the place David had prepared for it and set it inside the tent. Then they offered both burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord. ²After the offering of sacrifices was over, David blessed the people in the name of the Lord. ³Then he expressed his love for the people by giving each man and woman a loaf of bread, along with some dates and raisins.

⁴He appointed certain Levites to lead out in worship before the Ark of the Lord by praying for the people, giving thanks to the Lord and praising Him for what He had done for Israel. ⁵Asaph was put in charge and Zechariah was his assistant. Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed Edom and Jeiel were to play the lyres and harps and Asaph the cymbals. ⁶The two priests, Benaiah and Jahaziel were appointed to blow the trumpets before the Ark during worship.

David's Song of Praise

⁷David also gave Asaph and his brothers the following thanksgiving hymn to sing that he had written for the occasion:

⁸"Give thanks to the Lord; call on His name; tell the nations about His greatness and what He has done for us. ⁹Sing praises to the Lord for all His wonderful acts. ¹⁰Glory be to His holy name. Let those who love Him rejoice. ¹¹Seek the Lord and His strength; look to Him continually. ¹²Remember what He has done for us—remember his miracles and His gracious judgments in our behalf. ¹³The descendants of Jacob are His people; the sons of Israel are His chosen ones.

¹⁴"He is the Lord our God; His commandments are for everyone. ¹⁵He will keep His covenant forever; His promise stands for a thousand generations. ¹⁶The covenant He first made with Abraham, He confirmed with an oath to Isaac; ¹⁷He renewed it with Jacob and gave it to Israel to be theirs forever. ¹⁸He said, 'I will give you the land of Canaan as your inheritance.'

¹⁹"Our ancestors were few in number and were strangers in the land. ²⁰They wandered from place to place, pitching their tents in one little kingdom and then another. ²¹The Lord allowed no one to oppress them. For their sake He warned kings not to harm them. ²²He said, 'Do not touch my people; do my prophets no harm.'

²³"Sing to the Lord, all the earth; daily proclaim His message of salvation. ²⁴Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous deeds among the people. ²⁵Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; He is to be honored above all gods. ²⁶The gods of the people are only idols, but the Lord made heaven and earth. ²⁷Glory and majesty surround Him; power and joy fill His Temple.

²⁸"Praise the Lord, all people on earth; praise His glory and His might. ²⁹Give the Lord the glory that is due His name. Bring an offering and come before Him

with praise. Worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness. ³⁰Let all the people of the earth bow before Him. He set the earth firmly in its path so that it cannot be moved. ³¹Let the heavens rejoice; let the earth be glad! Tell the world: The Lord is King! ³²Let the oceans and every creature in them praise the Lord. Let the fields and everything in them be jubilant and rejoice. ³³Let the trees of the forest sing. Let them sing with joy before the Lord. Let them sing because the Lord is coming to put an end to sin. ³⁴Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love continues forever.

³⁵"Call out to Him, 'Save us, O Lord! Deliver us from our enemies. We will be forever thankful and praise your holy name. ³⁶Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel. Praise Him now and forever.'

The people loved the hymn that David had written, and they all said, "Amen! Praise the Lord!"

Levitical Duties

³⁷Then David left Asaph and the other Levites in charge of the Ark of the Lord to minister there daily. ³⁸He asked Obed Edom the son of Jeduthun and sixty-eight Levites to assist in the services. He and Hosah were also to serve as guards for the Ark. ³⁹David left Zadok the priest and his fellow priests in charge of the Sanctuary at Gibeon. ⁴⁰Every morning and evening they were to offer sacrifices on the altar of burnt offering according to the instructions that the Lord had given through Moses. ⁴¹Heman and Jeduthun and other Levites were asked to sing praises to the Lord, giving thanks for His love which continues forever. ⁴²These men were also responsible for playing the trumpets, cymbals and other instruments that accompanied the songs. The sons of Jeduthun guarded the gates.

⁴³Then all the people left and went home. David also went home and blessed his family.

God's Promise to David

17 After David had moved into his palace, he called in Nathan the prophet and said to him, "Here I am living in a palace of cedar while the Ark of the Lord sits in a tent." ²Nathan said, "Whatever you have in mind to do for the Lord, do it, because He is with you."

³That night the Lord said to Nathan, ⁴"Tomorrow morning go back to David and say to him, 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: You are not to build a house for me. ⁵I have not lived in a house from the day I brought the children of Israel out of Egypt until now. I have moved from one campsite to another, to be with my people. ⁶When I moved, did I ever ask the leaders of Israel whom I chose to care for my people why they hadn't thought of building a house of cedar for me? ⁷Tell my servant David, This is what the Lord of the heavenly army says: I took you from looking after sheep in the field and made you king of Israel. ⁸I've been with you wherever you have gone. I have defeated all your enemies for you. And I will give you a name among the names of the greatest men on earth.

⁹I will make a place for my people and will settle them in this place. They will have a land they can call their own and will not be oppressed as they have been. ¹⁰From the time of the judges until now, they've been mistreated by their neighbors, but I will subdue their enemies. The royal line of your descendants will last forever. ¹¹When you die and sleep beside your fathers, one of your sons will be the next king. I will extend his kingdom and make it strong. ¹²He will build a house for me and I will establish his family on the throne forever. ¹³I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me. I will not take my supportive love away from him as I had to from Saul. ¹⁴I will put him in charge of my people and set him over my kingdom forever. His royal house will never end.'"

¹⁵The next morning Nathan went to see

David and told him everything the Lord had said. ¹⁶Then David went to the tent where the Ark was and prayed to the Lord,

"Lord God of Israel, who am I and who is my family that you have made us so important to you? ¹⁷As if what you have done weren't enough, now you've said that you will build a line of kings through my son that will last forever. You've treated me as if I were some important person. ¹⁸What can I say? You know me better than I know myself, yet you have honored me, your servant, and set me over your people. ¹⁹O Lord, out of pure kindness you have done all this for me. You have shown me the future greatness of my descendants and I don't deserve it.

²⁰"There is no one like you. There's no other God who even exists beside you. ²¹What nation is there like Israel? What other nation has been rescued from slavery and made to be a special people to the God of heaven and earth? What other God has made a name for Himself by performing such mighty miracles and driving out nations to make room for those He has redeemed? ²²You have made the people of Israel your own and have become their God forever.

²³"Now, O Lord, let the promise you have made to me about my family be carried out according to your will. ²⁴May my house be established and may your name be honored as great forever. May people everywhere say, 'The Lord, the mighty God, the God of heaven and earth, is the God of Israel.' Under your kingly rule the house of David will stand forever. ²⁵Lord, I have courage to pray this prayer because of the promise you have made regarding my descendants. ²⁶O Lord, there is no doubt that you are God. You are the One who promised all these wonderful things to your servant. ²⁷Now, Lord, bless my family. Help them to be obedient so you can shower them with your blessings, for what you bless is blessed forever."

David's Victories

18 Some time later David again fought off the Philistines and defeated them. He took the city of Gath with its surrounding villages. It was their mother city but he made it part of Israel. ²He defeated the Moabites, and they became subject to him and agreed to be taxed.

³He also fought against Hadadezer from Zobah, the king of Syria who was trying to extend his territory to include Hamath by the upper Euphrates River. ⁴David defeated him and captured a thousand chariots, seven thousand horsemen and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He cut the hamstrings of all the horses so they couldn't be used for war again, except for a hundred chariot horses which he kept for himself. ⁵When the Syrians from Damascus sent an army to help Hadadezer, David defeated them too, and killed twenty-two thousand of their troops. ⁶Then he stationed troops in Zobah and Damascus, and the people there became subject to him and agreed to be taxed. The Lord gave David victory everywhere he went. ⁷He took the gold shields that Hadadezer's officers had and brought these shields to Jerusalem. ⁸He also captured the cities of Tebah and Cun which belonged to Hadadezer and took large quantities of bronze back with him to Jerusalem. This is what Solomon used when he made the huge laver, the pillars and the other bronze utensils for the Temple.

⁹When Toi (or Tou), king of Hamath, heard that David had defeated Hadadezer's entire army, ¹⁰he sent his son Hadoram with a delegation to David to congratulate him on his victory and to express his gratitude because Hadadezer had been at war with him also. Hadoram also brought David gifts of gold, silver and bronze. ¹¹David accepted these gifts and dedicated them to the Lord along with the silver and gold he had taken from the Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines and Amalekites.

¹²Abishai, the brother of Joab, de-

feated the Edomites in the Valley of Salt and in the process killed eighteen thousand of their men. ¹³Then David stationed troops in Edom and the people became subject to him and agreed to be taxed. Wherever David's armies went the Lord gave them the victory.

David's Government

¹⁴David treated everyone in Israel and in territories subject to him with justice and equity. ¹⁵Joab, the son of David's sister Zeruijah, was in charge of the entire army. Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahilud, was in charge of the country's records. ¹⁶Zadok, son of Ahitub, and Abiathar, assisted by his son Ahimelech, served jointly as high priests. Ahimelech's grandfather was the one who had given David holy bread when he fled from Saul. Shavsha was David's secretary. ¹⁷Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada was in charge of the Cherethites and Pelethites, David's personal bodyguards. David's sons were given positions as princes of the court.

The Defeat of the Ammonites and Syrians

19 When Nahash, king of the Ammonites, died and his son Hanun became king, ²David thought: His father was kind to my parents when I had to flee from Saul. I will show kindness to Hanun. So David sent a delegation to express his sympathy to the new king. When the delegation arrived, ³the Ammonite leaders said to Hanun, "Do you think David sent these men here just to comfort you? They've come to spy out the land so they can conquer us." ⁴Hanun believed what his leaders said and had David's men arrested. He ordered half their beards shaved off, cut their robes at the hips and sent them home. ⁵When David heard about this, he sent word to his men to stay in Jericho until their beards had grown back before coming back.

⁶Hanun and his leading men knew that this would anger David and bring on a war, which is what they were after.

Hanun hired some mercenaries and paid over thirty-five tons of silver for chariots and horsemen from the Syrian states of Maacah and Zobah in Upper Mesopotamia to come and help them fight against David. ⁷He also hired thirty-two thousand mercenaries and a thousand men from Maacah to come and set up camp near Medeba. The Ammonites mobilized all their own men also, and together they moved out for battle. ⁸When David heard about this, he sent Israel's entire army under the command of Joab to meet them. ⁹The Ammonites came out and drew up the battle lines at the entrance of Rabbah while their allies took their men to the open country where they could use their chariots.

¹⁰Joab noted that there were battle lines in front of him and to the side, and that those to the side were ready to use their chariots and swing around behind him. So he took his best troops and got ready to go against the Syrians in the open country. ¹¹He put Abishai, his brother, in charge of the rest of the men and sent them against the Ammonites. ¹²Joab said to him, "If the Syrians are too much for me, then send some of your troops to help me. If the Ammonites are too much for you, I'll send some of my troops to help you. That way we can defeat first one army and then the other." ¹³Let's be courageous and fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. May the Lord's will be done in this battle." ¹⁴Then Joab took his men and attacked the Syrian forces. He defeated them, and they turned and ran. ¹⁵When the Ammonites saw what was happening to their allies, they, too, turned and ran back into the city for protection. Then Joab and Abishai ordered their men to stop fighting, and they returned to Jerusalem.

¹⁶After the Syrians were defeated, they sent messengers back home asking that reinforcements be sent to them from beyond the Euphrates River. So Hadadezer, whom David had defeated before, recruited more troops, placed them under

the command of Shobach and sent them south. ¹⁷When David heard about this, he called up all his men and personally went out with them to meet the Syrians. They crossed the Jordan River and headed north to attack the combined forces of Syrians and Ammonites. ¹⁸David defeated them and altogether killed seven thousand charioteers and forty thousand foot soldiers. He also killed Shobach, their commander. ¹⁹When the local kings who were subject to Hadadezer realized that their combined forces had been defeated, they made peace with David and chose to be subject to him rather than the Syrians. After that, the Syrians never again came to help the Ammonites fight Israel.

David Captures Rabbah

20 In the spring of the following year, when armies usually went to war, Joab led his men back to fight the Ammonites while David stayed in Jerusalem. Joab besieged the capital of Rabbah and overthrew it. ²Then he asked David to come from Jerusalem to have the honor of marching the troops into the fallen city. David took charge of the troops, marched them into the city, took the crown off the head of their idol and, as a sign of victory, placed it for a moment on his own head. The crown weighed seventy-five pounds. It was made of solid gold and contained many precious stones. David took the crown and a large amount of plunder out of that city. ³He also took people from all the other Ammonite cities and consigned them to work with picks, saws and axes. Then he and his army went back to Jerusalem.

Battles Against the Philistine Giants

⁴Later war broke out with the Philistines at Gezer. It was during this battle that Sibbecai, one of David's mighty warriors, killed Sippai (or Saph), one of the giants. Again the Philistines were defeated. ⁵In another battle, Elhanan, son of Jair, killed the giant

Lahmi, brother of Goliath. Lahmi's spear was as thick as a weaver's beam.⁶In still another battle with the Philistines near Gath, there was a warrior with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. He, too, was one of the giants.⁷When he challenged Israel, Jonathan, the son of David's brother, killed him.⁸These three giants were descendants of Rapha, the giant from Gath, and all three were killed by David's men.

The Census of Israel and Judah

21 Satan wanted to bring trouble on Israel so he played on the pride of David and tempted him to take a census to find out how many men of military age there were in the country.²David called in Joab and the other officers and said to them, "I want you to take a census of the people from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south. Then report back to me so I can know how big an army I can count on if I need it."³Joab said, "With the Lord on our side, we already have an army a hundred times bigger than it appears. Why worry about how many more men of military age we have? This shows a lack of faith in the Lord. If we take this census we'll all be guilty of sin."⁴But the king insisted and overruled Joab. So he and his officers went throughout Israel taking the king's census. It took over nine months, and when they were finished, they returned to Jerusalem.⁵Joab reported to David the number of men who could be called up for war at a moment's notice. There were one million, one hundred thousand from Israel, including David's standing army of about three hundred thousand. From Judah alone, there were almost five hundred thousand.⁶Joab didn't like the king's command, so he didn't count the men from the tribe of Levi because it was against the law of Moses, nor did he count the men from Benjamin, because they refused to be numbered.

⁷What David had done greatly displeased the Lord, because the enemies

of Israel would read into this that Israel's strength was in numbers—in their huge army and not in their God. So the Lord decided to discipline David for what he had done.⁸When God told David what He planned to do, David repented and said, "I have sinned a great sin by doing this. I've been a fool to give in to my pride and draw the people's attention away from you."⁹The Lord said to the prophet Gad,¹⁰"Go to David and tell him that this is what the Lord says, 'I'm giving you three options. You choose which one you think is best for you.'" ¹¹So Gad went to David and said, "This is what the Lord says: 'I'm giving you three options. Choose which discipline you want. ¹²Do you want three years of famine, three months of successive defeats by attacking armies, or three days of an epidemic from the Lord to sweep across the land?'" Gad said, "Let me know what you decide so I can give the Lord your answer."¹³David said, "I have sinned by giving in to my own pride. Let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for He is very merciful. Let us not fall into the hands of man."

¹⁴So the Lord sent an epidemic on Israel, and seventy thousand men across the country died in a matter of three days.¹⁵The angel was ready to destroy those of military age in Jerusalem, but the Lord said, "Stop! That's enough!" When the Lord said this, the angel was hovering over the threshing floor of Ornan (Araunah) the Jebusite on the plateau of Mount Moriah where Abraham almost sacrificed his son Isaac.¹⁶The Lord opened David's eyes and he saw the angel hovering in midair with a drawn sword in his hand extended over Jerusalem. Then David and the leaders of Israel, all of whom were wearing sackcloth to show their repentance, fell on their knees and bowed face down to the ground.¹⁷David prayed to the Lord, "I was the one who ordered the census to be taken. I am the one who lost faith in you. But as for the people, these sheep,

what have they done? Let this sickness fall on me and kill me. I'm the one who deserves it. But spare my men."

¹⁸Then the Lord said to Gad, "Go and tell David to build an altar on Ornan's threshing floor." ¹⁹So David obeyed the prophet and went there. ²⁰Now while Ornan and his four sons were threshing wheat, the Lord opened their eyes, and they too saw the angel hovering in midair with a sword in his hand. When his sons saw this, they ran and hid. ²¹Just then David came. When Ornan saw him coming, he left the threshing floor and went to greet David. Then he fell on his knees in front of the king and bowed with his face down to the ground. ²²David said, "Stand up. Let me ask you something. Are you willing to sell your threshing floor? I want to build an altar to the Lord here to help stop this epidemic. I'll pay you the full price, no questions asked." ²³Ornan said, "Take it. I'll be glad to give it to you. Let the king do with it whatever he wants. I'll also give you these oxen. You may sacrifice them to the Lord. Use the boards from this threshing floor for wood and the wheat for the food offering. I'll give it all to you for nothing." ²⁴David said, "No, I'll pay you the full price. I'm not going to give something to the Lord which costs me nothing." ²⁵So David paid Ornan for the oxen and six hundred gold coins for the hill. ²⁶He built an altar to the Lord there and had the priests get the whole burnt offerings and peace offerings ready for sacrifice. David prayed and the Lord answered him by sending fire from heaven to burn up the sacrifices on the altar. ²⁷Then the Lord spoke to the angel and told him to put away his sword.

²⁸When David saw that the Lord had answered his prayer, he asked the priests to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving on the same altar. ²⁹Now the Sanctuary and the altar of sacrifice that Moses had built in the wilderness were still in Gibeon. ³⁰But David didn't leave Jerusalem to go there to pray because he was afraid of the

angel of the Lord. He preferred praying by the altar on Mount Moriah.

David Makes Plans to Build the Temple

22 Then David said, "This is where the Temple of the Lord must be built. And the altar of sacrifice for burnt offerings is to be built here also."

²So he gave orders to call together all the foreigners living in Israel and he offered them jobs working for the government. Some were skilled stonemasons and cut huge blocks for the Temple. Others were skilled in working with metals. ³David supplied them with iron for making nails and hinges for the gates. And he provided them with so much bronze it couldn't be weighed. ⁴He also supplied them with many carefully cut cedar logs imported from Tyre and Sidon. ⁵David said, "The Temple of the Lord must not be something ordinary, but something magnificent and full of splendor that will attract the attention of all people. Solomon is still young and inexperienced so I will design the Temple for him and do all I can to get things ready."

⁶Then David called for his son Solomon and said, "My son, I want you to build the Temple according to the pattern the Lord gave me. ⁷I had my heart set on building the Temple more than anything else in the world. ⁸But the Lord told me through Nathan the prophet, 'You have fought too many wars and shed too much blood. I don't want people associating war and bloodshed with my Temple. My Temple is to be a house of peace for all people. ⁹But one of your sons will become king and people will associate him with peace and prosperity. Solomon will build my Temple. His name means Peace, and during his reign I will bring rest to the people of Israel. ¹⁰He will build my Temple, and I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me. I will establish his royal house in Israel forever.'

¹¹"So you see, my son, the Lord has spoken. He will be with you and help you

build this Temple and give you success in doing so just as He said He would. ¹²May the Lord also give you wisdom and understanding when He puts you in charge of the country and helps you keep His commandments and His laws. ¹³If you obey Him and observe the ordinances that the Lord gave us through Moses, then the Lord can bless you and you'll be successful in everything you do. So be confident and full of courage. Don't let anything make you afraid. ¹⁴I have all these building materials ready for you. I have nearly four thousand tons of gold and almost forty thousand tons of silver. I have huge quantities of bronze and iron, probably more than you'll need. I have supplies of wood and stone, but you'll need more. ¹⁵You have a lot of workmen right here in Israel to help you—stonecutters, masons and carpenters. You also have men skilled in working with metals, such as ¹⁶gold, silver, bronze and iron. You've got all the skilled labor you need. When you're ready to begin, the Lord will be there to help you."

¹⁷Then David ordered all the leaders of Israel to be prepared to help Solomon. ¹⁸He said to them, "Hasn't the Lord been with you and given you peace on all sides from your enemies? Hasn't the Lord helped us conquer the people of this land? Today they're subject to the Lord and to you. ¹⁹Serve the Lord with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. When my son Solomon becomes king and starts to build the Temple, help him. Then when it's complete, take the Ark of the Lord from its tent and set it in the Temple where it belongs, together with everything that goes with it."

The Work of the Levites

23 When David grew too old to rule, he made his son Solomon king of Israel. ²He also called together all the leaders, priests and Levites to organize them for service in the Temple. ³He or-

dered a census taken of the Levites thirty years and older. There were thirty-eight thousand of them.

⁴David said to them, "I want twenty-four thousand of you to carry on the work in the Temple and six thousand of you to serve as officials and judges. ⁵Four thousand of you are to be gate keepers, and four thousand are to serve as musicians using the instruments I've provided." ⁶Then David divided the Levites into three groups corresponding to the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath and Merari.

⁷Gershon, the first son of Levi, had two sons: Ladan and Shimei. ⁸Ladan had three sons: Jehiel, Zetham and Joel. ⁹The sons of a nephew named Shimei were Shelomoth, Haziël and Haran. ¹⁰Ladan's brother Shimei also had four sons: Jahath, Zizah, Jeush and Beriah. They belonged to the tribe of Levi. ¹¹Jahath was registered as the firstborn and Zizah (or Zina) as the second, but Jeush and Beriah had no sons, so they were enrolled as a single family.

¹²Kohath, the second son of Levi, had four sons: Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. ¹³Kohath's oldest son, Amram, was the father of Moses and Aaron. Aaron and his descendants were set apart to serve as priests. They were to take charge of the sacred objects in the Sanctuary, to offer sacrifices to the Lord and to bless the people in the Lord's name. ¹⁴The sons of Moses were counted as being part of the Levites. ¹⁵Moses had two sons: Gershom and Eliezer. ¹⁶Gershom had a number of sons, the firstborn being Shebuel (or Shubael). ¹⁷Eliezer had only one son and his name was Rehabiah. But Rehabiah had many sons. ¹⁸Kohath's second son, Izhar, had Shelomith. ¹⁹Kohath's third son, Hebron, had four sons: Jeriah, Amariah, Jehaziël and Jekameam. ²⁰Kohath's fourth son, Uzziel, had Micah and Isshiah.

²¹Merari, the third son of Levi, had two sons: Mahli and Mushi. Mahli had two sons: Eleazar and Kish. ²²Eleazar had only daughters. Their cousins, the sons

of Kish, married them. ²³Merari's second son, Mushi, had three sons: Mahli, Eder and Jerimoth.

²⁴These were the descendants of Levi by heads of family groups as they were registered. All the men twenty years and older had an assignment to work in the Temple. ²⁵David said, "The Lord God of Israel has given His people peace and has come to Jerusalem to live. ²⁶So the descendants of Levi no longer need to carry the Sanctuary and all its articles of furniture from place to place."

²⁷Based on David's instructions all Levites from twenty years old and up were registered for service. ²⁸The duty of the Levites was to help the descendants of Aaron with the services of the Temple. The priests were in charge of the courtyard, the side rooms and purification of the holy things. They were to make sure that all functions were carried out properly. ²⁹They were also in charge of the holy bread on the sacred table, flour for grain offerings, the wafers made without yeast, and baked offerings, as well as the flour mixed with oil. ³⁰Every morning and evening they were to begin and end the day by giving thanks and praising the Lord. ³¹Also, when the special offerings were burned on the Sabbath, at New Moon Festivals and at other appointed festivals they were to praise the Lord. They were to take turns according to the number required. ³²So the Levites carried out their responsibilities in connection with the services of the Sanctuary under the direction of their relatives, the priests who were descendants of Aaron, a descendant of Levi.

The Work of the Priests

24 The descendants of Aaron who served as priests were also divided into groups and given their assignments. Aaron's sons were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ²Nadab and Abihu had died long before Aaron their father because they disobeyed the Lord, and they left no sons. Only

Eleazar and Ithamar were left to serve as priests. ³So when David organized the descendants of Aaron into groups, he asked Zadok, a descendant of Eleazar, and Abiathar, a descendant of Ithamar, together with his son Ahimelech, to help him. ⁴There were many descendants of Eleazar, so they were organized into sixteen groups, but the descendants of Ithamar were organized into only eight groups. ⁵Since there were administrators of the Sanctuary and also supervising priests among both groups, their assignments were made impartially by drawing lots. ⁶The descendants of Eleazar and Ithamar took turns drawing lots, and Shemaiah, son of Nethanel, was chosen as secretary to record each name to be drawn. This was done in the presence of the king, the princes, Zadok and Abiathar who served as high priests assisted by Abiathar's son Ahimelech, and the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Levites and priests.

⁷The first drawing produced the name of Jehoiarib, the second Jedaiah, ⁸the third Harim, the fourth Seorim, ⁹the fifth Malchijah, the sixth Mijamin, ¹⁰the seventh Hakkoz, the eighth Abijah, ¹¹the ninth Jeshua, the tenth Shecaniah, ¹²the eleventh Eliashib, the twelfth Jakim, ¹³the thirteenth Huppah, the fourteenth Jeshebeab, ¹⁴the fifteenth Bilgah, the sixteenth Immer, ¹⁵the seventeenth Hezir, the eighteenth Happizez, ¹⁶the nineteenth Pethahiah, the twentieth Jehezkel, ¹⁷the twenty-first Jachin, the twenty-second Gamul, ¹⁸the twenty-third Delaiah, and the twenty-fourth Maaziah. ¹⁹These were the leaders of groups of priests who were to serve in scheduled order at the Temple. They were to carry out their responsibilities according to the regulations handed down to them by Aaron as the Lord had told him.

Other Leaders Among the Levites

²⁰The leaders among the Levites were: Jehdeiah, a descendant of Amram

through Shubeal, ²¹Isshiah, a descendant of Rehabiah, ²²Jahath, a descendant of Izhar through Shelomoth, ²³Jeriah, Amariah, Jehaziel and Jekameam, all sons of Hebron, ²⁴Shamir, a descendant of Uzziel through Micah, ²⁵Zechariah, a descendant of Uzziel through Isshiah who was Micah's brother, ²⁶Mahli, Mushi and Jaaziah, descendants of Merari, ²⁷Shoham, Zaccur, Ibri and Beno, all sons of Jaaziah, ²⁸Eleazar and Kish, both of whom were sons of Mahli,—Eleazar had no sons, ²⁹Jerabmeel, the son of Kish, ³⁰and also Mahli, Eder and Jerimoth, the sons of Mushi. These were the leaders of the various ancestral houses of Levi. ³¹They also drew lots for their assignments as their relatives, the priests, had done. They did this in the presence of the king, Zadok and Abiathar and his son Ahimelech and the leaders of the ancestral houses of the priests and Levites. The oldest and youngest were all treated the same.

The Temple Musicians

25 Then David and the religious leaders separated some of the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun into three groups to serve as musicians to give God's messages in song, using harps, lyres and cymbals. Here is a list of the ones chosen to serve in each group: ²There were the four sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah and Asharelah. They were under the direction of their father and gave God's message in song as requested by the king. ³Then there were the six sons of Jeduthun: Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiiah, Shimei, Hashabiah and Mattithiah. They were under the direction of their father and also gave God's message in song, together with praise and thanksgiving accompanied by harps. ⁴There were fourteen sons of Heman: Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shebuel (or Shubael), Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, Romamti Ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir and Mahazioth. ⁵God

gave Heman the gift of prophecy who then served also as David's seer. God blessed Heman and gave him fourteen sons and three daughters. ⁶All his sons were musicians skilled in playing instruments such as the cymbal, harp and lyre. They served in the Temple under the direction of their father as requested by the king. ⁷These leaders, together with their relatives from the tribe of Levi, made up a group of two hundred and eighty-eight musicians. ⁸They cast lots for their duties and made no distinction between teacher and student. There were twenty-four groups of twelve, each with its leader.

⁹The drawing of lots was to decide on the order in which the twenty-four sons of Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were to serve and lead each group of twelve. The first drawing began with the family of Asaph and it came up with the name of Joseph, the second drawing, with the name of Gedaliah, ¹⁰the third, with Zaccur, ¹¹the fourth, with Izri, ¹²the fifth, with Nethaniah, ¹³the sixth, with Bukkiah, ¹⁴the seventh, with Asharelah, ¹⁵the eighth, with Jeshaiiah, ¹⁶the ninth, with Mattaniah, ¹⁷the tenth, with Shimei, ¹⁸the eleventh, with Azarel (or Uzziel), ¹⁹the twelfth, with Hashabiah, ²⁰the thirteenth, with Shubael, ²¹the fourteenth, with Mattithiah, ²²the fifteenth, with Jerimoth (or Jerimoth), ²³the sixteenth, with Hananiah, ²⁴the seventeenth, with Joshbekashah, ²⁵the eighteenth, with Hanani, ²⁶the nineteenth, with Mallothi, ²⁷the twentieth, with Eliathah, ²⁸the twenty-first, with Hothir, ²⁹the twenty-second, with Giddalti, ³⁰the twenty-third, with Mahazioth, ³¹the twenty-fourth, with Romamti Ezer.

The Temple Guards

26 Here are the assignments of the Levites who were chosen to be the gate keepers and who later served as Temple guards: From the Korahites: Meshelemiah, the son of Kore, one of the sons of Asaph. ²Meshelemiah and his

sons: Zechariah, Jediael, Zebadiah, Jathniel, ³Elam, Jehohanan and Eliehoenai. ⁴Next Obed Edom and his sons: Shemaiah, Jehozabad, Joah, Sacar, Nethanel, ⁵Ammiel, Issachar and Peullethai. ⁶The Lord blessed Obed Edom's grandsons that he had through Shemaiah, and they all developed into capable leaders. ⁷They were: Othni, Rephael, Obed, Elzabad, Elihu and Shemachiah. The last two were very good leaders. ⁸Altogether there were sixty-two descendants of Obed Edom, and all of them were highly qualified for the work of the Lord. ⁹Meshelemiah had eighteen descendants, all of whom were capable men. ¹⁰Hosah, the Merarite, was put in charge of the gate keepers. His son Shimri was made leader of the group, even though he was not the first-born. ¹¹Then there was Hilkiah, Tebaliah and Zechariah. Altogether there were thirteen descendants of Hosah who were in charge of the gates.

¹²All these men were divided into groups, according to their families and were rotated as gate keepers just as the other Levites were. ¹³Lots were cast for each group who served at the Sanctuary and later at the Temple, and no difference was made between old and young. ¹⁴Shelemiah (or Meshelemiah) drew the lot for guarding the east gate. His son Zechariah, a young man of wisdom, drew the lot for guarding the north gate. ¹⁵Obed Edom drew the lot for the south gate. The lot for guarding the storehouse fell to his sons. ¹⁶Shuppim drew the lot for the west gate. Hosah drew the lot for the Shallecheth gate on the upper road. The guard duty was divided into certain periods with one period following another. ¹⁷Each day there were six guards on the east, four on the north, four on the south and two at each of the storerooms. ¹⁸There were two each day for the colonnade on the west and four at the upper road. ¹⁹So this is how the descendants of Korah and Merari were divided into groups to

serve as guards of the Sanctuary and later as guards at the Temple.

Other Temple Duties

²⁰Some Levites were in charge of the Lord's treasury, which included revenue and offerings. Others were in charge of the treasury of dedicated things for the Temple. ²¹Ladan, one of the sons of Gershon, was the ancestor of a number of families including the family of Jehieli.

²²The two sons of Jehieli were Zetham and Joel and they were among those in charge of the Lord's treasury. ²³Others who were assigned to the treasury were descendants of Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. ²⁴Shebuel, a descendant of Moses through Gershon, was the leader of those in charge of the treasury. ²⁵The descendants of Eliezer, the brother of Gershon, were: Rehabiah, his son Jeshaiiah, his son Joram, his son Zichri and his son Shelomith, who through the line of descent was related to Shubael. ²⁶Now Shelomith and his relatives were in charge of the things dedicated to the Lord for the Temple. These things had been provided by David, the heads of ancestral houses and commanders of hundreds and thousands. ²⁷Some of the gifts given to the Lord were from things taken in battle and then dedicated to Him for the building of the Temple. ²⁸Everything dedicated to the Lord by the prophet Samuel, Saul, Abner his commander, and Joab the commander of David's army, was put in the care of Shelomith and his relatives.

²⁹Chenaniah and his sons, all of whom were descendants of Izhar, were given duties as officials and judges away from the Temple and were asked to keep records and settle disputes. ³⁰Hashabiah, a descendant of Hebron, and seventeen hundred members of his ancestral house were put in charge of all religious and civil matters throughout the country west of the Jordan River. ³¹Jeriah was in charge of coordinating all of this and assigning people their duties. Now in the fortieth year of David's reign, the family

records of Hebron's descendants were checked. They found that some very outstanding men were living at Jazer in Gilead. They were also given administrative responsibilities. ³²Jeriah had twenty-seven hundred very capable men under him from his relatives who were heads of families. David put them in charge of religious and civil matters east of the Jordan River in the territory belonging to the Reubenites, Gadites and half the tribe of Manasseh.

Civil and Military Organization

27 This is a list of the children of Israel who served as government officials and army officers. These were leaders of ancestral houses and commanders of a hundred or a thousand. The army was divided into twelve divisions of twenty-four thousand each. Each division served for one month under its respective commander. Following are the names of the officers who served each month:

²The first month, Jashobeam the son of Zabdiel. ³He was a descendant of Perez, who came from the tribe of Judah to which David belonged. Jashobeam was over all the officers for the first month. ⁴The second month, Dodai the Ahohite served, with Mikloth as second in command. ⁵The third month, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada the priest, served. ⁶This was the same Benaiah who was one of The Mighty Thirty who fought so bravely. His son Ammizabad served as commander under him. ⁷The fourth month, Asahel the brother of Joab, served. His son Zebadiah succeeded him as commander. ⁸The fifth month, Shamhuth the Izrahite served. ⁹The sixth month, Ira the son of Ikkesheh the Tekoite served. ¹⁰The seventh month, Helez the Pelonite from Ephraim served. ¹¹The eighth month, Sibbecai the Hushathite from the family of Zerach from Judah served. ¹²The ninth month, Abiezer the Anathothite from Benjamin served. ¹³The tenth month Maharai the

Netophathite also from the family of Zerach from Judah served. ¹⁴The eleventh month, Benaiah the Pirathonite from Ephraim served. ¹⁵The twelfth month, Heldai the Netophathite from the family of Othniel served.

Leaders of Tribes

¹⁶Following are the administrative officers of the tribes: Eliezer, the son of Zichri, was over the tribe of Reuben; Shephatiah, the son of Maacah, over Simeon; ¹⁷Hashabiah, the son of Kemuel, over Levi; Zadok over the house of Aaron; ¹⁸Elihu, the brother of David, over Judah; Omri, the son of Michael, over Issachar; ¹⁹Ishmaiah, the son of Obadiah, over Zebulun; Jerimoth, the son of Azriel, over Naphtali; ²⁰Hoshea, the son of Azariah, over Ephraim; Joel, the son of Pedaiah, over half the tribe of Manasseh west of Jordan; ²¹Iddo, the son of Zechariah, over half the tribe of Manasseh east of Jordan in Gilead; Jaasiel, the son of Abner, over Benjamin; and ²²Azarel, the son of Jeroham, over Dan. These were the administrative officers over the twelve tribes of Israel.

²³David did not take a census of the younger men in Israel, those twenty years old and under, because the Lord promised to make Israel as numerous as the stars in the sky. ²⁴But David did order Joab to count the available fighting men to determine the size of his army should they all be needed. However, the Lord was very displeased, so the census was never really completed.

Other State Officials

²⁵Following are the names of those who administered the royal properties: Azmaveth, son of Adiel, was in charge of the royal treasuries; Jonathan, son of Uzziah, of the storehouses in the cities and villages; ²⁶Ezri, son of Chelub, of the farm workers; ²⁷Shimei, the Ramathite, of the vineyards; Zabdi, the Shiphmite, over the produce of the vineyards; ²⁸Baal Hanan, the Gederite, over olive groves

and fig trees in the western foothills; Joash over the supplies of olive oil; ²⁹Shitrai, the Sharonite, over the herds in the Plain of Sharon; Shaphat, son of Adlai, over the herds in the valleys; ³⁰Obil, the Ishmaelite, over the royal camels; Jehdeiah, the Meronothite, over the royal donkeys; ³¹and Jaziz, the Hagrite, over the sheep and goats. All these were in charge of King David's property which was passed on to his son Solomon.

³²Jonathan, David's uncle, a man of great wisdom and insight, was his counselor; Jehiel, the son of Hachmoni, was in charge of educating and training David's sons; ³³Ahithophel was another one of David's counselors; Hushai, the Archite, was David's close friend. ³⁴After Ahithophel died he was followed by Jehoiada, the son of Benaiah, and by Abiathar as the king's adviser. Joab was commander of the army.

David Gives Solomon Plans for the Temple

28 Before David died, he gave specific instructions to all the officials of Israel regarding the Temple. He called for the commanders of thousands and hundreds, the administrators of his properties and herds, those in charge of the palace, administrative leaders and all the mighty men and brave warriors.

²David stood and said, "Listen to me, my fellow Israelites. I had it in my heart to build a Temple for the Ark of the Lord to give it a more permanent home and to serve as a footstool for the God of heaven. God guided me in drawing the plans for it, and I have made all the provisions I could to have it built. ³But the Lord said to me, 'You are not the one to build a Temple for me because you're known as a soldier, and as such, you have killed a lot of men.' ⁴Yet it was the Lord who chose me to be king of Israel. From the tribe of Judah, He chose my family, and from my father's sons, He chose me. ⁵He has given me many sons, and from them has chosen Solomon to

succeed me as the new king of Israel. ⁶The Lord said to me, 'Your son Solomon is the one who will build a Temple for me because I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father. ⁷I will make his kingdom last forever if he keeps my commandments and faithfully administers my laws as is being done today.' ⁸So now in the presence of God and before all Israel I charge you to obey the Lord our God and do everything He has told us to do so you can continue to live in this goodly land and pass it on to your descendants forever."

⁹Then David turned to his son Solomon and said, "My son, I charge you before God and all these witnesses that you publicly accept your father's God as your God and promise to serve Him with all your heart and soul and mind. He knows all our thoughts and desires. If you seek Him, you'll find Him, for He's not far away. But if you forget about Him and go your own way, He'll not force you to come back. ¹⁰The Lord has chosen you to build a Temple for Him, so take it seriously and put your whole heart into it."

¹¹Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for building the various sections of the Temple, the courtyard, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place where the final work for the atonement of sin was to be made. ¹²David drew up these plans under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and included plans for the different courts, the storerooms for the Temple equipment and the rooms for the treasures of dedicated things. ¹³He also gave Solomon plans for organizing the priests and Levites into work shifts to carry out their responsibilities in the Temple and to care for all the utensils and equipment to be used for worship.

¹⁴He wrote down for him how much silver and gold to use for making the various utensils and which ones should be made of silver and which ones of gold. ¹⁵He specified how much gold and silver should go into making extra lamps and lampstands, and which ones were to be

made of silver and which ones of gold. ¹⁶Then there were instructions on how much gold to use for the extra tables on which to place the holy bread and how much silver to use for certain other tables. ¹⁷David also left instructions on how much gold to use for the forks, sprinkling bowls, pitchers and dishes, as well as how much silver to use for other dishes. ¹⁸He told Solomon how much gold to use to overlay the altar of incense and gave him instructions on how to make two huge cherubim with outstretched wings to arch over the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place. ¹⁹David had all this written down. When he gave these plans to Solomon, he said to him, "Everything outlined in these plans I have done under the direction of the Lord.

²⁰"So when you're ready to build the Temple, go ahead with confidence because these plans are from the Lord and He's the One building the Temple. Don't get discouraged, no matter how long it takes, because the God of Israel will help you as He helped me in drawing the plans. He won't let you down. He will be with you all the way until the Temple is finished. ²¹The priests and Levites already know what they have to do. The workmen with their different skills are ready to help you. The leaders of Israel and all the people are behind you and are ready to obey your every command."

Offerings for Building the Temple

29 Then David said to all the people who were present, "My son Solomon is the one God has chosen to be the next king, but he's still young and inexperienced. The work he needs to do is awesome because he's not building a house for himself but a Temple for the God of heaven. ²I've done everything I could to get things ready for him. I've drawn up the plans, collected materials such as gold, silver, bronze, iron, timbers, precious stones for mosaics, gems of various colors and large quantities of

white marble. ³In addition to all this, I'm giving all my personal treasures of gold and silver to my God because I love Him so very much. ⁴I'm giving Him one hundred and ten tons of pure gold and two hundred and sixty tons of refined silver for decorating the walls of the Temple ⁵and for the gold and silver that the workmen will need for the furnishings. Now who else is willing to consecrate himself and to give an offering to the Lord?"

⁶Then the heads of ancestral houses, the leaders of all the tribes, the commanders of the army and the administrators of royal properties all willingly brought their valuable things to the Lord as an offering. ⁷The combined offerings for the work of the Temple was one hundred and ninety tons of gold, three hundred and seventy-five tons of silver, six hundred and seventy-five tons of bronze and three thousand, seven hundred and fifty tons of iron. ⁸Those who gave precious stones brought them to Jehiel, a descendant of Gershon the son of Levi, who was in charge of the Temple treasury. ⁹When the people saw the generous and whole-hearted response of their leaders, they rejoiced and also gave freely to the Lord. David the king was very pleased.

David Praises God

¹⁰Then he praised the Lord in prayer, "O Lord, you are the God of our father Jacob. Praise be to you forever and ever for what you have done for your people. ¹¹Lord, you are great and powerful, surrounded by glory, splendor and majesty. Everything in heaven and earth is yours. The kingdom is yours and you are its rightful Ruler. ¹²Wealth and honor come from you. You rule over everything by your own strength and power. No one has given you what you have. You are the One who makes others great and gives them strength and power. ¹³We praise your holy name and give thanks for what you have done for us.

¹⁴"Who are we to think that we are giving something to you? You have given us

everything we have. So all we're doing is giving you what is already yours. ¹⁵We're pilgrims in this land just like our forefathers who lived in tents. Our days on this earth are numbered and are like a fleeing shadow. Without you, no one can hope to escape the grips of death. ¹⁶O Lord, all the offerings we have brought for your Temple have come from you. We're only returning what is yours. ¹⁷Lord, I know that you look at everyone's heart and test them to see if they love you. I also know that you're pleased to see honesty and integrity there. Whatever I've given you, I've given honestly and with good intentions because I love you. I see how much your people love you, what they've given to you and how willingly and joyously they've done it. ¹⁸O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, keep this spirit of love in the hearts of your people and keep them loyal to you always.

¹⁹Please put in the heart of my son Solomon a strong desire to please you and to keep your commandments and laws. Help him do everything he can to build the Temple for which I've made all these preparations."

²⁰After his prayer, David said to the people who were there, "Come praise the Lord our God with me." So they all praised the Lord with him. They fell on their knees and bowed in worship before the Lord and in honor before David their king.

Solomon Anointed King

²¹The next day the people began to bring their animals to the priests to be sacrificed as whole burnt offerings to

the Lord. They brought a thousand young bulls, a thousand rams, a thousand male lambs, drink offerings, bread offerings and other offerings in abundance. ²²They held a sacred feast to the Lord and ate with joy, for they knew the Lord was with them. Then they proclaimed Solomon as king of Israel a second time. They anointed him with oil as their ruler and Zadok as their high priest. ²³So Solomon succeeded his father David as king and became ruler over all of Israel. He was a successful king and all Israel obeyed him. ²⁴All the officers and mighty men of David pledged their loyalty to Solomon, as did all the sons of David. ²⁵The Lord blessed Solomon so that the people stood in awe of him. No other king in Israel or Judah ever received the honor he did.

David's Reign Ends

²⁶David, the son of Jesse, had become king of Israel by God's choice. ²⁷He ruled for forty years, the first seven in Hebron, the capital of Judah, and the next thirty-three years in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. ²⁸He died at a ripe old age, wealthy and respected, having enjoyed a long life, and his son Solomon succeeded him. ²⁹The history of David from beginning to end is written in the books of the prophets Samuel, Nathan and Gad. ³⁰The record tells how he became king, how he ruled, how powerful he was and all the things that happened to him and to Israel, as well as to the surrounding nations during his time.

2 CHRONICLES

Solomon Asks God for Wisdom

1 Solomon was a very powerful and respected king because the Lord God was with him.

²He spoke to the commanders of thousands and hundreds, the judges, tribal leaders and heads of ancestral houses, ³and asked them to go with him to Gibeon to the Sanctuary that Moses had built in the wilderness. ⁴David had already brought the Ark of the Lord from Kiriath Jearim to Jerusalem and put it in a special tent that had been made for it. ⁵But the bronze sacrificial altar that Bezalel, son of Uri and grandson of Hur, had made was still in Gibeon in the courtyard of the Sanctuary. So Solomon and the people of Israel went there to worship instead of to Jerusalem. ⁶Solomon ordered a thousand animals to be sacrificed on the bronze altar as whole burnt offerings to the Lord and as a sign of consecration.

⁷That night the Lord appeared to Solomon and said, "I have accepted your consecration. What do you want me to do for you?" ⁸Solomon said, "Lord, you have been very kind to my father David, and you have chosen me to be king in his place. ⁹May the promise you made my father that his son and his descendants would rule over Israel come true. You have made me king over a people who are so numerous that they can hardly be counted. ¹⁰If I'm to govern these people, please give me wisdom to know how to do it. Otherwise, there's no way I can be the kind of king you want me to be."

¹¹The Lord said, "Since that's what you want and you haven't asked for wealth, fame, the death of your enemies or a long life for yourself, but only for wisdom to govern my people, ¹²I will give you what you have asked for. In addition I'll give you wealth and fame such as no other king in Israel has had before you or will have after you." ¹³Then Solomon left the place of worship at the Sanctuary in Gibeon and returned to Jerusalem to reign over Israel.

Solomon's Military and Economic Power

¹⁴Over time Solomon accumulated one thousand, four hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses. He stationed some of them in Jerusalem and the rest in strategic cities throughout the country. ¹⁵During his reign silver and gold became as common as rocks. And cedar was as plentiful as fig trees. ¹⁶Solomon imported horses from Egypt and from as far away as Turkey. ¹⁷He imported chariots from Egypt and then sold them to the Syrians and the Hittites for six hundred pieces of silver. The horses he imported were so valuable they sold for a hundred and fifty pieces of silver.

Preparation for Building the Temple

2 Solomon determined to build the Temple of the Lord and a royal palace for himself. ²He used seventy thousand men to transport materials, eighty thousand as stonecutters and three thousand six hundred foremen, including supervisors. ³Solomon sent this message to Hiram, king of Tyre: "Can you sell me some cedar logs like you sold to my father David? I'm planning to build a palace. ⁴I'm also in the process of building a Temple for the Lord my God to bring honor to His name. I plan to dedicate it as a place of worship where we will burn incense, set out consecrated bread and offer whole burnt offerings to God every morning and evening, as well as on Sabbath, the New Moon and other appointed days. This is what the Lord has told us to do. ⁵I want to build the greatest temple that has ever been built because we believe that our God is greater than any other god. ⁶In reality no one can build a Temple to hold the Lord our God. This will primarily be a place for us to come and worship Him and bring Him our offerings.

⁷"Can you send me a man who is skilled to work with gold and silver, bronze and

iron, and with purple, scarlet and blue cloth and yarn? I also need someone skilled in the art of engraving to work here in Jerusalem with the craftsmen whom my father has already selected. ⁸In addition to cedar, I need cypress and sandalwood from Lebanon. Your people are skilled lumbermen, and I will send my men to help them. ⁹We'll need lots of lumber because the Temple of our God will be the most magnificent temple in the world. ¹⁰I'll send you one hundred and twenty-five thousand bushels of wheat, one hundred and twenty-five thousand bushels of barley, one hundred and fifteen thousand gallons of unfermented wine and one hundred and fifteen thousand gallons of olive oil."

¹¹Hiram, king of Tyre, replied to Solomon in a letter, "It must be because the Lord your God loves His people that He has made you their king. ¹²Praise be to the Lord your God, the God of Israel, Creator of heaven and earth. He has given David a wise son, one full of wisdom and knowledge who will bring honor to his God by building a Temple for Him and only then a palace for himself.

¹³"Yes, I will send you the best craftsman I have. His name is Hiram and he can do all the things you need to have done. ¹⁴His mother was an Israelite from the tribe of Dan and his father was from Tyre. He can work with gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone and wood, as well as with purple, scarlet and blue cloth and yarn. He's also experienced in all kinds of engraving and can design anything you want him to. He'll be glad to work with your craftsmen whom your father David chose. ¹⁵So send me wheat, barley, unfermented wine and olive oil for my servants and we'll get started. ¹⁶I'll have my men cut all the logs you need, bring them down from the mountains and float them down the coast to Joppa. From there you can have your men take them overland to Jerusalem."

¹⁷As soon as Solomon received the letter, he ordered a census to be taken of all

foreign workers in the country, similar to the census that his father David had taken to see the size of his army. From the census they found that altogether there were one hundred and fifty-three thousand six hundred foreigners living and working in Israel. ¹⁸So Solomon assigned seventy thousand of them to transport the lumber from Joppa to Jerusalem, eighty thousand to cut stones in the mountains of Israel. He appointed three thousand six hundred foremen, including supervisors, to make sure that everything stayed on schedule.

Solomon Begins Building the Temple

3 Then Solomon began to build the Temple on top of Mount Moriah in Jerusalem where the Lord's angel had appeared with a sword in his hand to his father David. David had bought the property on top of Mount Moriah from Ornan, the Jebusite, and had decided that was where the Temple of the Lord should be. ²Solomon began construction on the second day of the second month in the fourth year of his reign. ³He used the same measure that Moses had used when he built the Sanctuary in the wilderness. The Sanctuary part of the Temple was a hundred and ten feet long and thirty-six feet wide.

⁴The entrance room was thirty-six feet across, thirty-six feet high and eighteen feet deep. Solomon overlaid the whole inside with pure gold. ⁵He had the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place paneled with cedar, overlaid with gold, and designs worked in of palm trees and wreaths. ⁶He had the Temple decorated with precious stones for beauty. The gold he used came from Arabia. ⁷He also had the ceiling beams, walls, doors and door frames of the Temple overlaid with pure gold and cherubim were carved on the walls.

⁸The Most Holy Place was thirty-six feet long and thirty-six feet wide, the same width as the Sanctuary overall. Solomon used twenty-three tons of pure

gold to overlay the Most Holy Place. ⁹The other rooms, such as the Holy Place and the entrance, were overlaid with gold. Even the nails used were made of gold, twenty ounces for each nail.

¹⁰Two huge angels were carved for the Most Holy Place and overlaid with gold.

¹¹The wingspan of the two angels together was thirty-six feet. Each wing of the first angel was nine feet long, with the two wings measuring eighteen feet. One wing touched the wall and the other touched the wing of the other angel.

¹²The same was true with the second angel. Each outstretched wing was also nine feet long, with the two wings measuring eighteen feet. One wing touched the wall and the other wing touched the wing of the first angel. ¹³So the outstretched wings of the two angels touched each other in the middle of the room and extended to the opposite walls.

¹⁴Solomon also had a curtain made for the Most Holy Place out of blue, purple and scarlet yarn with designs of angels and hung it from golden chains.

¹⁵He had two freestanding pillars made for the entrance to the inner part of the Temple. Each was thirty-three feet high, and together they measured sixty-six feet, not counting the two four-and-a-half-foot crowns, which together measured nine feet. ¹⁶The crown of each pillar was decorated with seven wreaths interwoven and two rows of pomegranates, a hundred in all. Both crowns together had a total of two hundred pomegranates.

¹⁷He had these pillars placed at the entrance to the inner Temple, one on the right and the other on the left. He named the one on the right Jachin, meaning God Establishes, and the one on the left Boaz, meaning In God Is My Strength.

The Temple Furnishings

4 For the courtyard Solomon had a bronze altar made, thirty-six feet square and eighteen feet high. ²He also had a round basin or laver made of cast metal over nine feet high, about eighteen

feet across and fifty-four feet around.

³Below the rim on the outside were carvings of bulls; every two feet was a grouping of ten bulls. These were placed in two rows around the basin when it was cast.

⁴The basin itself rested on the backs of twelve bronze bulls, three facing north, three south, three east and three west. They stood facing outward. ⁵The basin was three-and-a-half inches thick, and its rim was shaped like the rim of a cup curving outward like the petals of a flower. When completely full, it could hold seventeen thousand gallons of water. ⁶He also had ten smaller basins made for the courtyard, five to be placed toward the south and five toward the north. The water in those basins was for washing the whole burnt offerings, but the water in the large basin was used by the priests to wash their hands and feet.

⁷Solomon had ten small golden lampstands made, patterned after the large one in the Sanctuary, and placed them in the Holy Place, five on the south side and five on the north side. ⁸He had ten tables made for the sacred bread and placed them in the Holy Place, five on the south side and five on the north. He also had a hundred bowls made for incense. ⁹The inner courtyard was for the priests and the outer courtyard for the people. He also made doors that opened into the courtyards and covered them with bronze. ¹⁰He had the large basin placed in the inner courtyard in line with the southeast corner of the Holy Place.

¹¹He also had pots and shovels and bowls made for the courtyard. ¹²Huram made all this under the direction of Solomon. He made the two freestanding pillars with crowns ¹³and encircling wreaths with one hundred pomegranates for each crown and two hundred to be used elsewhere. ¹⁴He also made the carts with their basins, ¹⁵the large basin resting on the backs of twelve bronze bulls, ¹⁶and the pots, shovels, meat forks and other needed items. Hiram made all these things out of polished bronze just

as Solomon had told him to. ¹⁷Solomon had all this done in the foundry located between Succoth and Zeredah (or Zerethan) in the Jordan Valley. ¹⁸There were so many things made out of bronze that no one kept track of how much bronze was being used.

¹⁹Everything used in the Temple was made of pure gold, including the altar of incense, the tables that held the Lord's bread, ²⁰the lampstands which helped to light up the inner Sanctuary, ²¹the decorations of flowers, the other lamps, the tongs, ²²the wick trimmers, bowls for incense, pans for carrying hot coals and the doors going into the Holy Place and into the Most Holy Place. Some of these were made out of solid gold and others were overlaid with gold.

5 When the Temple was finished, Solomon placed everything his father David had dedicated to the Lord, including the gold, silver and other precious vessels, in the storeroom of the Temple.

The Ark Brought Into the Temple

²Then he called all the leaders of Israel and all the heads of ancestral groups to Jerusalem to help him bring the Ark of the Lord from the southern part of the city, called the City of David, to the Temple on Mount Moriah in the northern part of the city. ³This was during the time of the Festival of Tabernacles also called the Festival of Shelters or Booths. ⁴When they all arrived, the priests picked up the Ark ⁵and carried it on their shoulders to the Temple. The priests and Levites also went to Gibeon and brought the Sanctuary and all its furnishings to the Temple in Jerusalem. ⁶Solomon and the people sacrificed so many sheep and other animals in front of the Ark of the Lord that the Levites lost count.

⁷Then the priests brought the Ark into the Most Holy Place of the Temple and set it beneath the outstretched wings of the huge angels that Solomon had put

there. ⁸The wings of these two cherubim were so big that they covered the whole Ark including the angels attached to its cover and its carrying poles. ⁹The poles were so long that they could be seen from the Holy Place, but not from the courtyard. They were laid in front of the Ark, and that's where they remained. ¹⁰There was nothing inside the Ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had brought down from Mount Sinai when the Lord made a covenant with the children of Israel after they had come out of Egypt.

¹¹Then the priests withdrew from the Holy Place of the Temple. All these priests had ritually purified themselves, no matter what priestly division they belonged to. ¹²All the Levites who were musicians, that is, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives, came to the Temple in white linen robes. They stood to the east of the altar of sacrifice and played their cymbals, harps and lyres, accompanied by one hundred and twenty priests blowing trumpets.

¹³With one voice they all gave praise and thanks to God, accompanied by the trumpets, cymbals, harps and lyres. They praised the Lord and sang, "The Lord is good. His love endures forever." Then the Temple was filled with the cloud of the Lord's presence ¹⁴which was so brilliant that the Levites and the priests had to discontinue services in the Temple and leave.

6 Then Solomon prayed, "O Lord, you said you would live in clouds and reside in thick darkness. ²I have built a magnificent Temple for you, a place for you to live in forever."

Solomon Speaks to the People

³The people stood and listened to Solomon. Then he turned and blessed them, ⁴saying, "Praise the Lord God of Israel. He has kept the promise He made to my father David when He said, ⁵From

the time I brought my people out of Egypt until now, I have not chosen any city from among the tribes of Israel as a site for my Temple, nor have I chosen anyone to lead my people. ⁶But now I have chosen Jerusalem as my city, the place for my Temple, and I have chosen David to lead my people.' ⁷That's why my father David had it in his heart to build a Temple for the Lord. ⁸The Lord said to him, 'You did well to want to build a Temple as a place to worship me. ⁹However, you are not the one to do it. But your own flesh and blood will do it—your son Solomon will build the Temple for me.'

¹⁰'The Lord has kept His promise. I have succeeded my father as king and now sit on the throne of Israel, just as the Lord said, and I have built this Temple for Him. ¹¹I have brought the Ark into the Temple with the two tablets of stone containing the covenant of the Lord with His people.'

Solomon's Prayer

¹²Then Solomon went over to the platform in front of the altar of sacrifice. ¹³For this occasion, he had made a bronze platform which was five-and-a-half feet high, nine feet long and nine feet wide. Solomon knelt on the platform in front of all the people, spread his hands toward heaven and said, ¹⁴'O Lord, God of Israel, there is no other God like you anywhere, either in heaven or on earth. You keep your covenant of love with all who walk wholeheartedly in your way. ¹⁵You kept your promise to my father David. You not only promised it, but backed it up by your actions, as we can see today. ¹⁶Lord, now also keep the promise that you made to my father David when you told him, 'You will always have a descendant on the throne of Israel, as long as your offspring are careful to obey me and walk in my ways as you have done.' ¹⁷Lord, may this promise you made to my father David come true just as your promise about the Temple did.

¹⁸'How can the God of heaven live on earth with sinful men and women? Even the heavens are not big enough to hold your glory. How can a Temple like this hold you? ¹⁹Lord, please listen to my prayer. I plead for your mercy and kindness. I'm your servant and am making this plea, not only in your presence, but in front of all these people. ²⁰May your thoughts be toward this Temple day and night so that no harm will come to it. You said this is where we are to worship you. Please listen to my prayer when I pray facing the Temple. ²¹Hear the prayers of your people when they pray toward this place. Listen from your place in heaven, and when you hear our confessions, please forgive us our sins.

²²'When a man is accused of hurting his neighbor and is brought to your Temple before your altar to take an oath that he's innocent, ²³then hear from heaven and judge your people. Punish those who are guilty and uphold those who are innocent.

²⁴'When your people have been defeated by their enemies because they have sinned against you but then they look to you for help and turn toward this place to ask you for forgiveness, ²⁵please hear their prayers from where you are in heaven and forgive them and bring them safely back to the land that you gave them.

²⁶'When there is no rain because the people have sinned against you and yet they turn to you for help and look to this place asking for forgiveness, ²⁷then listen to them in heaven, forgive them their sins and teach them what is right. Give them the rain needed in the land you have given them as their inheritance.

²⁸'If famine or sickness or mildew or blight comes, if locusts or grasshoppers destroy our crops, if enemies come and surround our cities or whatever disaster strikes your people, ²⁹when they look to this place and plead for help, then listen to them. If anyone spreads out his hands toward this Temple and in heartfelt sorrow afflicts his soul, ³⁰then do hear his

prayers. Listen to them from your throne in heaven and forgive them their sins. Forgive each one according to what he has done because you are the only One who knows the thoughts and intentions of the human heart. ³¹Relate to each one personally so that your people will respect you and walk in your ways as they live in this land that you gave to their ancestors.

³²“When a foreigner comes from a distant land because he’s heard how you’ve intervened mightily for your people—when he prays to you and looks toward the Temple for help, ³³then listen to his prayers from your place in heaven. Please answer him so that people everywhere will know that you are their God also, and they will love and respect you as your own people do. Then they will know that the Temple I have built for you is truly yours.

³⁴“When your people go into battle against their enemies, wherever you send them, and they look toward Jerusalem and the Temple and pray for help, ³⁵when they do this, please listen to their prayers from your place in heaven and respond to their needs.

³⁶“When your people sin against you—and there is no one who doesn’t sin—and you allow their enemies to defeat them and take them captive to other countries either near or far away, while they’re there, ³⁷they may have a change of heart. If they repent and confess their sins, saying, ‘Lord, we have sinned against you. Please forgive us!’ then do listen to their prayers. ³⁸When they turn to you and are willing to obey you with all their hearts, when they look toward their homeland and this Temple for your forgiveness and help, ³⁹then please listen to their prayers and be merciful to them; forgive their sins and help them.

⁴⁰O Lord, may your eyes be open and may your ears hear the prayers coming to you from this place.

⁴¹“Now, O Lord, make this Temple your own. Come and sit between the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant and

stay here forever. Bless your priests as they teach your people the way of salvation. Bless your people so they will be happy and rejoice in your goodness. ⁴²O Lord, don’t reject this king you have chosen, but be kind to him. Remember the promise you made to my father David and how much you loved him.”

The Temple Dedicated

7 When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices that had been put on the altar by the priests, and the glory of the Lord filled the whole Temple. ²The light of His presence was so bright that the priests couldn’t carry on their services. ³When the people saw the fire come down from heaven and the light of the presence of the Lord fill the Temple, they fell on their knees and bowed with their faces to the ground. They worshiped Him, praised Him and thanked Him for His goodness and unfailing love.

⁴Then Solomon and the people brought their personal sacrifices to the Lord. ⁵The king and the people offered twenty-two thousand young bulls and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep. Most were peace offerings and were eaten by priests and people uniting together in holy joy, giving thanks to God for His blessings. So Solomon and the people dedicated the Temple to the Lord God of Israel. ⁶Then the priests took their positions. The Levites stood with musical instruments David had provided, some of which he had used when he praised the Lord. They sang the hymn, “His Love Endures Forever,” and the priests blew the trumpets while all the people stood.

⁷Solomon dedicated the courtyard in front of the Holy Place and had the priests offer whole burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord. There were so many offerings that the altar of sacrifice couldn’t hold them all.

⁸The king and his people celebrated the Festival of Shelters for seven days. There was a huge crowd of people at

Jerusalem. They came all the way from the Hamath Pass in the north to the border of Egypt in the south. ⁹They spent seven days dedicating the Temple and seven days celebrating the Festival of Shelters. On the eighth day of the festival they had the closing ceremony, ¹⁰which was the twenty-third of the seventh month. That morning Solomon blessed the people and sent them home. They were full of joy over all the things the Lord had done for David, for Solomon and for His people.

¹¹Solomon finished the Temple and did all he had in mind to do before he began to build his royal palace.

God's Second Appearance to Solomon

¹²The Lord appeared to him that night and said, "I have heard your prayer and accept this Temple as my own and as the place for you to offer sacrifices. ¹³Whenever I hold back the rain or let locusts eat the harvest or let sickness come on my people to discipline them, ¹⁴if my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and turn from their wicked ways, looking to me for help, I will hear from heaven and will forgive them their sins and heal their land. ¹⁵My eyes will be on this Temple, and my ears will be open to all the prayers that are offered there. ¹⁶I have made this Temple my own and have set it apart to be a place of worship forever. I will watch over it, put my name here and my heart also. ¹⁷As for you, if you serve me as faithfully as your father David did, keep my commandments and obey my laws, ¹⁸I will carry out the promises I made to your father David when I told him that there would always be a descendant of his on the throne of Israel.

¹⁹"But if you and your people turn away from me and stop keeping my commandments and my laws and begin to worship and serve other gods, ²⁰then I will move you and your people out of

the land I have given you. I will leave this Temple which I have made holy and it will become an object of ridicule and hatred among many nations. ²¹Even though now people everywhere admire this place, they will be amazed at what will happen to it and will ask, 'Why did the Lord, the God of Israel, do this to His Temple and to this land?' ²²The people will answer and say, 'He did this because His people have forsaken Him. They have turned away from the God who brought their ancestors out of Egypt and they have worshiped other gods. That's why the Lord has allowed this to happen to them.'

Solomon's Other Achievements

8 It took Solomon seven years to build the Temple and thirteen years to build the royal palace, a total of twenty years. ²He also rebuilt the cities that King Hiram had returned to him and settled them with his own people.

³He captured the territory of Hamath Zobah and added it to Israel. ⁴He fortified the city of Palmyra (also called Tadmor) in the Arabian Desert, as well as the cities in Hamath, using them to store supplies for his troops. ⁵He also rebuilt Upper and Lower Beth Horon and fortified them with walls, gates and bars. ⁶He did the same for the city of Baalath and all the cities where he stored supplies and where his troops with their horses and chariots were stationed. Solomon built whatever he wanted in Jerusalem, throughout the country and in all the territories he controlled. ⁷Now the original people left in the land such as the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites ⁸whom the children of Israel had not driven out, paid their taxes to Solomon in labor. ⁹But the Israelites served him as soldiers, army officers, commanders of chariots and horsemen. ¹⁰Two hundred and fifty officers were appointed by Solomon just to oversee his special projects and three hundred more for his other projects.

¹¹Then Solomon brought Pharaoh's daughter from the lower part of the city to the palace he had built for her west of the Temple. He said, "Though my wife worships the God of Israel, she ought not to live in the vicinity of the Temple because this section of the city is holy."

¹²Solomon had sacrifices offered on the altar of the Lord every day. ¹³They were offered just the way Moses had commanded. Offerings were also brought to the Lord on the Sabbath, the New Moon and the three annual festivals (that is, the Festival of the Passover and Unleavened Bread together, the Harvest Festival and the Festival of Shelters). ¹⁴Solomon also carried out the instructions of his father David and organized the priests and Levites into units to serve at the Temple. The priests offered the sacrifices. The Levites helped the priests and also led in singing praises to the Lord. Solomon appointed Temple guards. He organized them into units and stationed them at the gates as his father David had told him to. ¹⁵All the instructions Solomon gave pertaining to the priests, the Levites and the Temple treasury were carried out in detail.

¹⁶The workmen did everything exactly as Solomon had told them, from the day the foundation was laid until the Temple was finished. After seven years of building, the Temple was finally completed.

¹⁷After the Temple had been built, Solomon sent men to the port cities of Ezion Geber and Elath on the Gulf of Aqabah in the land of Edom and began building ships. ¹⁸King Hiram of Tyre sent some of his ships there under the command of his own officers and manned by experienced sailors. They sailed with Solomon's ships to the land of Ophir and brought back nearly seventeen tons of gold to King Solomon.

The Queen of Sheba

9When the queen of Sheba heard about Solomon's wisdom and all that he had done, she decided to go to

Jerusalem to see for herself and to test him with difficult questions. She arrived with a large group of people and a caravan of camels carrying spices, precious stones and lots of gold. She asked Solomon all the questions she could think of. ²He answered all of them to her satisfaction. Nothing was too hard for him. ³So the queen of Sheba learned for herself how wise he was and with her own eyes saw the magnificent palace he had built. ⁴She was amazed at the food on his table, the organization of his staff and the rich clothes they all wore, including his servants and cupbearers. And she was impressed by the large number of sacrifices he offered to his God.

⁵She was indeed overwhelmed with it all and said to the king, "The report I heard in my country about your wisdom and achievements is true, ⁶but I didn't believe it until I came and talked with you and saw everything with my own eyes. In fact, what I had heard is not even half of what is true. Your wisdom and your deeds are even greater than I was told. ⁷How fortunate your officers and servants are and how happy they must be to be around you and hear your words of wisdom! ⁸Praise the Lord your God for what He has done for you! There's no doubt that He loves you, because He has placed you on the throne to rule in His name. He must really love His people to do all this for them and to allow them to be ruled by such a wise king who maintains law and order and looks after their happiness." ⁹Then she gave Solomon about four-and-a-half tons of gold and large amounts of spices and many precious stones. There have never been such fine spices as the queen of Sheba gave Solomon.

¹⁰The men of King Hiram and the men of Israel who had sailed to the land of Ophir brought back a huge amount of gold also, and large quantities of precious stones and juniper wood. ¹¹Solomon used the juniper wood to make steps for the Temple and for the royal palace and to

make harps and lyres for his musicians. Nothing like it had ever been seen in Judah before.

¹²As the queen of Sheba was leaving, Solomon gave her everything she asked for. This was in addition to the gifts he had already given her, which were more than what she had given him. Then she left and returned to her own country.

Solomon's Wealth

¹³Every year Solomon received about twenty-five tons of gold. ¹⁴This was in addition to the revenue that came in from taxes paid by merchants and traders. And the kings and governors of other lands who came to visit Solomon brought him gifts of silver and gold. ¹⁵Solomon made two hundred large shields of gold using seven pounds of beaten gold for each one. ¹⁶He also made three hundred smaller shields using three-and-a-half pounds of beaten gold for each of these. He hung them in the House of the Forest of Lebanon for display and used them only for state occasions. ¹⁷Then he made a large throne, inlaid with ivory and overlaid with pure gold. ¹⁸It had six steps leading up to it and a footstool of pure gold. The throne had two armrests and a statue of a huge lion standing on each side. ¹⁹Twelve smaller statues of lions stood on the six steps, one on each end of each step. Nothing like it had ever been made for any other king in any country. ²⁰All of Solomon's goblets were made of gold, as were all the furnishings in the banquet hall of the House of the Forest of Lebanon. Nothing was made out of silver because in those days silver was not considered very valuable. ²¹He also had a whole fleet of ships which were manned by King Hiram's men. Once every three years, the fleet returned bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks.

²²Solomon was richer and wiser than any other king in the world. ²³Kings from everywhere came to hear him and the wisdom that God had given him. ²⁴Year after year they came bringing with them

gifts of gold, silver, spices and richly decorated robes—also horses, mules and even weapons. ²⁵Solomon had four thousand stalls for his chariot horses and twelve thousand horsemen trained for battle. These were stationed in various cities throughout the country including Jerusalem. ²⁶He ruled over all the land from the Euphrates River in the north to the Philistine country in the west and down to the borders of Egypt in the south. ²⁷During the time of Solomon, silver was as common in Jerusalem as stones on the street and cedar was as plentiful as fig trees in the foothills of Judah. ²⁸Solomon imported horses from Egypt and many other countries.

The Death of Solomon

²⁹All the things that Solomon did during his entire reign are recorded in such books as the records of Nathan the Prophet, the prophecies of Ahijah the Shilonite and the visions of Iddo the Prophet (which took place during the reign of Jeroboam, the first king of Northern Israel). ³⁰For forty years Solomon ruled over all the tribes of Israel from the city of Jerusalem. ³¹Then he died and was buried in The City of David beside his father. His son Rehoboam succeeded him.

The Northern Tribes Revolt

10 Rehoboam went to Shechem where all the leaders had gathered to make him king. ²When Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who had fled to Egypt to escape the anger of Solomon, heard about this meeting, he came back to Israel. ³When he got home, the leaders invited him to attend the coronation, so he went with them. While he was there, they asked him to be their leader and go with them to talk to Rehoboam about their heavy taxes. ⁴The delegation went to see Rehoboam and said, "Your father, Solomon, taxed us very heavily. If you lower our taxes, we'll be happy to have you as our king." ⁵Rehoboam said, "Come

back in three days and I'll give you my answer." And they agreed.

⁶Then Rehoboam called in the older men who had advised his father and who now worked for him. He asked, "What do you think I should do about the people's request for me to lower their taxes?"

⁷They answered, "If you're kind and considerate with the people and give them a favorable answer, they'll be glad to serve you and have you as their king." ⁸But Rehoboam didn't think that was good advice. So he called in some younger men, those he had grown up with and who were also his advisers. ⁹He asked them,

"What's your advice about the request of the people for me to lower their taxes?"

¹⁰The young men answered, "Tell those people, 'My little finger will be thicker than my father's waist. ¹¹My father put a heavy tax on you, but I will make it even heavier. He used regular whips to keep you in line, but I will use whips which sting like scorpions.'"

¹²Rehoboam liked what he heard. Three days later Jeroboam and the leaders of Israel returned to see Rehoboam as he had suggested. ¹³Rehoboam rejected the advice of the older men and spoke harshly to Jeroboam and the leaders. ¹⁴He followed the advice of the younger men, saying, "My father gave you a heavy tax burden, but I will make it even heavier. If my father used whips to keep you in line, then I'll use whips which sting like scorpions." ¹⁵Rehoboam didn't listen to the people's request, and the result was just the opposite of what the young men had suggested. The people rebelled. This is what God had said would happen when years before He sent the prophet Ahijah to tell Jeroboam that Israel would be divided.

¹⁶When the leaders of Israel saw how unreasonable Rehoboam was, they said, "What have David's sons ever done for our tribes? All our taxes are being used to help Judah! Down with David's sons! Let Rehoboam look after himself!" And they all turned away from him and went home.

¹⁷This left only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin for Rehoboam to reign over.

¹⁸At first Rehoboam didn't believe what had happened. He sent Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor, to get the Israelites to work for the government in addition to paying taxes, but they refused and stoned him to death. When Rehoboam heard that, he jumped into his chariot and raced back to Jerusalem. ¹⁹From then on, the ten tribes became known as the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Never again did they unite with the Southern Kingdom of Judah ruled by the descendants of David.

11 When Rehoboam got back to Jerusalem, he called up all the troops from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, one hundred and eighty thousand men, to fight against the other tribes to reunite the kingdom. ²Then the Lord said to Shemaiah the prophet, ³"Go to Solomon's son Rehoboam, king of Judah, and give this message to him and to all the troops from Judah and Benjamin: ⁴This is what the Lord says, 'Do not fight against your brothers to the north. I want you to go home. What happened was my doing.'" The king and his troops listened, then returned home and did not attack their brothers as they had planned.

Rehoboam Fortifies the Cities of Judah

⁵So Rehoboam stayed in Jerusalem and fortified the following cities to help defend Judah: ⁶Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, ⁷Beth Zur, Soco, Adullam, ⁸Gath, Mareshah, Ziph, ⁹Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah, ¹⁰Zorah, Aijalon and Hebron. All these cities were either in Judah or in Benjamin. ¹¹He stationed troops with officers in these cities and supplied them with the necessary food and drink. ¹²He equipped the men with spears and shields and in this way made sure that Judah and Benjamin stayed under his control.

Priests and Levites Come to Judah

¹³The priests and Levites from all

across the country supported him. ¹⁴They even left their farms and other property and moved to Judah and Jerusalem because Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them as priests of the Lord in the Northern Kingdom. ¹⁵Jeroboam appointed his own priests who served at the pagan shrines he had built and led the people into worshiping golden calves and other idols which he had set up. ¹⁶The people who loved the God of Israel and wanted to worship Him followed the priests and Levites down to Judah and Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the God their fathers had worshiped. ¹⁷In this way the kingdom of Judah grew stronger and the people supported Rehoboam, son of Solomon, as their king. For the next three years people migrated to Judah so they could worship the Lord as their fathers had done under David.

The Family of Rehoboam

¹⁸Rehoboam had married his cousin Mahalath, the daughter of Jerimoth who was a brother to Solomon. Her mother was Abihail, the granddaughter of David's older brother Eliab. ¹⁹Mahalath gave Rehoboam three sons: Jeush, Shemariah and Zaham. ²⁰Then he married his distant cousin Maacah, the granddaughter of his father's brother Absalom. She gave him four sons: Abijah, Attai, Ziza and Shelomith. ²¹Rehoboam loved Maacah more than any of his other wives and concubines. Altogether he had eighteen wives and sixty concubines, and they gave him twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters. ²²He appointed Abijah, the firstborn son of Maacah, as crown prince to succeed him as king. ²³Rehoboam wisely appointed his other sons as supervisors over districts and fortified cities throughout Judah and Benjamin and provided generously for their needs. Since they were princes, he also found a number of wives for each of them.

Egypt Invades Judah

12 But after Rehoboam became strong and his position as king was secure, he and his people turned away from the Lord. ²Because of this, the Lord allowed Shishak, the king of Egypt, to attack Jerusalem. This happened in the fifth year of King Rehoboam. ³The king of Egypt came against Jerusalem with one thousand, two hundred chariots, sixty thousand horsemen and thousands of troops from Egypt, Libya, Ethiopia and the Sudan. There were so many, it was difficult to count them all. ⁴He took many of the fortified cities and came as far as Jerusalem.

⁵Then the Lord sent Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam and his officers who had fled to Jerusalem in fear of Shishak. Shemaiah said to them, "This is what the Lord says: 'You have turned away from me, so I have turned away from you.'" ⁶Rehoboam and his officers humbled themselves and said, "The Lord is right. We have sinned against Him." ⁷When the Lord saw that they had humbled themselves and confessed their sins, He sent the prophet Shemaiah back to them with this message: "Because you have humbled yourselves and confessed your sins, I will not let Shishak destroy you, but I will deliver you. I will not discipline Jerusalem to the fullest extent as I had planned to do. ⁸But I will allow you to become subject to Shishak so you will find out what it's like to serve a foreign king."

⁹Then Shishak attacked Jerusalem and marched right into the city. When he left, he took with him all the treasures of the Temple and the royal palace, including the gold shields that Solomon had made. ¹⁰After Shishak was gone, Rehoboam made bronze shields to replace the gold ones and entrusted them to the officers in charge of guarding the entrance to the palace. ¹¹Whenever the king went to the Temple, the guards would take these shields and go with him. After he returned, they would put them back in the guard room. ¹²Because Rehoboam had humbled himself and confessed his sin,

the Lord did not let Shishak destroy Jerusalem, and the country recovered.

Rehoboam's Reign Ends

¹³So Rehoboam established himself firmly in Jerusalem and continued as king. He was forty-one years old when he began to rule and reigned over Judah for seventeen years. Rehoboam's mother was Naamah from the country of Ammon. ¹⁴He did wickedly because he did not set his heart to seek the Lord.

¹⁵Everything that Rehoboam did, from the beginning of his reign to the end, was recorded by the prophet Shemaiah and the prophet Iddo who kept records of the royal family's genealogy. All during Rehoboam's reign there was periodic warfare between him and Jeroboam, king of Israel. ¹⁶When Rehoboam died, he was buried in Jerusalem, the City of David, and his son Abijah became king.

Abijah's Reign in Judah

13 It was in the eighteenth year of Jeroboam, king of Israel, that Abijah, the son of Rehoboam, became king of Judah. ²He ruled for only three years. His mother's name was Maacah, the daughter of Uriel and Tamar from Gibeah.

During these three years there was constant warfare between Abijah and Jeroboam. ³One time Abijah went into battle with over four hundred thousand men against Jeroboam who came to attack him with more than eight hundred thousand. ⁴The armies met in the mountains of Ephraim. Before the battle Abijah stood on Mount Zemaraim and called out to the troops of Israel, "Listen to me! ⁵Don't you know that the Lord God of Israel promised David and his descendants that they would rule over Israel forever? So Israel belongs to Judah. ⁶You Israelites know that Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, was an official under Solomon and that he rebelled against the son of David. ⁷Afterwards, a group of worthless scoundrels gathered around him and rebelled against

Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, when he was too young and inexperienced to stand up against them.

⁸"Now all of you have come to attack the descendants of David and rebel even more against the Lord's kingdom. You have a huge army, and with you are the golden calves that Jeroboam made to be your gods. ⁹You have driven the priests, the descendants of Aaron, and the Levites out of the country. You have chosen your own priests as other nations do. Anyone who comes along with a bull and seven rams may become a priest of these false gods you have. ¹⁰But we in Judah still worship the Lord and have not forsaken Him. The priests who serve Him are the descendants of Aaron, and the Levites assist them. ¹¹Every morning and evening they offer the whole burnt offering as a consecration sacrifice to the Lord and burn incense before Him. They set out the sacred bread on a ceremonially clean table, and every evening they make sure that the lamps on the golden lampstand have enough oil in them to burn all night. We are following God's commandments, but you have turned your backs on Him. ¹²God is with us and is our Captain. His priests are here with their trumpets and are ready to give the call to battle. Men of Israel, don't fight against the Lord God of our fathers, because you can't possibly win."

¹³Jeroboam had sent some of his troops around to the rear of the forces of Judah while he stayed in charge of the army in front. ¹⁴Then he ordered his troops to attack. The men of Judah saw that they were surrounded, and they cried to the Lord for help while the priests blew the trumpets for a counter-attack. ¹⁵When the men of Judah gave the battle cry, the Lord came to their rescue and helped them defeat the Israelites. ¹⁶Then Jeroboam and his men turned and ran, but the Lord helped the men of Judah overtake them. ¹⁷Abijah and his forces inflicted very heavy casualties on the Israelites—over five hun-

dred thousand of them were either killed or wounded.

¹⁸So Israel was defeated, but Judah was victorious because they depended on the Lord God of their fathers. ¹⁹Abijah pursued Jeroboam and took the cities of Bethel, Jeshanah and Ephron. They also captured the surrounding villages and occupied them. ²⁰Jeroboam never did regain his former power. Finally the Lord struck him down and he died. ²¹But Abijah's kingdom grew stronger. Over the years he took fourteen wives and had twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. ²²Everything that Abijah said and did was recorded by the prophet Iddo.

14 Abijah died and was buried in the royal tombs in the City of David where he rested with his fathers, and Asa his son became the next king. For the first ten years of Asa's reign, there was peace in the country .

Asa's Reign in Judah

²Asa did what was right and good in the eyes of the Lord. ³He removed the pagan altars in the high places, crushed the sacred columns and cut down the poles of the mother goddess Asherah. ⁴He told the people of Judah that they should worship the God of their fathers, obey His laws and keep His commandments. ⁵He destroyed the pagan altars of incense in every city and town in Judah. Under him, the kingdom was at peace. ⁶He fortified numerous cities throughout the land of Judah and did so unhindered because there were no wars during that time, for the Lord gave His people rest from their enemies. ⁷Asa had said to the people of Judah, "Let's fortify these cities with walls and towers and gates that can be secured with strong bars. This country is ours and we still have our freedom because we have followed the Lord, and he has given us peace on all sides." ⁸Asa had a standing army of three hundred thousand men from Judah, all of whom

were equipped with shields and spears. He also had two hundred and eighty thousand men from Benjamin armed with smaller shields and bows and arrows. All these men were brave and well trained.

⁹Now Zerah, the Ethiopian, decided to attack Judah. He invaded the southern part of Judah with thousands upon thousands of troops and three hundred chariots. He got as far as Mareshah. ¹⁰Asa was prepared and the men of Judah went out to meet him. They took up their positions in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. ¹¹Then Asa called on the Lord for help, saying, "O Lord, there is no one like you to help those who know they're helpless. Please go with us against this mighty army that has attacked our land, for we have no one else to depend on but you. Don't let them defeat us, or they'll think they have defeated you." ¹²The Lord heard Asa's prayer and the men of Judah counterattacked. The Lord struck the Ethiopian forces, and they turned and ran. ¹³Asa pursued them as far as Gerar on the way to Egypt. So many of the enemy were killed that there was no way they could recover and fight again. They were overpowered by the Lord, and the men of Judah were able to carry away enormous amounts of plunder. ¹⁴They also destroyed all the smaller cities in the area around Gerar because the fear of God had fallen on the people. The men of Judah plundered all these cities where there were many treasures. ¹⁵Asa also attacked the camps of the herdsmen in that area and took a large number of sheep and camels. Then he and his men returned to Jerusalem.

Asa's Reforms

15 The Spirit of the Lord came upon Azariah, the son of Oded, ²and he went out to meet Asa and his men as they were returning to Jerusalem, and he said to them, "Listen to me, O king, and all you men from Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you as long as you're with Him. If you look for Him, He will let you

find Him, but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. ³For a long time the people of Israel lived without worshiping God and without priests to teach them His law. ⁴But when troubles came, the people turned to the God of Israel and found Him. ⁵In those days it wasn't safe to travel because there was danger and turmoil everywhere. ⁶One country was fighting another country and one city another city. God allowed all these troubles because the people had forsaken Him. But when the people turned to the Lord, He brought them peace. ⁷So be strong and full of courage. Don't give up serving the Lord. The work you do for Him will be rewarded."

⁸When Asa and his men heard this from the prophet, they took courage. So Asa took away all the idols in the land of Judah and Benjamin and all the idols in the cities he had annexed in the hills of Ephraim. He also repaired the altar of the Lord that stood in the courtyard of the Temple and had sacrifices offered on it. ⁹Then he invited the people of Judah and Benjamin to come together to worship the Lord. He also invited the people from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon to join them. Many of them had moved to Judah from Israel because they saw that the Lord was with Asa. ¹⁰The people assembled in Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa's reign. ¹¹They sacrificed seven hundred cattle and seven thousand sheep to the Lord from the plunder they had brought back from war. ¹²They made a covenant with the Lord to serve Him with all their being. ¹³All who insisted on worshipping idols, no matter who they were, man or woman, rich or poor, were to be put to death. ¹⁴The people took an oath to the Lord to do so and voiced their commitment to Him, accompanied by trumpets and rams' horns. ¹⁵They took the oath of commitment wholeheartedly and rejoiced in that they did it unitedly. They took pleasure in worshipping the Lord and sought Him eagerly. And God let

them find Him. Then He gave them peace on all sides.

¹⁶Asa also removed his grandmother Maacah as queen mother from her place of influence because she had set up one of the obscene poles of the fertility goddess, Asherah, in the middle of the city. He cut the pole down, chopped it up and burned it outside of Jerusalem in the Kidron Valley. ¹⁷Even though Asa didn't destroy the pagan shrines in the mountains, he did love the Lord and followed Him all the days of his life. ¹⁸Asa brought all the silver and gold and other things to the Temple that he and his fathers had dedicated to the Lord. ¹⁹There had been no major war during Asa's reign until his fourteenth year, which was the thirty-fifth year of the Southern Kingdom, when Zerah attacked Judah.

Asa's Treaty With Syria

16 In the thirty-sixth year of the Southern Kingdom, which was the fifteenth year of Asa's reign, Baasha, king of Israel, invaded Judah and took the city of Ramah. Then he started fortifying it to keep his people from going to Jerusalem and settling in Judah. ²So Asa took silver and gold out of the royal treasury and out of the Temple and sent it to Benhadad I, King of Syria, with this message: ³"Let's make a treaty and be allies as our fathers were. I'm sending you a present of silver and gold and would like to ask you to break your treaty with Baasha, king of Israel, so he'll pull his troops out of my country." ⁴Benhadad agreed and ordered his forces to invade Israel. They took the cities of Ijon, Dan, Abel Beth Maacah, and all the cities of Naphtali where Israel had stored supplies. ⁵When Baasha, king of Israel, heard what had happened, he stopped fortifying Ramah, took his troops and went back home. ⁶Then Asa, king of Judah, took his men, went to Ramah and had them carry away all the timber and building stones that Baasha had brought there.

Asa used this building material to build up and fortify the cities of Geba and Mizpah.

⁷About that time the prophet Hanani came to see Asa and said to him, "Because you relied on Benhadad to help you instead of relying on the Lord, you will not be able to defeat the king of Syria when he breaks his treaty and attacks you. ⁸Didn't Zerah, the Ethiopian, attack you with a large army of Egyptian and Libyan mercenaries and with chariots and horses? What happened? When you relied on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand. ⁹The Lord keeps an eye on everything that goes on in this world. He strengthens the hands of those who love Him and are loyal to Him. You have been very foolish to do what you have done. From now on, you will always be at war with your enemies." ¹⁰This message made Asa very angry, so he had the prophet arrested and put in prison. Then he began to be brutally unjust in his dealings with the people and treated some of them cruelly.

The Death of Asa

¹¹Everything that Asa did from the beginning of his reign until the end is recorded in The Books of the Kings of Judah and Israel. ¹²In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa came down with a terrible foot disease. He didn't ask the Lord for healing but only asked help from his physicians. ¹³Two years later, in his forty-first year, Asa died. ¹⁴They buried him in a rock tomb that he had hewn for himself in the City of David. There the people laid his body on a bier and prepared it for burial using spices and perfumed oils. Then they closed the tomb and built a fire, burning additional spices and perfumed oil in his honor.

Jehoshaphat's Reign in Judah

17 Asa's son Jehoshaphat, became the next king of Judah, and he strengthened his army to defend himself against Israel. ²He stationed troops in all

the fortified cities of Judah, in various other cities throughout the Southern Kingdom and in the cities that his father Asa had annexed in Ephraim. ³The Lord blessed Jehoshaphat because he followed the example of his ancestor David and of his father Asa's earlier life. He did not worship or consult Baal. ⁴Instead he worshiped the God of Israel and kept His commandments and did not live as the kings of Israel did. ⁵The Lord made Judah a strong kingdom under Jehoshaphat, and the people brought him many gifts. He became wealthy and was highly respected. ⁶He obeyed God and destroyed all the high places of pagan worship in Judah and all the symbols and poles of the goddess Asherah.

⁷In the third year of his reign he appointed five officials to go throughout the country to see to it that the people were taught about the Lord. These were: Ben Hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel and Micaiah. ⁸They were assisted by nine Levites and two priests. The Levites were: Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah and Tob Adonijah. The priests were: Elishama and Jehoram. ⁹These men took the Book of the Law with them and went to all the cities and towns throughout Judah teaching the people about their God.

¹⁰Then the Lord made the other nations afraid to start a war with Judah. So the country enjoyed peace on all sides. ¹¹Some of the Philistines even brought gifts to Jehoshaphat, including large amounts of silver for taxes. The Arabians brought him gifts from their flocks—seven thousand, seven hundred rams and seven thousand, seven hundred goats. ¹²Jehoshaphat became more and more powerful and built fortifications and supply depots all over Judah. ¹³He stored supplies in huge quantities in various cities throughout the country and even stationed a number of fighting units in Jerusalem.

¹⁴There were three commanding offi-

cers from Judah: Adnah had three hundred thousand registered men divided into units of a thousand; ¹⁵Jehohanan had two hundred and eighty thousand registered men; ¹⁶and Amasiah, the son of Zichri, had two hundred thousand available men. ¹⁷And there were two commanding officers from Benjamin: Eliada had two hundred thousand men all skilled in using shields and bows and arrows, ready to be called; ¹⁸and Jehozabad had one hundred and eighty thousand men who were well-armed and ready for war at a moment's notice. ¹⁹These five officers with their regular troops were stationed in and around Jerusalem, besides those assigned to fortified cities in other places throughout the country.

The Prophet Micaiah Warns Ahab

18 When Jehoshaphat became wealthy and highly respected, he made a marriage alliance between his son Jehoram and Ahab's daughter Athaliah. ²Time went by and he decided to pay a royal visit to Ahab. He went to Samaria, the capital of Israel. When he got there Ahab honored Jehoshaphat and his men by holding a royal banquet. He slaughtered countless sheep and cattle for the occasion. During the feast he urged Jehoshaphat to join him in attacking Ramoth in Gilead that the king of Syria had now taken from him. ³Ahab said, "Will you go with me?" Jehoshaphat answered, "Certainly, because my people and your people are one. We should stick together."

⁴Then he added, "But first let's ask the Lord what we should do." ⁵So Ahab called together his prophets, about four hundred of them, and asked, "Should we fight the Syrians at Ramoth?" They answered, "Go, and the Lord God of Israel will go with you and give you the victory." ⁶But Jehoshaphat said to Ahab, "Isn't there a true prophet of the Lord around here whom we can ask, other than these prophets who also worship

Baal?" ⁷Ahab answered, "There is, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me. His name is Micaiah, the son of Imlah." Jehoshaphat said, "You shouldn't say that. Let's bring him here and see what he has to say."

⁸So Ahab called to one of his officers, "Go and bring Micaiah the prophet here as fast as you can." ⁹The two kings were dressed in their royal robes, sitting on portable thrones in an open space near the gates of Samaria. The four hundred prophets were all there prophesying good things for them. ¹⁰Zedekiah, the son of Chenaanah, one of the false prophets, made two iron horns and said to the kings, "This is what the Lord says, 'You will be like these two iron horns. You will attack the Syrians and totally destroy them.'" ¹¹All the other prophets agreed, saying, "Go and attack Ramoth in Gilead, and the Lord will give you the victory and deliver the Syrians into your hands."

¹²In the meantime, the officer whom Ahab had sent to get Micaiah, arrived at the prophet's house and said to him, "When we get to the gates of Samaria, you need to say the same thing that the other prophets have said. They're telling the king to attack Ramoth in Gilead and he will be successful." ¹³Micaiah said, "As surely as the Lord lives, I will tell the king only what the Lord tells me to say." ¹⁴So when they got there, Ahab asked Micaiah, "Should we go to war against Ramoth in Gilead or not?" Micaiah said, "Go ahead and attack! You'll win! These prophets of yours already told you so!" ¹⁵The king said, "How many times have I told you not to play games with me? Tell me the truth!"

¹⁶Then Micaiah said, "I saw the armies of Israel and Judah scattered across the hills of Gilead like sheep without a shepherd. I asked the Lord what this meant, and He said, 'These men have lost their leader; let them go back home in peace.'" ¹⁷Ahab turned to Jehoshaphat and said, "See, I told you that he never prophesies anything good about me." ¹⁸Then Micaiah

continued, "Listen to the word of the Lord. In vision I saw the Lord sitting on His throne and all the angels standing in front of Him. ¹⁹The Lord said to the angels, 'How can we get Ahab to go to Ramoth in Gilead? We need to put an end to his wicked reign.' One angel suggested one thing and another something else. ²⁰Finally, an evil angel appeared in the vision and said to the Lord, 'I know what to do.' The Lord said, 'What?' ²¹The wicked angel said, 'I will make all Ahab's prophets tell lies.' The Lord said, 'I won't interfere, because I've already removed my protection from him.' ²²So what these prophets are telling you are lies. You won't succeed, because the Lord has decided that in this battle He will allow you to be wounded and die."

²³Then Zedekiah, the false prophet, went up and slapped Micaiah in the face and said, "When did the Spirit of the Lord leave me to speak through you? Tell me!" ²⁴Micaiah said, "You'll find out when you have to go and hide from the Syrians in a back room to keep from being killed." ²⁵Then Ahab said to one of his officers, "Arrest Micaiah and take him to Amon, the mayor of the city, and to my son Joash. ²⁶Tell them to throw him in jail and feed him nothing but bread and water until I come back safely." ²⁷Micaiah said to the king, "If you return victorious, then what I said was a lie and certainly not from the Lord. Everyone of you here, mark my word."

The Death of Ahab

²⁸Then Jehoshaphat decided to go with Ahab to fight the Syrians at Ramoth in Gilead because he had given his word before hearing what Micaiah had to say. ²⁹When they got to the front, Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "I want to get more involved in the fighting instead of just standing back and directing it. I'll disguise myself, but you stay dressed as you are and direct things from back here." Jehoshaphat agreed. So Ahab put on other clothes

and went into battle, hoping he might escape the prophet's predictions.

³⁰Now the king of Syria had told his chariot commanders to focus on capturing Ahab rather than killing a lot of Israelites. ³¹During the battle when the commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they thought he was Ahab. They said, "There's the king! Let's get him!" So they pursued him. Jehoshaphat cried to the Lord for help, and the Lord turned the main fighting away from him. ³²And when the chariot commanders realized that Jehoshaphat was not the king of Israel, they stopped chasing him.

³³But during the battle one of the Syrian archers drew his bow and shot it at random and the arrow hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor. Ahab shouted to his chariot driver, "I'm wounded! Turn around and get me out of the fighting!" ³⁴The driver did so, but then Ahab changed his mind and ordered him to turn back to face the Syrians. All that day Ahab directed the battle propped up in the chariot with the arrow still in his body, believing they would defeat the Syrians. Just before sunset he died, and they took his body back to Samaria.

19 But Jehoshaphat was safe, and after the battle, he returned to Jerusalem. ²Then the prophet Jehu went out to meet the king and said to him, "Do you think it's right to make an alliance with the wicked and help those who hate the Lord? You set a bad example in helping Ahab, and the Lord is very displeased with what you have done. ³But there is some good in you. You did get rid of the symbols of the fertility goddess Asherah whom the people worshiped, and you have tried to follow the Lord. Still the Lord will have to punish you so the people will know that your alliance with Ahab was wrong."

Jehoshaphat's Reforms

⁴Jehoshaphat repented of his sin and

went throughout the country, from Mount Ephraim in the north to Beer-sheba in the south, turning people's hearts back to God. ⁵He appointed judges in all the fortified cities throughout Judah and Benjamin ⁶ and said to them, "Be sure you do what's right because you're not working for man but for God. Stay close to Him, and He'll stay close to you and help you in everything you do. ⁷The Lord wants people to be treated fairly. So don't let anyone bribe you into handing down a wrong verdict. The Lord will not tolerate it."

⁸Jehoshaphat also set up a supreme court in Jerusalem. He appointed judges from among the Levites, priests and leading men of Judah who lived in Jerusalem. He asked them to hear cases regarding the law of God, as well as settle civil disputes. ⁹He said to them, "You must remember that you're serving the God of Israel. Be faithful in everything you do and love the Lord your God with all your heart. ¹⁰When people come to you to settle their cases, you are to warn them not to sin against the Lord. If you don't do this, the Lord will not only be displeased with you but with all your people. If you warn them, you won't be held guilty. ¹¹Amariah, the high priest, will be the final appeal in religious matters. Zebadiah, the son of Ishmael and governor of Judah, will be the final appeal in civil matters. The Levites will serve as officers. It'll be their responsibility to see that all decisions handed down are carried out. So take up your duties with courage and may the Lord our God be with you."

War With Edom, Ammon, and Moab

20 It was after this that the Lord allowed the Moabites, Ammonites and the Meunites from Edom to attack Jehoshaphat's army and invade the land of Judah. ²A messenger brought word to Jehoshaphat, saying, "A large army is coming from Edom to attack us. They're coming from the other side of the Dead

Sea. They've already taken the city of Hazazon Tamar and the wells of En Gedi." ³When Jehoshaphat heard this he was afraid and asked the Lord to help him. He also announced a day of fasting and prayer. ⁴All across the country people came together to pray for Jerusalem and to ask the Lord for protection.

⁵Many of them came to Jerusalem and assembled in the courtyard of the Temple to pray. Jehoshaphat stood up ⁶and prayed, "O Lord, God of our fathers, you're the God of heaven and earth. You rule over all nations and kingdoms. All power is yours, and there is no one who can stand up against you. ⁷You are our God. You are the One who drove out the inhabitants of this land and brought your people Israel here just as you promised our father Abraham, your special friend. ⁸Your people have lived here and built a temple for worshiping you. ⁹You said that if troubles came, whether through famine, war, sickness or any other calamity and we came to the Temple, looking to you for help in our distress, you would hear our prayers and save us. ¹⁰The combined armies of Edom, Ammon and Moab, whose land you would not allow our ancestors to attack when they came out of Egypt, are now coming against us. ¹¹This is how they're repaying us for not destroying them. They're coming here to drive us out of the land you gave us. ¹²O Lord, our God, please help us! We're helpless against such a vast army. We don't know what to do. So we're looking to you to save us."

¹³As Jehoshaphat was praying, the men of Judah with their wives and children stood by helpless. ¹⁴Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, the son of Zechariah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph. He came and stood in front of the people ¹⁵and said, "All of you, whether you're from Jerusalem or from elsewhere in Judah, listen to the word from the Lord: 'Don't be afraid of this large army. The battle belongs to the Lord and not to you. ¹⁶Tomorrow morning march out against your enemies. They'll be coming

up the mountain pass at Ziz and I want you to meet them at the end of the gorge that leads into the open country by Jeruel near Tekoa and from there to the wilderness. ¹⁷You won't have to fight. Just take up your positions, stand firm and see what the Lord will do for Judah and Jerusalem. Don't be afraid and don't get discouraged. Tomorrow morning go out and face your enemies, and the Lord will go with you.'"

¹⁸Jehoshaphat fell on his knees and bowed down, and all the people followed his example. They, too, fell on their knees and worshiped the Lord. ¹⁹Then some of the Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the God of Israel with loud voices and with singing.

²⁰Early the next morning the troops got ready to march out to the open country to battle. As they left, Jehoshaphat said to them, "Men of Judah and Jerusalem, listen to me! Have faith in God, and He will uphold you. Believe His prophets, and you will succeed." ²¹Then Jehoshaphat ordered the Levites to put on the robes they wore for sacred occasions, organize themselves into a choir and march ahead of the army singing, "Praise to the Lord! Give thanks to Him. His love is eternal; it never fails."

²²As Jehoshaphat and his men neared Tekoa, the Levites began singing and praising the God of Israel. Then the Lord went ahead of them and threw the armies of Edom, Ammon and Moab into confusion. ²³The men of Ammon and Moab started fighting the men from Edom and slaughtered them. Then they turned on each other with a savage fury.

²⁴When the men of Judah got to where they could look out on the open country, they saw only dead bodies. Not one of the enemy had survived. ²⁵Jehoshaphat and his men plundered the camp of their enemies unhindered. They found a large amount of equipment and clothing and so many articles of value, they couldn't carry them all. It took them three days just to collect what they wanted. ²⁶On

the fourth day they gathered in the Beracah Valley south of Tekoa and praised the Lord for what He had done. That's why the valley is called The Valley of Praise. ²⁷Then all the men of Judah and Jerusalem led by King Jehoshaphat returned home rejoicing in the Lord. ²⁸When they reached Jerusalem, they marched to the Temple singing praises to the Lord accompanied by harps, flutes and trumpets. ²⁹The fear of the Lord came upon all the surrounding countries when they heard what the God of Israel had done for His people and how He had fought against their enemies. ³⁰So under Jehoshaphat, the kingdom of Judah was at peace because God gave them rest on all sides.

The Death of Jehoshaphat

³¹Jehoshaphat became king when he was thirty-five years old and reigned in Jerusalem for twenty-five years. His mother's name was Azubah, the daughter of Shilhi. ³²He followed the example of his father Asa and did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and didn't deviate from it. ³³However, the pagan shrines on the high places around Jerusalem and in the country were not removed, and the people of Judah still didn't worship God with the same measure of devotion that their fathers had.

³⁴Everything that Jehoshaphat did from beginning to end was recorded by the prophet Jehu, the son of Hanani, and can be found in The Books of the Kings of Israel and Judah.

³⁵Before Jehoshaphat died, he made an alliance with Ahaziah, the king of Israel who had done as many wicked things as his father Ahab had. ³⁶Jehoshaphat agreed to join him in building a fleet of trading ships at Ezion Geber. ³⁷Then the prophet Eliezer, the son of Dodavahu from Mareshah, went to see Jehoshaphat and said, "Because you didn't learn your lesson the first time when the Lord warned you not to make an alliance with Israel but you went

ahead and did it again, the Lord will destroy your ships." So the ships were wrecked in a storm and never again sailed to Spain.

Jehoram's Reign in Judah

21 Jehoshaphat died and was buried beside his fathers in the City of David, and his son Jehoram became the next king. ²Jehoram's brothers were: Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azariahu, Michael and Shephatiah. All these were the sons of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. ³Their father gave them gold, silver and other valuable gifts and put each one in charge of one of the fortified cities in Judah. But he chose Jehoram to be his successor because he was the oldest.

⁴After Jehoram felt he had firm control of things, he had all his brothers and some of the country's top officials killed. ⁵He was thirty-two years old when he became king and ruled Judah from Jerusalem for eight years. ⁶He followed the example of the kings of the Northern Kingdom and did what Ahab had done. He married Ahab and Jezebel's daughter, Athaliah, and sinned greatly against the Lord. ⁷But because of the covenant the Lord had made with David, the Lord was not willing that Judah should be totally destroyed. He had promised that He would not extinguish the light of David but that his descendants would be the rulers of God's people forever.

⁸In the time of Jehoram, the Edomites rebelled against Judah, set up their own king and declared themselves free from its control. ⁹Jehoram took his army with its chariots and went to put down the rebellion. The Edomites surrounded him. But during the night Jehoram and his men managed to break through the lines and escape. ¹⁰Ever since, Edom has been independent from Judah. Also during this time, the city of Libnah revolted and broke away from Judah. All this happened because Jehoram had forsaken the Lord, the God of his fathers.

¹¹Jehoram even built shrines on the hills around Jerusalem and throughout the country for different gods and led the people to prostitute themselves before these idols. ¹²One day Jehoram received a letter from Elijah the prophet which said, "This is what the Lord God of your ancestor David says, 'You have not followed your father's or grandfather's example, both of whom served as kings of Judah and did what was right. ¹³But you have followed the example of Ahab and Jezebel in Israel and have led the people of Judah and Jerusalem to prostitute themselves in front of these idols whose shrines you have built. You have even killed your own brothers who were better than you. ¹⁴The Lord will bring a severe sickness on your people, your wives and your children. He will take away many of your possessions. ¹⁵You will become sick with a painful intestinal condition which will get continually worse until you die.'"

¹⁶Then the Lord stirred up the anger of the Philistines, the Arabians and the Ethiopians against Jehoram. ¹⁷They began invading the land of Judah and attacking the cities. They came into Jerusalem, carried off all the valuables found in the king's palace, including his wives and children. Not one of them was left except his youngest son, Jehoahaz (also called Ahaziah).

¹⁸Then the Lord brought a painful intestinal condition on Jehoram. ¹⁹In time he couldn't control his bowels, and after about two years, he died. The people did not make a huge bonfire to honor him as they had for his father and grandfather. ²⁰Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he ruled over the Southern Kingdom for eight years. When he died, no one mourned for him. He was buried in the City of David but not beside the other kings of Judah.

Ahaziah's Reign in Judah

22 Then the people of Judah made Jehoram's youngest son Ahaziah

king because all of his brothers had either been killed or captured by invading armies. ²Ahaziah was part of the family of Athaliah, daughter of Ahab. Forty-two years after her grandfather Omri had become king of Israel, Ahaziah became king of Judah. He ruled only one year. ³He, too, followed the example of Ahab and Jezebel because his mother, Athaliah, encouraged him to do so.

⁴After his father's death he sinned still more against the Lord by taking in members of Ahab's family as advisers, which led to his ruin. ⁵He listened to them when they told him to go with Joram, the son of Ahab, against Hazael, king of Syria. The armies met at Ramoth in Gilead and Joram was wounded. ⁶Then Joram returned to his other palace in Jezreel to recover from the wounds he had received in battle. Ahaziah, the son of Jehoram and king of Judah, went there to visit him.

⁷While Ahaziah was there, the Lord brought about his downfall. Both kings went out to meet Jehu, the son of Nimshi, whom the Lord had anointed king of Israel with instructions to destroy the royal house of Ahab. ⁸Jehu killed Joram and the other members of the royal house. He killed the sons of Ahaziah's brothers. ⁹Then he told his men to capture Ahaziah who had been wounded and was heading for Jerusalem by way of Samaria. They caught up with him and brought him to Jehu who had him executed. Out of respect they buried him. They said, "He was the grandson of King Jehoshaphat who did what he could to serve the Lord." So no one was left in the family of Ahaziah to rule as king of Judah.

Queen Athaliah's Reign in Judah

¹⁰When Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, heard that her son was dead, she appointed herself as queen and took over the kingdom. She was determined that no one from the house of David would replace any of the descendants of

Ahab as rulers over Judah. So she proceeded to kill anyone belonging to the house of Judah who would have been eligible to take the throne. ¹¹But Jehosheba, daughter of Jehoram and half-sister of Ahaziah, took one-year-old Joash, her brother's youngest son, and hid him and his nurse in her bedroom. Jehosheba was the wife of Jehoiada, the high priest, and she lived in one of the apartments at the Temple. Because of that, Athaliah, the queen mother, couldn't find the boy. ¹²Little Joash lived in the Temple apartment for six years while Athaliah ruled the country.

Young Boy Joash Made King of Judah

23 In the seventh year, Jehoiada, the high priest, decided to do something about the situation in Judah. So he made an agreement with five commanders of the army: Azariah the son of Jeroham, Ishmael the son of Jehohanan, Azariah the son of Obed, Maaseiah the son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat the son of Zichri. ²They went to all the cities in Judah and brought the Levites and all the heads of ancestral houses to Jerusalem.

³They all took an oath of loyalty to Joash, the seven-year-old son of Ahaziah. Then Jehoiada, the high priest, said to the Levites, the priests and the Temple guards, "This is the son of the late king and a descendant of David. He's the one to rule our country, not Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. The Lord promised David that his descendants would rule Judah. ⁴So this is what I want you to do. As you take up your Sabbath duties, a third of you will keep an eye on the Temple gates, ⁵a third of you will watch the royal palace and a third of you will be stationed at the Foundation Gate. Don't let anyone come into the Temple. ⁶Only the priests and Levites on duty are to be allowed into the courtyard of the Sanctuary because they have cleansed themselves and are considered ritually consecrated to the Lord. But all others are to be kept out of the inner court as

the Lord has told us. ⁷For the ceremony, those of you who had the Sabbath off are to come and stand guard around the king's son with weapons in your hands. Anyone who tries to force his way into the Temple is to be put to death. When the ceremony is over, guard the king wherever he goes."

⁸They did what Jehoiada asked them to do. The commanders told their men going off duty to stay by until they were released by the high priest, so these were added to the men coming on duty. ⁹Jehoiada gave the commanders of the different units the spears and the large and small shields of David which had been stored in the Temple. ¹⁰When the time came for the coronation ceremony, he stationed the men with their weapons around the young king. They stood from one side of the Temple courtyard to the other. ¹¹Jehoiada brought out the young prince, put a crown on his head and gave him a copy of the law to hold. Then he proclaimed him the new king of Judah. He also anointed him with holy oil, and all those present shouted, "Long live the king!"

The Death of Queen Athaliah

¹²When Athaliah, the queen mother, heard shouting coming from the Temple and saw people running in that direction, she wondered what was going on. ¹³So she went to look and the guards let her into the Temple courtyard. She saw little Joash standing between the pillars by the entrance to the Sanctuary surrounded by army officers. All the people were shouting, "Long live the king!" The Temple musicians were blowing their trumpets and the choir was singing praises to the Lord. Then Athaliah tore her royal robe and shouted, "Treason! Treason!" ¹⁴Jehoiada, the high priest, saw her, but he didn't want her killed in the Temple, so he said to the officers, "Let her get out of the Temple, then catch up with her and kill her. Also kill anyone who tries to protect her." ¹⁵So they captured her as she reached the

Horse Gate by the king's house, and that's where she was killed.

¹⁶Jehoiada had the young king and those who were there join him in making a covenant that they would be loyal to the Lord. ¹⁷Then the people went to the temple of Baal, tore it down, smashed the altars and the idols and killed Mattan, the high priest of Baal, in front of the destroyed altars. ¹⁸Jehoiada put the Lord's priests and the Levites in charge of the work at the Temple. He assigned the same duties to them that David had written out when he was king and told them to present the offerings to the Lord with singing, just as Moses had told them to do. ¹⁹He also stationed guards at the gates of the Temple so that no one came in who was ritually unclean. ²⁰Then together with the young king, he led the commanders, the leaders of Judah and all the others through the Upper Gate to the place where Joash took his place on the royal throne. ²¹This made all the people happy. They rejoiced and were glad over their new king. Jerusalem was now quiet and at peace because the queen mother was dead.

Joash Orders the Temple Repaired

24 Joash was seven years old when he became king, and he ruled over Judah from Jerusalem for forty years. His mother's name was Zibiah. She was from Beersheba. ²Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord nearly all the years of Jehoiada, the high priest. ³When Joash got old enough to marry, Jehoiada the high priest chose two wives for him, and Joash took them and had many sons and daughters.

⁴Some years after he became king, Joash decided to restore the Temple, because it had fallen into disrepair. ⁵So he called together the priests and Levites and said, "Go throughout the country and collect the annual Temple tax as quickly as you can." But the priests and Levites kept putting it off. ⁶Then Joash called in Jehoiada, the high priest, and

said, "Why didn't you urge the priests and Levites to collect the annual Temple tax? This tax is what the Lord through Moses told the people to pay to keep up the Temple." ⁷While the wicked Queen Athaliah had been alive, her sons had broken into the Temple and taken many sacred objects which they then diverted for worshiping Baal.

⁸Joash was impatient with the delay of the priests and Levites to collect the Temple tax, so he commanded that a chest be made and placed at the entrance to the Temple. ⁹Then he issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem that the people should bring their Temple tax to the Lord as Moses had instructed they should. ¹⁰The officials and people cheerfully paid the Temple tax. They put it into the chest that Joash had placed at the entrance. ¹¹At the end of every day the Levites would bring the chest inside and call the king's officials to come and open it. Then the royal secretary and the representative of the high priest would empty it. The next morning the Levites would put the chest back at the entrance of the Temple. It wasn't long before they had collected a large amount of money. ¹²Then the king and the high priest gave the money to the men in charge of repairing the Temple. They hired carpenters and masons and others who could work with iron and bronze. ¹³The men in charge were honest men and committed to restoring the original design of the Temple as quickly as they could making it as solid as ever.

¹⁴When they finished their job and had money left over, they brought it to the king and the high priest who used the money to have things made for use in worship, such as bowls and other utensils of silver and gold. Then Jehoiada, the high priest, began regular services in the Temple and offered whole burnt offerings to the Lord every day as long as he lived.

Joash's Apostasy

¹⁵Jehoiada was one hundred and thirty years old when he died. ¹⁶They buried him beside the kings in the City of David because of all the good he had done for Israel and for the Temple.

¹⁷After Jehoiada died, the officials of Judah came to see the king and persuaded him to join them in idol worship. ¹⁸Under their influence the people stopped worshiping the God of their fathers and began worshiping idols and images of Asherah, the mother goddess of fertility, and other idols. The Lord was very displeased with the apostasy of the people. ¹⁹Even though He sent prophets with special messages to warn the people to bring them back to Him, they simply wouldn't listen.

²⁰Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Zechariah, son of Jehoiada the high priest. He stood above the people and said, "This is what the Lord says, 'Why do you keep disobeying me? You know I can't bless you if you do this. You have forsaken the Lord. The Lord will now forsake you.'" ²¹But the people turned against Zechariah, and with the king's approval and on his orders, they stoned Zechariah to death right in the courtyard of the Temple. ²²Joash had forgotten how kind Zechariah's father Jehoiada had been to him when he was a boy and how he had saved his life from Athaliah, the wicked queen mother. As Zechariah lay dying, he said to the king, "May the Lord see this and demand payment for what you have done."

The Death of Joash

²³In the spring of the year, the Lord allowed the Syrian army to attack Jerusalem. They killed all the officials and took everything of value back to Damascus with them. ²⁴Even though the Syrian army was small, the Lord saw to it that they defeated the much larger Judean army because the people had forsaken God and had turned to idols. This is the way the Lord punished the people for what they were doing.

²⁵During the battle Joash was severely wounded. After the Syrians withdrew and the king was at home recovering, two of his officials conspired against him and killed him in his own bed to avenge the death of Zechariah. Then they buried Joash in the City of David, but not in the royal tombs of the kings. ²⁶The two officials were Jozabad (Zabad for short), the son of Shimeath, an Ammonite woman, and Jehozabad, the son of Shimrith (also called Shomer), a Moabite woman. ²⁷Everything that Joash did, the account of his sons, what he did in his early life for the Temple and the prophetic messages sent against him in his later years, is recorded in The Books of the Kings of Judah. Amaziah, the son of Joash, became the next king.

Amaziah's Reign in Judah

25 Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled over Judah for twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Jehoaddin. She was from Jerusalem. ²He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, but only halfheartedly. ³When he was in firm control of the kingdom, he executed the two officials who had murdered his father. ⁴He did not put their sons to death, but stayed within the law that the Lord had spoken to Moses, "Fathers are not to be put to death for what their children have done, and children are not to be put to death for what their fathers have done."

War Against Edom

⁵Amaziah assigned all the men of Judah and Benjamin to various military units by ancestral houses and put them under commanders in units of hundreds and thousands. Everyone twenty years old and up who was fit for war and knew how to use a spear and a shield was assigned to a military unit. This gave Amaziah an army of three hundred thousand ready for war. ⁶He also hired a hundred thousand mercenaries from Israel for seven thousand, five hundred pounds

of silver. He felt that he was now ready to go against the forces of Edom. ⁷But the Lord sent a prophet to Amaziah who said to him, "You are not to use the troops from the northern kingdom because the Lord will not be with them. They are no longer on the side of Israel. ⁸You may think that they'll be a help to you, but they won't. The Lord can help you, or He can see to it that you're defeated."

⁹Amaziah said, "But what about the seven thousand, five hundred pounds of silver I paid for the use of those men?" The prophet said, "Obedience is more important. The Lord can give you much more than that." ¹⁰So Amaziah sent the troops from the northern kingdom back home. The men were upset about this and felt they were being discriminated against because they were from the north. They became angry with the king and left in a rage. ¹¹Then Amaziah gathered courage and with a much smaller army marched against the forces of Edom. They met in the Valley of Salt. He defeated them, killing ten thousand enemy troops. ¹²By the time the battle was over, he had captured another ten thousand. Then he took these prisoners to the top of the cliff overlooking the nearby city of Sela, later called Petra, and had them pushed off the edge. They were all killed on the rocks below. ¹³When the Israelite troops, whom Amaziah had sent back home, arrived in Samaria, they decided to raid the cities of Judah. So the men crossed the border and attacked the area around Beth Horon. They killed three thousand people and took an enormous amount of plunder.

¹⁴After Amaziah defeated the Edomites, he took their gods with him back to Jerusalem, set them up, bowed down in front of them and even offered sacrifices to them. ¹⁵The Lord was very displeased with this and sent a prophet to see Amaziah. The prophet said to the king, "Why are you worshiping these idols as if they were the heroes who helped you win the war? Did they protect your forces or

prevent them from being defeated?"¹⁶Amaziah got very upset over this and interrupted the prophet, "Stop! Who asked you to be my adviser? If you keep on talking, I'll have you arrested." The prophet said, "All right, I'll stop, but let me say this: I know that God will punish you for what you've done and for not listening to my counsel." Then he turned and left.

Judah Invades Israel

¹⁷Soon after this Amaziah consulted his advisers and asked them what to do about the raids the men of Israel had made into Judah. They told him to challenge Jehoash to a fight. So Amaziah sent this message to Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz: "Come and let's face each other in battle."¹⁸Jehoash sent this message back to Amaziah: "Once there was a thorn bush in the mountains of Lebanon. It said to the cedar tree, 'Give your daughter to my son in marriage.' But instead, a wild beast came and walked all over the thorn bush."¹⁹You think that just because you defeated the Edomites that you can now defeat me. That victory has made you arrogant and proud. Stay home. Why ask for a fight and have me walk all over you?"

²⁰But Amaziah ignored the message. So the Lord allowed Jehoash to defeat Amaziah because he had asked the Edomite gods to help him.²¹Then Jehoash, the king of Israel, attacked Amaziah, the king of Judah. Their forces met in battle at Beth Shemesh in the land of Judah.²²Amaziah and his men were defeated, and every one of them turned and ran home.²³Jehoash captured Amaziah during the battle of Beth Shemesh and marched him and the few men he had back to Jerusalem. When they got there, Jehoash broke down part of the city wall all the way from the Gate of Ephraim to the Corner Gate, a section of about six hundred feet.²⁴He took all the gold and silver in the Temple that Obed Edom was in charge of, all the treasures in the royal palace and a number of

hostages. Then he released Amaziah and returned to Samaria.

The Death of Amaziah

²⁵Amaziah continued to rule, and lived fifteen years after Jehoash died.²⁶Everything that Amaziah did, from beginning to end, is recorded in The Books of the Kings of Israel and Judah.²⁷After Amaziah rebelled against the Lord, plans were made to kill him. When he heard about it, he fled from Jerusalem to Lachish. But they followed him there and killed him.²⁸They brought his body back by horse and buried him alongside his ancestors in the City of David.

Uzziah's Reign in Judah

26 Then the people of Judah made sixteen-year-old Uzziah king in place of his father Amaziah.²One of the first things Uzziah (or Azariah) did after becoming king was to take the city of Elath on the Gulf of Aqabah, make it a part of Judah and fortify it.³He was sixteen years old when he became co-regent with his father and reigned in Jerusalem for fifty-two years. His mother's name was Jecoliah. She was from Jerusalem.⁴He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord as his father Amaziah had first done, even though he did not remove all the pagan shrines in the country.⁵Uzziah served the Lord as long as the prophet Zechariah was alive. The prophet guided him with visions and dreams from the Lord. And as long as he depended on God, the Lord blessed him.

⁶He fought off the Philistines. In one engagement he took the city of Gath and broke down its walls. He also took the cities of Jabneh and Ashdod. He rebuilt some of the cities that he took, made them part of Judah and then fortified them.⁷Not only did the Lord help him defeat the Philistines, but also the Arabians at Gur Baal and the Meunites from Edom.⁸The Ammonites submitted to Uzziah without a fight and agreed to be taxed by him. He became a very pow-

erful king and his fame spread throughout the neighboring territories as far as the borders of Egypt. ⁹Uzziah also fortified Jerusalem. He restored the length of the wall to the Corner Gate that Jehoash, the king of Israel, had broken down. He repaired and fortified the Valley Gate where the wall turns. ¹⁰He dug numerous wells for his large herds of animals and built fortifications and towers to protect them from bands of robbers. He loved farming and encouraged his people to plant vineyards in the western hills and work the fertile land that was there.

¹¹Uzziah had a well-equipped and battle-ready army. His troops were organized by divisions and their records were kept by Jeiel, one of the royal secretaries, and by Maaseiah the officer under Hananiah, one of the king's commanders. ¹²The king had two thousand, six hundred officers in his army. ¹³Under them were three hundred and seven thousand, five hundred troops all trained for war and well able to fight for the king against his enemies. ¹⁴Uzziah gave them shields, spears, helmets, protective armor, bows and arrows, and slings and smooth stones for their slings. ¹⁵In Jerusalem he had devices made for shooting arrows and slinging large rocks from the towers and corners of the city wall. His fame spread far and wide, and he became a very powerful king because of the help he received from the Lord.

Uzziah's Pride

¹⁶But after Uzziah achieved all this, he became proud, and pride led to his downfall. He thought he could do anything, so he went into the Temple—right into the Holy Place where only the priests are allowed to go—and offered incense to the Lord on the altar of incense. ¹⁷Azariah, the high priest, with eighty other courageous priests, had met the king in the courtyard and tried to keep him from going into the Holy Place.

¹⁸They said, "It's not right for you to come in here and offer incense to the

Lord. Only the priests, the descendants of Aaron who have been consecrated to do this, are allowed to come in. You need to leave, because this courtyard is holy, set aside by God, and He will not bless you for doing this."

¹⁹But Uzziah already had a censer with incense in his hand. He became very angry and forced his way into the Holy Place. While he was standing by the altar of incense raging at the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead. ²⁰When Azariah and the priests saw this, they stared at him with horror and told him what they saw. Then they hurried him out of the Temple. He left in terror because he knew that the Lord was punishing him. ²¹Uzziah had leprosy for the rest of his life. He was relieved of his responsibilities and moved into a separate house. Never again was he able to set foot in the Temple because he was ritually unclean. His son Jotham took over the responsibilities of the government and ruled the land for his father.

²²Everything that Uzziah did, from beginning to end, was recorded by the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz. ²³So Uzziah died and rested with his fathers and was buried in a graveyard belonging to the kings, but not in the royal tombs because of his leprosy. Then Jotham, his son, ruled the country.

Jotham's Reign in Judah

27 Jotham was twenty-five years old when he began to rule the country for his father and reigned from Jerusalem for sixteen years. His mother's name was Jerusha, the daughter of Zadok. ²He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord just as his father Uzziah had done in the early part of his reign. Jotham respected the Lord and did not sin by going into the Holy Place as his father had done. But he did allow the people to continue worshipping their idols.

³Jotham rebuilt the Upper Gate of the Temple and did extensive work on the

city wall by the Hill of Ophel. ⁴He also ordered new cities built in the Judean hills, as well as fortifications and towers in the forests. ⁵Jotham fought against the kings of the Ammonites and defeated them. Each year for three years the Ammonites paid him seven thousand, five hundred pounds of silver, sixty thousand bushels of wheat and sixty thousand bushels of barley. ⁶He became a very powerful king because he trusted and obeyed the Lord, and the Lord blessed him.

⁷Everything that Jotham did, including his wars and all his other accomplishments, is recorded in The Books of the Kings of Israel and Judah. ⁸He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign and ruled the country for sixteen years, also helped by his son. ⁹He died and was buried next to his fathers in the City of David, and his son Ahaz became fully king.

Ahaz's Reign in Judah

28 Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign and he also ruled the country for sixteen years, the same length of time his father had. Unlike his father and his ancestor David, he did evil in the eyes of the Lord. ²He followed the example of the kings of Israel, made images of Baal and set them up everywhere. ³He burned incense to Baal in the Valley of Hinnom just outside Jerusalem. He even sacrificed his own infant sons to Molech. He did all the wicked things that the original inhabitants of the land had done whom the Lord had driven out. ⁴He offered sacrifices and burned incense to Baal on all the hilltops around Jerusalem and under every big tree that attracted his attention.

Syria and Israel Attack Judah

⁵Therefore the Lord removed His protection from Ahaz and let the king of Syria defeat him. The Syrians captured many of the people of Judah and took them back to Damascus with them. The Lord also let Israel attack Ahaz and in-

flict heavy casualties on him. ⁶In just one day, the army of Pekah, king of Israel, killed one hundred and twenty thousand men of Judah because the people of Judah had forsaken the Lord. ⁷During that same battle, Zichri, one of Israel's mighty warriors from Ephraim, killed Maaseiah, son of Ahaz. He also killed Azrikam, the officer in charge of the king's special guard and Elkanah, who was second in command to the king. ⁸The Israelites took two hundred thousand wives, sons and daughters from the men of Judah. They also took an immense amount of plunder, then headed back to Samaria.

The Lord Orders Israel to Return Captives

⁹When Pekah and his troops reached home, the prophet Oded met him, and said to the king, "You were able to defeat the armies of Judah because the Lord was displeased with them and gave them into your hand. But you slaughtered the people as if they were nothing and you did it so viciously that the Lord will not ignore it. ¹⁰You also brought back with you many men and women from Judah and Jerusalem with the intention of making them your slaves. You know that by doing this you have sinned against the Lord. ¹¹Now listen. Send your brothers and sisters back home. The Lord is not pleased with what you have done."

¹²Then four officials from Israel, Azariah, the son of Johohanan; Berechiah, the son of Meshillemoth; Jehizkiah, the son of Shallum; and Amasa, the son of Hadlai went and stood before the troops coming back from the war. ¹³They said, "Don't bring these people here! We have sinned against the Lord, and this will only make matters worse. The Lord is already displeased with us over the way we have conducted the war, and this will only add to our guilt. If we keep these people as our slaves, He'll punish all of us."

¹⁴So the troops turned the captives and the plunder over to the officials in

the presence of the people of Israel. ¹⁵The king then asked the officials to look after the captives and to see them safely home. Many were half-naked and none had eaten for some time. These people were given clothes, sandals and food from the plunder, and olive oil was poured on their wounds. Those who were weak were put on donkeys. They were returned to the city of Jericho, the City of Palms, in Judah. Then the officials from Israel returned to Samaria.

Judah Asks Assyria for Help

¹⁶It was about this time that Ahaz, king of Judah, asked Assyria to help him. ¹⁷The Edomites had again attacked Judah and carried away many captives. ¹⁸The Philistines had raided some of the cities in the western foothills and in the southern part of Judah. They had taken Beth Shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco, Timnah, Gimzo and the surrounding villages. ¹⁹The Lord let all this happen to discipline Ahaz for the sins he had caused the people of Judah to commit and for his defiance of the Lord. ²⁰Tiglath Pileser, the king of Assyria, came with his army, but instead of helping Ahaz he turned against him. ²¹Ahaz took things from the Temple, from the royal palace and from the princes and gave them to the king of Assyria. But this appeased Tiglath Pileser for only a short time.

The Death of Ahaz

²²Ahaz didn't learn from all of this, but sinned even more against the Lord. ²³He offered sacrifices to the same gods the Syrians worshiped because he thought, "Since the gods of the Syrians are so strong, if I worship them, they'll help me too." But this was his downfall, and it brought the whole country to the brink of ruin. ²⁴Ahaz went from bad to worse. He smashed all the articles in the Temple used for worship and then closed its doors. Then he set up pagan altars on every street corner in Jerusalem. ²⁵In every city of Judah he built pagan places

of worship where the people could burn incense to pagan gods. This greatly displeased the God of Israel. ²⁶All the things that Ahaz did and the other things that happened during his reign are recorded in The Books of the Kings of Israel and Judah. ²⁷Ahaz died and was buried beside his fathers in Jerusalem, but not in the royal tombs. His son Hezekiah became the next king.

Hezekiah's Reign in Judah

29 Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he began to reign alone, and he ruled the country for twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Abi (or Abijah), the daughter of Zechariah. ²He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord just as his ancestor David had done.

Hezekiah Reconsecrates the Temple

³The first thing he did was to reopen the Temple and repair the damage that had been done. ⁴He brought the priests and Levites to the eastern section of the courtyard of the Temple and said to them, ⁵"Listen to me, Levites. I want you to reconsecrate yourselves, and then reconsecrate the Temple. It is the house of our God, the God of our ancestors. Take everything out of the Temple that doesn't belong there and clean it up. ⁶Our fathers were unfaithful to the Lord and did evil in His sight. They stopped worshipping at His house. ⁷They closed the Temple doors. They let the lamps go out. They stopped offering sacrifices to Him, the daily burnt offering or any other offerings; neither did they burn incense to Him. ⁸That's why the Lord has disciplined us and allowed all kinds of troubles to come on Judah and Jerusalem. Other people are shocked at what has happened to us. We have become objects of contempt and scorn among our neighbors. You've seen this for yourselves. ⁹This is why our fathers have been killed in battle and our wives and children taken away as captives. ¹⁰I want to renew our nation's covenant with the Lord God of Israel so

He can bless us and stop our enemies from attacking us. Then our people will feel safe again. ¹¹You are spiritual sons of the royal house of Judah. Be faithful to the Lord and do not neglect His house, for the Lord has chosen you to burn incense before Him and to minister to Him in the Temple.”

¹²The Levites listened to the king. From the Kohathites there was Mahath, the son of Amasai, and Joel, the son of Azariah; from the Merarites: Kish, the son of Abdi, and Azariah, the son of Jehallelel; from the Gershonites: Joah, the son of Zimmah, and Eden, the son of Joah; ¹³from the descendants of Elizaphan: Shimri and Jeuel (Jeiel); from the descendants of Asaph: Zechariah and Mattaniah; ¹⁴from the descendants of Heman: Jehuel (Jehiel) and also Shimei; from the descendants of Jeduthun: Shemaiah and Uzziel. ¹⁵These men called together the other Levites and they all made themselves ritually clean and consecrated themselves anew to the Lord. Then they purified the Temple as Hezekiah had commanded, following the instructions the Lord had given to Moses. ¹⁶The priests also cleansed themselves ritually and consecrated themselves anew to the Lord. They went into the Sanctuary itself and purified it. Everything that was unclean they brought out into the courtyard. From there the Levites took it all down to the Kidron Valley and burned it.

¹⁷They began the work of purification on the first day of the first month of the religious year and by the eighth day they had purified the outer sections of the Temple. Then for the next eight days they purified the inner sections of the Temple, and by the sixteenth day of the first month they were finished. ¹⁸Then they went to see King Hezekiah and said to him, “We’ve purified the whole Temple, the sacrificial altar in the courtyard with its utensils and the table for the consecrated bread and all its utensils. ¹⁹We’ve also replaced all the furni-

ture and articles that your father Ahaz destroyed or took away during the years he was unfaithful, and we have dedicated them to the Lord. All these things are setting in the courtyard in front of the altar of sacrifice.”

Hezekiah Restores Temple Worship

²⁰Early the next morning the king called together all the officials of the city and went with them to the Temple. ²¹They brought seven young bulls, seven rams, seven male lambs and seven male goats with them as a sin offering to the Lord for all of Judah. Then the king ordered the priests to offer these sacrifices on the altar of the Lord. ²²So they slaughtered the bulls, took the blood and sprinkled it on the altar. Then they sacrificed the rams and sprinkled their blood on the altar. ²³The goats were brought before the king and the leaders of Judah to have them lay their hands on the animals. ²⁴Then the priests sacrificed the goats and poured their blood on the altar as a sin offering to atone for the sins of all the people as the king had requested.

²⁵Hezekiah also stationed Levites in the Temple with cymbals, harps and lyres as had been outlined years earlier by David, by Gad his personal prophet and by the prophet Nathan. ²⁶While the Levites took the instruments that David had provided, the priests took their trumpets, and together they stood ready to accompany the people in singing praises to the Lord. ²⁷Hezekiah gave the order to offer the whole burnt offering on the altar. As the ritual began, the people broke out in singing praises to the Lord, accompanied by trumpets and other instruments. ²⁸Everyone there bowed in worship. The singing and music continued until the sacrifice of the whole burnt offering was totally consumed. ²⁹When all the offerings were finished, the king and the people knelt down and worshipped the Lord. ³⁰To close the service, Hezekiah and the leaders of Judah told the Levites to sing the songs of praise that David and

Asaph the prophet had written. They sang with joy, and the people joined in as they worshiped the Lord together.

³¹Hezekiah concluded by saying to the people, "Now that you're ritually clean and have consecrated yourselves to the Lord, come and bring your own sacrifices of thanksgiving to Him." So the people gladly brought their sacrifices of thanksgiving. In addition, some of them brought whole burnt offerings to the Lord. ³²The whole burnt offerings the people brought voluntarily were seventy young bulls, a hundred rams and two hundred male lambs. ³³The total number of animals brought to the Lord as sacrifices was six hundred young bulls and three thousand sheep. The greater part of the peace offerings was to be eaten by the families and their friends in a joyous festival of thanksgiving. ³⁴But there were too few priests to handle it all. So the Levites had to help until they could find more priests, ritually cleanse them and consecrate them to the Lord. The Levites chosen to step in were more conscientious than some of the priests had been, so they were allowed to help. ³⁵In addition to offering the whole burnt offerings, the priests were responsible for offering the fat of the peace offering, the drink offerings and the bread offerings which went along with the whole burnt offerings. So the worship services of the Temple were restored. ³⁶Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced over what the Lord had done for them so quickly.

Hezekiah Celebrates the Passover

30 Now the people had not celebrated the Passover for a long time. So Hezekiah sent word throughout Judah and also to Israel, especially to the neighboring tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, inviting them to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover of the Lord. ²It was decided by Hezekiah and his officers to celebrate the Passover during the second month instead of the first month of the religious

year, as allowed in exceptional cases.

³They had not been able to celebrate the Passover at the regular time because not enough priests were ritually clean and the people of Jerusalem didn't show an immediate interest. ⁴Both the king and the people said that this was the time to start celebrating the Passover again.

⁵That's when Hezekiah sent word not only to Judah, but also to all Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, inviting the people to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the occasion. It had not been celebrated in harmony with the law by most of the people for a long time. ⁶So at the king's command, messengers went throughout the land of Judah and Israel with an announcement from the king and leaders of Judah which said, "People of Israel, it's time to return to obeying the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Then the Lord will turn toward us again, especially to the remnant who escaped from the hands of the king of Assyria. ⁷Let's not be like our ancestors who were unfaithful to the Lord. They had to be disciplined by God until even the people around us were shocked and disgusted with them. You've seen this attitude yourselves. ⁸So don't be stubborn as your ancestors were. Give yourselves to the Lord wholeheartedly and show it by coming to His Temple, the place He has made holy. Let's serve the Lord our God so He can protect us again as He used to. ⁹If you return to the Lord, the captors of your loved ones will have compassion on them and will let them come back home. The Lord our God is compassionate and will not turn away from you if you return to Him."

¹⁰The messengers went from city to city in Judah, then on to Ephraim and Manasseh and as far north as Zebulun. But many people made fun of them. ¹¹However, some from the northern tribes of Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun did listen to the king's invitation. They were sorry for what they had done, so

they went to Jerusalem. ¹²The Holy Spirit worked on the hearts of the people to give them unity of purpose, and they responded. They listened to the king and his officials and prepared to celebrate the Passover according to the word of the Lord.

¹³The very next month after Hezekiah had reopened the Temple, a large crowd came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread which followed. ¹⁴Throughout Jerusalem the people broke down all the pagan altars on which incense had been offered and threw them into the Kidron Valley. ¹⁵On the fourteenth day of the second month, the Passover lamb was killed. The priests and Levites who were still ritually unclean were ashamed because the people had more zeal than they did. So they purified themselves by the accepted ritual and reconsecrated themselves to the God of Israel. Then they brought whole burnt offerings and sacrificed them to the Lord. ¹⁶They took their places in the Temple according to the instructions in the law of Moses. The Levites helped in slaughtering the animals and handed the blood to the priests who sprinkled it on the altar.

¹⁷Many in the crowd, particularly those from the Northern Kingdom, were not ritually clean and were not allowed to kill the Passover lambs they had brought. So the Levites killed the animals for them and rededicated each person to the Lord. ¹⁸But others, particularly those from the northern tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun who were ritually unclean, had killed their Passover lamb and eaten its meat before consecrating themselves to the Lord.

The king prayed for them, saying, "O Lord, forgive them. You are a compassionate God, a God who pardons. ¹⁹I know you forgive those who worship you with their whole hearts, even if they are not ritually clean according to the rules of the Sanctuary." ²⁰The Lord heard Hezekiah's prayer and showed His com-

passion and forgiveness to those people.

²¹The people joyfully celebrated the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread for seven days. Every day the Levites and priests sang praises to the Lord, accompanied by the instruments that David had provided years before. ²²Hezekiah complimented the priests and Levites for understanding the work that needed to be done and spoke words of encouragement to them. So the priests, the Levites and the people ate their portions of the sacrifices and peace offerings for seven days and praised the God of their fathers.

²³When the week was over, the people agreed to extend the festival for another week. And they continued to celebrate with great joy. ²⁴Hezekiah gave one thousand young bulls and seven thousand sheep for the occasion. The leaders of Judah also gave a thousand young bulls and ten thousand sheep. A large number of priests went through the ritual of purification and reconsecrated themselves to the Lord. ²⁵All the people who had come to Jerusalem were happy—those from Judah, the Levites and priests from Israel, and the foreigners who lived in Israel and Judah. ²⁶Such joy had not been seen in Jerusalem since the days of Solomon, son of David. ²⁷Then the priests and Levites prayed for the people and asked the Lord to bless them. The Lord heard their prayers and from His place in heaven, blessed them.

Hezekiah's Other Reforms

31 After the people had celebrated the Passover, they went to every city in Judah and broke the images in pieces, cut down the wooden poles of the goddess Asherah and destroyed the pagan altars and places of worship. They did this not only in Judah and Benjamin, but also in Ephraim and Manasseh in Israel. Only then did they return to their homes.

²Hezekiah reinstated the rotation of priests and Levites which David had set up. They were to offer whole burnt offer-

ings and peace offerings and to sing praises to God at the entrance to the Temple. ³He gave animals from his own flocks and herds for the morning and evening sacrifices and for the extra sacrifices used on the Sabbath, the Festival of the New Moon and other appointed festivals as required by the law of the Lord. ⁴He also told the people in Jerusalem to bring their tithes and firstfruits to the Temple for the support of the priests and Levites so they could continue to minister to the Lord. ⁵As soon as the people heard what the king wanted them to do, they gave generously of the firstfruits of their grain, grapes, oil, honey and all the other produce of their fields. They also brought a tithe of everything they had, which was a very large amount.

⁶When the people in other cities and towns heard about it, they, too, brought a tithe of their herds and flocks and other things as freewill offerings and gave them all to the Lord. There were so many things that they had to be stacked in piles. ⁷The people began bringing their tithes and offerings in the third month, one month after the celebration of the Passover, and this went on until the seventh month. ⁸When Hezekiah and his officials came to the Temple and saw the large piles of tithes and offerings, they praised the Lord and blessed His people. ⁹Then Hezekiah asked the priests and Levites if they had enough tithes and offerings to care for everyone. ¹⁰The high priest, Azariah, from the family of Zadok, said, "Since the people have been faithful in bringing their tithes and offerings, there has been more than enough to take care of the priests and Levites and their families. The Lord has surely blessed His people, and because they've been faithful, we have more than we need."

¹¹Then Hezekiah ordered them to build more storerooms in the Temple area. ¹²So the Levites put the extra tithes and offerings into these new storerooms and the king put Conaniah in charge of it all and made his brother Shimei his as-

sistant. ¹³Those assigned to help them were: Jehiel, Azaziah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahath and Benaiah. These appointments were made by the king and Azariah, the high priest.

¹⁴Kore, who was in charge of the guards at the east gate, was also in charge of receiving tithes and freewill offerings and distributing them to the priests and Levites as needed. He kept any surplus in the storerooms of the Temple. He was the son of Imnah, the Levite. ¹⁵Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah and Shecaniah were his assistants who helped him distribute tithes to the priests and Levites, both young and old, in the cities where they lived. ¹⁶They distributed tithes to every Levite from twenty years old and up who ministered in the Temple and even to each male child from the age of three and up who was listed in the Levite's genealogical records. ¹⁷They also distributed tithes to the priests who were listed in the genealogical records, just as they did for the Levites who worked at the Temple. ¹⁸As they distributed the tithes to the priests and Levites who worked at the Temple, they also took into account their wives and children, as well as anyone else listed in the family history. ¹⁹There were also men assigned to distribute tithes to the priests and Levites who lived in rural areas elsewhere. They gave a share to every male who was listed as a descendant of Aaron.

²⁰Hezekiah had all this done throughout the land of Judah. He did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord and was faithful in everything he did. ²¹He stayed close to the Lord and kept all of God's commandments including the laws that applied to the Temple. He put his whole heart into it and the Lord blessed him and gave him good success.

King Sennacherib of Assyria Invades Judah

32 After these acts of faithfulness to the Lord on the part of Hezekiah,

Sennacherib, king of Assyria, invaded the land and laid siege to some of the fortified cities in Judah, determined to make them part of his empire. ²When Hezekiah saw what was happening and realized that Jerusalem would be next on Sennacherib's list, ³he consulted the city officials and his military staff about the advisability of cutting off the water supply outside the city so the Assyrians wouldn't have water when they came. The city officials and military men agreed.

⁴So they took a large number of men and went outside the city and plugged up all the open springs until the water stopped. They said, "Why should we let the king of Assyria and his men have water if they're coming to attack us?" ⁵After they had cut off the outside water supply, Hezekiah ordered the men to strengthen the city's defenses. So they repaired the wall and built extra defense towers on it. They also extended the wall of the city to protect the Pool of Siloam, which was the city's water supply, and repaired the defenses of the old part of the city called Millo. Then Hezekiah ordered extra shields and spears made. ⁶He armed all the men of the city and put officers in charge of them. Then he assembled them by the gate and said, ⁷"Let's not be afraid of Sennacherib and his vast army, because we have a far greater Power on our side than he does. Take courage. ⁸The king of Assyria is depending on his men, but we have the Lord God of Israel on our side. He will fight our battles." When the troops and the people heard this they gained confidence.

⁹Later, when Sennacherib and his army attacked the city of Lachish, about thirty miles from Jerusalem, he sent this message to Hezekiah and his people: ¹⁰"Sennacherib, king of Assyria, has already invaded your land and taken some of your cities. What makes you think that Jerusalem can resist him? ¹¹When your king says, 'The Lord our God will save us,' don't believe him. He's deceiving you, and you'll only end up dying of

hunger and thirst. ¹²Didn't Hezekiah destroy all the altars in Jerusalem and throughout the land and tell you that you should worship and burn your offerings only on the altar by the Temple? Do you think your God is pleased with such restrictions? ¹³Do you realize what I and my ancestors have done to people who have resisted us? Were their gods able to protect them? ¹⁴Which one of those gods saved his people from me and my fathers? Do you think your God can do differently? ¹⁵Don't let Hezekiah lead you astray. Don't believe what he tells you. No god of any other country has been able to resist us and deliver his people. Your God won't be able to do it either."

¹⁶Then Sennacherib's messengers said even worse things against the Lord. ¹⁷But the people did not respond. When Sennacherib heard this, he sent a personal letter to Hezekiah, saying, "Just as the gods of other lands couldn't defend their cities, so your God won't be able to defend Jerusalem. No one can take you out of my hand." ¹⁸This time Sennacherib's messengers shouted in Hebrew to the people on the walls to terrify them so they would surrender. ¹⁹They spoke to them about the God of Israel as they would about the gods of other countries who were only carved idols.

An Angel Defeats Sennacherib's Army

²⁰Then Hezekiah and Isaiah, the son of Amoz, prayed earnestly to the Lord to come and help them. ²¹The Lord heard their prayers and sent an angel into the camp of the Assyrians who killed all the officers and men who had besieged Jerusalem, all one hundred and eighty-five thousand of them. So Sennacherib withdrew the rest of his men from Judah and returned home. There he went into the temple of his god to worship and two of his sons came in and attacked him with their swords and killed him. ²²That is how the Lord answered Hezekiah's prayer and saved the inhabitants of Jerusalem from

the hand of Sennacherib. After that, the people of Judah had peace on all sides.²³ Many from across the country came to Jerusalem with thank offerings for the Lord and gifts to King Hezekiah.

Hezekiah Healed

²⁴Just after Sennacherib first invaded Judah, Hezekiah had become sick and was about to die. He prayed earnestly to the Lord to be well. The Lord answered his prayer and gave him a miraculous sign that in three days he would be well.²⁵ After he recuperated, Hezekiah became proud and forgot how good God had been to him. The Lord was very displeased with him and with the people in Jerusalem and throughout Judah.²⁶ Then Hezekiah and the people repented of their pride and the Lord deferred discipline until after Hezekiah's death.

Hezekiah's Wealth

²⁷Hezekiah became so rich that he had to build extra storerooms for his silver and gold, his precious stones and spices, as well as for his shields and other valuables.²⁸ He also had to build extra buildings to store his surplus of grain, grapes and olives, as well as to house his growing herds of cattle and sheep.²⁹ The Lord blessed Hezekiah and he became extremely wealthy.³⁰ Before the siege of Jerusalem, it was Hezekiah's idea to block the upper part of the Gihon spring flowing into the Kidron Valley and make a tunnel so the water would flow to a pool inside the city. He succeeded in this and in everything else he set out to do.³¹ Later, the deposed king of Babylon, who had revolted against the Assyrians, sent messengers to Hezekiah to find out about the miracle that had happened in the land of Judah. Hezekiah didn't talk to them about what great things the Lord had done, only about his own riches. The Lord had brought the Babylonians to Hezekiah to test him, but his heart was full of pride.

The Death of Hezekiah

³²Everything that Hezekiah did, as well as his devotion to the Lord, is recorded in the visions of the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, and the Books of the Kings of Israel and Judah.³³ Hezekiah died and was buried in the royal tombs alongside his ancestors. All the people of Jerusalem and Judah showed him great honor at his funeral, and his son Manasseh became the next king.

Manasseh's Reign in Judah

33 Manasseh was only twelve years old when he became king of Judah, having been born after his father Hezekiah was healed. He ruled the country jointly with his father and then alone for a total of fifty-five years.² He did evil in the eyes of the Lord and took up many of the idolatrous practices of those who were in the land before the children of Israel came.³ He rebuilt pagan places of worship that his father Hezekiah had destroyed, erected altars to Baal and Asherah the fertility goddess, and worshiped the sun, moon and stars.⁴ He even erected altars inside the Temple, the very place the Lord had made holy and declared that only He should be worshiped.⁵ In both the outer and inner courts of the Temple he built altars to the constellation figures in the heavens.⁶ He sacrificed his infant sons as burnt offerings to pagan gods in the Hinnom Valley just outside Jerusalem. He practiced witchcraft and sorcery and even consulted spirit mediums and listened to the advice of demons. He sinned against the Lord as no other king before him.

⁷He took the carved image of the fertility goddess, Asherah, and set it up in the very place in the Temple about which the Lord had said to David, "I have chosen this Temple in Jerusalem in the territory of Judah to be forever mine. Here is where my people are to come to worship me.⁸ I will not let my people be driven out of the land that I have given them as long as they keep my commandments, my laws and

the ordinances that I gave them through my servant Moses.”⁹ But Manasseh led his people away from the Lord until they were more evil in His sight than the heathen who had been in the land before the children of Israel came.

Manasseh Repents

¹⁰The Lord sent prophets with messages to Manasseh and to the people, but they paid no attention to them. ¹¹So the Lord allowed the king of Assyria and his army to come against Judah. They came and captured Manasseh, put a hook in his nose and put him in chains. Then they led him away to the land of Babylon, which was then still part of the Assyrian Empire. ¹²In his distress Manasseh humbled himself, turned to the God of his fathers and begged the Lord to help him. ¹³The Lord heard his prayer, and the king of Assyria unexpectedly released Manasseh and let him return to Jerusalem to rule Judah. This convinced Manasseh that the Lord is real and that He is God.

¹⁴After his return from Assyria, Manasseh increased the height of the wall of Jerusalem and strengthened the fortifications of the City of David from the Gihon Spring to the Fish Gate and around to the Hill of Ophel. He also stationed troops in all the fortified cities of Judah. ¹⁵He removed his idols, pagan images and altars from the Temple and threw them out of the city. ¹⁶Then he restored the altar of the Lord, sacrificed peace and thank offerings on it and told the people to worship the God of their fathers. ¹⁷But the people only partially obeyed. While they offered sacrifices to the Lord, they did it on pagan altars and wherever it was convenient for them.

The Death of Manasseh

¹⁸Everything that Manasseh did, including his captivity, his prayer to the Lord for help and the messages from the Lord which the prophets gave him, is recorded in The Books of the Kings of

Israel and Judah. ¹⁹Also a record of his sins before he was taken prisoner, the pagan places of worship he built, the idols he set up in Jerusalem and in the Temple, the prayer he offered and how God answered it, is found in the writings of the prophets. ²⁰Manasseh died and was buried in the royal gardens next to the palace but not in the royal tombs alongside the other kings. His son Amon became the next king.

Amon's Reign in Judah

²¹Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he ruled for only two years. ²²He, too, did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done before he was taken captive. Amon worshiped all the idols his father had made and offered sacrifices to them. ²³But unlike his father, who repented during his captivity and then served the Lord, Amon continued to sin and was even more evil than his father had been. ²⁴His officials plotted against him and assassinated him in his own palace. ²⁵Then the people killed those who had taken part in the assassination of Amon and made his son Josiah the next king.

Josiah's Reign in Judah

34 Josiah was only eight years old when he became king, and he ruled over Judah from Jerusalem for thirty-one years. ²He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord. He followed the example of his ancestor David and remained faithful to God, not turning to the right or the left. ³In the eighth year of his reign, while still in his teens, he began to worship the God of his fathers even more earnestly. Four years later, at about the age of twenty, he began getting rid of pagan places of worship, symbols of the goddess Asherah and the other idols and images that had been set up in Jerusalem and throughout the land of Judah.

⁴Under his personal supervision he had the altars of Baal, the incense altars

and the wooden Asherah images destroyed. He even had the wooden and metal images ground into dust and scattered on the graves of those who had worshiped those images. ⁵He also had the bones of the priests of those idols dug up and burned on their pagan altars. Thus he purged Jerusalem and Judah of their idolatry. ⁶Josiah ordered the same thing done in the cities in Ephraim, Manasseh, Simeon and as far north as Naphtali, all in the territory of Israel. ⁷There, too, he tore down the pagan altars and ground the idols and images into dust. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

The High Priest Finds the Book of the Law

⁸By the time Josiah had purged the land of idol worship and cleansed the Temple, he was in his mid-twenties. Then he ordered Shaphan son of Azaliah, Maaseiah mayor of the city, and Joah son of Joahaz, who was the city recorder, to begin repairing the Temple. ⁹The three of them went to Hilkiah the high priest and gave him money that the people had given for the Temple. The Levites, who served as doorkeepers of the Temple, had collected these funds from the people of Judah and Benjamin and from those who came from Ephraim and Manasseh and other parts of Israel to worship in Jerusalem. ¹⁰Then Hilkiah gave the money to the supervisors to give to the workers making the repairs for their wages and for the supplies they needed. ¹¹So the carpenters and masons had enough money to buy timbers and enough stones to repair the parts of the Temple which previous kings of Judah had allowed to deteriorate. ¹²The men did their work faithfully and well. They were supervised by Jahath and Obadiah, both of whom were Levites descended from Merari; and Zechariah and Meshullam, who were descendants of Kohath. These men were not only skilled builders but also skilled musicians. ¹³They supervised all the workers to see

that the job was done right while other Levites kept records and served as Temple guards.

¹⁴One day while Hilkiah the high priest was getting money from one of the storerooms, he found a copy of the Book of the Law that someone had hidden there. ¹⁵Hilkiah showed it to Shaphan, the royal secretary, and said, "Look! I've found a copy of the Book of the Law written by Moses," and he gave it to him. ¹⁶Shaphan reported to the king the progress of repairing the Temple, saying, "Your servants have done everything you asked them to do. ¹⁷We have given the money collected by the Levites to Hilkiah, the high priest, who is giving it to the supervisors to give to the workers for their wages and to buy their supplies." ¹⁸Then Shaphan said to the king, "While Hilkiah was in the storeroom, he found this book and gave it to me." The king asked him to read from the book. So Shaphan did.

¹⁹When the king heard what was written in the book, he stood up and tore his robe in grief. ²⁰Then he gave these orders to Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor (or Abdon), Shaphan, and Asaiah his personal attendant: ²¹"Go and ask the Lord for me and for God's remnant in Israel and Judah what all this means. It sounds like the Lord is very displeased with us and is ready to discipline us, because, as a people, we and our fathers have not done what is written in this book."

²²So Hilkiah the high priest and others whom the king appointed went to see Huldah the prophetess. She was the wife of Shallum, who was in charge of the king's wardrobe, as well as the garments of the priests serving at the Temple. They lived in the newer section of Jerusalem. ²³Huldah listened to them, then said, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Give the man who sent you this message: ²⁴I will discipline the people of Jerusalem and Judah by bringing on them all the disasters written in the book that was read to you. ²⁵I will do this because the people have forsaken

me and have burned incense and made offerings to others gods. They have turned against me and worshiped idols, so I cannot keep silent but will punish them for what they have done. ²⁶Tell the king of Judah that the Lord also says: ²⁷You have humbled yourself and torn your robe in grief when you heard the words of the book read to you. You repented and wept and prayed over these words. I saw your sorrow and grief and heard your prayers. ²⁸So I will soon lay you to rest, and you will sleep in peace beside your fathers. You won't see all the disasters that will come on Judah and Jerusalem and on those who live there." Hilkiah and the others took this message back to the king.

Josiah Renews the Covenant

²⁹When the king heard it, he called together all the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem to consult with them. ³⁰When they came, he led them to the Temple, together with the priests, the Levites and the people of Jerusalem, rich and poor alike, to worship the Lord. Then the king read to them from the Book of the Law that Hilkiah had found in the Temple.

³¹Josiah stood by the royal column in the courtyard and renewed Israel's covenant with the Lord. He promised to obey the Lord with all his heart and soul and mind, to keep His commandments and His laws and to carry out all the regulations written in the book. ³²Then he committed everyone in Jerusalem and Judah and Benjamin to the Lord and made them promise to keep the covenant. The people responded and obeyed and did everything according to the covenant that God had made with their fathers. ³³Josiah also went north into Israel and destroyed every disgusting idol he could find that he had missed before. As long as he lived, he was committed to the Lord and required the people to serve and worship the Lord God of their fathers.

Josiah Celebrates the Passover

35 Then Josiah decided to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. He had the Passover lamb killed on the fourteenth day of Nisan, which was the first month of the religious year and the time the Lord had designated. ²He appointed priests, assigned them their duties and encouraged them in their service for the Lord. ³He said to the Levites who had consecrated themselves to the Lord and were teachers of the people, "Put the Ark of the Lord back in the Most Holy Place. Don't keep carrying it around on your shoulders from place to place but leave it in the Temple where it belongs. Serve the Lord your God and His people with all your hearts. ⁴Take up your duties in the Temple according to your ancestral houses as our forefather David and his son Solomon arranged them. ⁵And organize yourselves in such a way that when people come to the Temple with their offerings, you'll be ready to minister to their spiritual needs and help them. ⁶Consecrate yourselves to the Lord; kill the Passover lambs and then help your fellow Israelites prepare their sacrifices as the Lord through His servant Moses told us to do."

⁷Then Josiah provided the people with all the Passover and sin offerings they needed, a total of thirty thousand sheep and goats and three thousand young bulls, all from his own flocks and herds. ⁸His high officials also gave of their herds and flocks to the people, to the Levites and to the priests. The officials of the Temple, Hilkiah, Zechariah and Jehiel and their families donated two thousand, six hundred Passover lambs and three hundred young bulls. ⁹The leaders of the Levites, Conaniah, Shemaiah, Nethanel, Hashabiah, Jeiel and Jozabad and their families donated five thousand lambs and five hundred young bulls.

¹⁰The priests and Levites arranged everything that needed to be done for the celebration of the Passover and then took up their positions as ordered by the

king. ¹¹The Passover lambs were killed; the Levites skinned them, and the priests sprinkled the blood on the altar as the Levites handed the lambs to them. ¹²Then they divided the offering among the people by families, as was instructed in the law by Moses. ¹³They roasted the Passover lambs over the fire. They boiled the peace offerings in pots, kettles and pans, and quickly served portions of the sacrificial meat to the people. ¹⁴Then the Levites prepared something for themselves and for the priests who were burning the offerings and the fat according to the instructions the Lord had given Moses. They worked all day, right up until nightfall. ¹⁵The musicians, made up of the descendants of Asaph, were there and took their places, as arranged years before by David, Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun the prophet. Since the gatekeepers couldn't leave their posts, the Levites prepared the Passover lambs for them.

¹⁶So the people celebrated the Passover and the week-long Festival of Unleavened Bread that followed. And all the sacrifices were offered on the altar of the Lord as Josiah had ordered. ¹⁷The people from the Northern Kingdom of Israel who were in Jerusalem celebrated the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread together with their brothers from Judah. ¹⁸The Passover had not been celebrated with such fervor since the days of Samuel the prophet. No other king had held the Passover with so many priests, Levites and people present from both Judah and Israel. ¹⁹This all took place in Jerusalem in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign.

The Death of Josiah

²⁰Josiah did all this for the Lord. Thirteen years later, Necho, king of Egypt, was on his way to fight the Babylonians at Carchemish on the Euphrates River. Josiah decided to march out and stop him. ²¹Necho sent this message to Josiah: "I don't have a quarrel with you. I'm not

here to attack you, but I am on my way to fight the Babylonians. Your God has told me that since I'm going up north to fight, I must go through the land of Judah as quickly as I can. So stop meddling with the directions your God has given me or He'll turn against you."

²²Josiah thought that since no word had come to him from the Lord, it would be humiliating to turn back. So he didn't listen to the Lord's warning through Necho. He called up his troops, disguised himself as a common soldier and went into battle. The two armies met on the plains of Megiddo. ²³Josiah was critically wounded by archers. He shouted to his servants nearby, "I've just been hit! Quick! Get me out of here!" ²⁴So they carried him out of the battle zone, put him in another chariot and took him back to Jerusalem where he died. He was buried alongside his fathers in the royal tombs, and all of Judah and Jerusalem were very sad and greatly mourned his death.

²⁵The prophet Jeremiah wrote lamentations for Josiah's funeral which are still sung by men and women whenever they commemorate Josiah's death. This became a tradition throughout the land of Israel. ²⁶Everything that Josiah did, his devotion to his God, his obedience and his careful observance of the law ²⁷is recorded from beginning to end in The Books of the Kings of Israel and Judah.

Jehoahaz Taken Captive

36 Then the people made Jehoahaz, a younger son of Josiah, the next king of Judah. ²Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king and he ruled for only three months. ³King Necho of Egypt had been defeated by the Babylonians at the battle of Carchemish. While on his way home from the north, he decided to attack Jerusalem, taking Jehoahaz prisoner and demanding from the people seven thousand, five hundred pounds of silver and seventy-five pounds of gold. ⁴He made Eliakim, the older brother of Jehoahaz, king of Judah and

changed his name to Jehoiakim. Then he took Jehoahaz with him back to Egypt as a war trophy.

Jehoiakim Taken Captive

⁵Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he ruled Judah for eleven years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. ⁶When he rebelled, Nebuchadnezzar, crown prince of Babylon, invaded Judah, attacked Jerusalem and took Jehoiakim captive. He intended to take him to Babylon in chains, but Jehoiakim died at the hands of his captors. His body was thrown into a pit outside Jerusalem, just as Jeremiah had predicted. ⁷But he did take many captives with him, including Daniel and his three friends, as well as treasures from the Temple which he put in his palace. ⁸Everything that Jehoiakim did, including his wicked practices, are recorded in The Books of the Kings of Israel and Judah, and his son Jehoiachin became the next king.

Jehoiachin Taken Captive

⁹Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he ruled the country for only three months and ten days. He, too, did evil in the eyes of the Lord. ¹⁰In the spring of the year when kings go out to make war, Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem again. He took Jehoiachin prisoner, and made his uncle Mattaniah king of Judah and changed his name to Zedekiah. Nebuchadnezzar took with him still more treasures from the Temple to Babylon, as well as more captives, including the prophet Ezekiel.

Zedekiah's Reign in Judah

¹¹Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he ruled for eleven years. ¹²He, too, did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He didn't listen to Jeremiah the prophet who brought him message after message from the Lord. ¹³Zedekiah rebelled against Nebu-

chadnezzar as his overlord just as Jehoiachin before him had done, even though he had taken an oath in the name of the God of Israel to be loyal to Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah broke his oath, became stubborn and refused to obey the God of Israel. ¹⁴All the leaders of Judah, the priests and the people became unfaithful to the Lord and followed the example of the nations around them in worshiping idols and doing the most detestable things imaginable. Not only that, but they did some of these things right in the Temple of the Lord.

The Fall of Jerusalem

¹⁵Again and again, God sent His prophets with messages to His people because he loved them and had pity on them. He also cared about His Temple. ¹⁶But the people made fun of these messages and despised the Lord's prophets until their sin became so great that the Lord had to step in, for there was no other remedy left.

¹⁷Then God allowed the Babylonians to attack Jerusalem a third time. This time Nebuchadnezzar had no mercy on anyone, man or woman, young or old, sick or healthy. He even killed the young men who were in the Temple. ¹⁸He took all the treasures of the Temple that he had not taken before, even those from the palace and the houses of the officials. ¹⁹Then his army set fire to the Temple, broke down the walls of Jerusalem, burned the palace and the houses of all the officials and destroyed anything else of value in the city. ²⁰Nebuchadnezzar took with him all the people who survived the attack, except the very poor and weak, and marched them to Babylon where they became his slaves and the slaves of his sons. They remained slaves until Cyrus, king of Persia, defeated the Babylonians. ²¹What the Lord had predicted through Jeremiah the prophet had come to pass. The land lay desolate for the next seventy years while the children of Israel were in Babylon. So the land made up for the Sabbaths it had

missed through the centuries, because the people had not let it rest every seventh year as they were supposed to.

The Decree of Cyrus

²²It was in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the children of Israel were released from captivity and allowed to go home. Years before, the Lord had told Jeremiah that this would happen. So

Cyrus made a decree and put it in writing to be read throughout the empire. It said, ²³“This is what Cyrus, king of Persia, says: ‘The Lord God of heaven has made me king of Persia and the surrounding countries. He also has given me the responsibility of rebuilding His Temple in Jerusalem. So I want all of you who are God’s people to be free to go to Jerusalem. May God be with you.’”

EZRA

The Seventy Years of Captivity End

1 The very first year that Cyrus was king of Persia, the Lord fulfilled the promise He had given through Jeremiah to stir Cyrus's heart to free His people and let them go home. Cyrus wrote a proclamation to be read throughout his kingdom which said, ²"This is the command of Cyrus, King of Persia:

'The Lord, the God of heaven, has made me ruler over all the kingdoms that make up Persia, and He has given me the responsibility of rebuilding His Temple at Jerusalem in Judah. ³May the God of heaven be with all of you who are His people. You are free to return to Judah and to rebuild the Temple of the Lord, the God of Israel who is worshiped in Jerusalem. ⁴If anyone who worships the God of heaven needs help in returning, those who are able should provide the help needed. They should provide pack animals, livestock, food supplies and money, as well as silver and gold for the house of God in Jerusalem.'

⁵Then leaders from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin got ready to go home, as did the priests and Levites and everyone whose heart was stirred to rebuild the Temple. ⁶Their neighbors gave them silver, gold, food supplies, pack animals, livestock and other valuables to present as offerings to the God of Israel. ⁷King Cyrus gave the exiles the golden cups and bowls that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had taken from the Temple at Jerusalem seventy years earlier and which he had put in the temple of his gods. ⁸He ordered Mithredath, the chief of the royal treasury, to hand over the following items to Zerubbabel (also called Sheshbazzar), a prince and leader of the tribe of Judah: ⁹Thirty large gold offering bowls, one thousand large silver offering bowls, twenty-nine other large silver bowls, ¹⁰thirty small gold bowls, four hundred and ten small matching silver bowls and one thousand other temple utensils.

¹¹These were just some of the items that Cyrus gave the exiles. Altogether there were about five thousand, four hundred articles of silver and gold which Zerubbabel took with him when he and the exiles left Babylon to go back to Jerusalem. This was the first return of the exiles.

The Captives Return to Jerusalem

2 Many of the exiles living in the province of Babylon responded to King Cyrus's declaration of freedom and returned to Jerusalem or to their various hometowns in Judah. Their families had been living in exile for seventy years, ever since King Nebuchadnezzar had taken them captive to Babylon. ²The leaders who led them back home were Zerubbabel, Joshua (also known as Jeshua), Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum and Baanah.

The number of men from each family group were as follows: ³Two thousand, one hundred and seventy-two of the descendants of Parosh, ⁴three hundred and seventy-two of the descendants of Shephatiah, ⁵seven hundred and seventy-five of the descendants of Arah, ⁶two thousand, eight hundred and twelve of the descendants of Pahath-Moab through the line of Jeshua and Joab, ⁷one thousand, two hundred and fifty-four of the descendants of Elam, ⁸nine hundred and forty-five of the descendants of Zattu, ⁹seven hundred and sixty of the descendants of Zaccai, ¹⁰six hundred and forty-two of the descendants of Bani, ¹¹six hundred and twenty-three of the descendants of Bebai, ¹²one thousand, two hundred and twenty-two of the descendants of Azgad, ¹³six hundred and sixty-six of the descendants of Adonikam, ¹⁴two thousand and fifty-six of the descendants of Bigvai, ¹⁵four hundred and fifty-four of the descendants of Adin, ¹⁶ninety-eight of the descendants of Ater through the line

of Hezekiah, ¹⁷three hundred and twenty-three of the descendants of Bezai, ¹⁸one hundred and twelve of the descendants of Jorah, ¹⁹two hundred and twenty-three of the descendants of Hashum, and ²⁰ninety-five of the descendants of Gibar. ²¹The number of men who came from certain cities were as follows: One hundred and twenty-three men from the city of Bethlehem, ²²fifty-six from the city of Netophah, ²³one hundred and twenty-eight from the city of Anathoth, ²⁴forty-two from the city of Azmaveth, ²⁵seven hundred and forty-three from the cities of Kiriath Jearim, Chephirah and Beeroth, ²⁶six hundred and twenty-one from the cities of Ramah and Geba, ²⁷one hundred and twenty-two from the city of Micmash, ²⁸two hundred and twenty-three from the cities of Bethel and Ai, ²⁹fifty-two from the city of Nebo, ³⁰one hundred and fifty-six from the city of Magbish, ³¹one thousand, two hundred and fifty-four from the city of Elam, ³²three hundred and twenty from the city of Harim, ³³seven hundred and twenty-five from the cities of Lod, Hadid and Ono, ³⁴three hundred and forty-five from the city of Jericho, and ³⁵three thousand, six hundred and thirty from the city of Senaah.

³⁶The priests numbered nine hundred and seventy-three of the descendants of Jedaiah of the house of Jeshua, ³⁷one thousand and fifty-two of the descendants of Immer, ³⁸one thousand, two hundred and forty-seven of the descendants of Pashhur, and ³⁹one thousand and seventeen of the descendants of Harim.

⁴⁰The Levites numbered seventy-four. They were descendants of Jeshua and Kadmiel through the line of Hodaviah. ⁴¹The number of Temple musicians who came with us was one hundred and twenty-eight; they were descendants of Asaph. ⁴²The Temple guards who registered numbered one hundred and thirty-nine; they were the descendants of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita and Shobai.

⁴³The Temple workmen belonged to

thirty-five families whose heads were: Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, ⁴⁴Keros, Siaha, Padon, ⁴⁵Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub, ⁴⁶Hagab, Shalmal, Hanan, ⁴⁷Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, ⁴⁸Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, ⁴⁹Uzza, Paseah, Besai, ⁵⁰Asnah, Meunim, Nephishesim, ⁵¹Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, ⁵²Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, ⁵³Barkos, Sisera, Temah, ⁵⁴Neziah and Hatipha.

⁵⁵The descendants of Solomon's servants belonged to ten families whose heads were: Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda, ⁵⁶Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel, ⁵⁷Shephatiah, Hattil, Pochereth-Hazzebaim and Ami.

⁵⁸The total number of Temple workmen and the descendants of Solomon's servants was three hundred and ninety-two.

⁵⁹Then there were those who came from the cities of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addan and Immer, but who could not show that they were descendants of Israel. ⁶⁰They belonged to the family groups of Delaiah, Tobiah and Nekoda and numbered six hundred and fifty-two. ⁶¹Then there were those family groups who claimed to belong to the priesthood but could not prove their ancestry. They were the descendants of Habaiah, Hakkoz and Barzillai who had married a daughter of Barzillai the Gileadite and had taken the name of his father-in-law. ⁶²They looked for their family records but could not find them, so they were not numbered and could not be accepted as priests. ⁶³Zerubbabel the governor told them that they could not eat from the food that was offered to God until there was a priest who could inquire of God as to their ancestry through the Urim and Thummim.

⁶⁴The total number of exiles returning from captivity was twenty-nine thousand, eight hundred and eighteen men (many of whom would be sending for their families later), and twelve thousand, five hundred and forty two women, which came to forty-two thousand, three hundred and sixty. ⁶⁵The number of male and female servants who came with them was seven thousand, three hundred and thirty-

seven, plus two hundred male and female secular singers. ⁶⁶There were seven hundred and thirty-six horses, two hundred and forty-five mules, ⁶⁷four hundred and thirty-five camels and six thousand, seven hundred and twenty donkeys.

⁶⁸When all the exiles arrived home and gathered at the ruins of the Temple in Jerusalem, some heads of families gave thank offerings to the Lord for bringing them home safely. Their gifts were used to rebuild the Temple on its original site. ⁶⁹They gave as much as they could, and their offerings amounted to more than a thousand pounds of gold, about six thousand pounds of silver and one hundred robes for the priests.

⁷⁰The priests, Levites and some of the people settled in or near Jerusalem, while the musicians, Temple guards and Temple workmen settled in nearby towns. The rest of the people settled in the towns their families originally came from.

Worship Begins Again in Jerusalem

3 As the seventh month drew near, after the returnees settled, they all came to Jerusalem to prepare to worship the Lord. ²Then Joshua the high priest, the son of Jehozadak (Jozadak for short), and his fellow priests, together with Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and his associates, rebuilt the altar of the God of Israel to offer sacrifices according to the law of Moses, the man of God. ³The returned exiles did this in spite of threats from foreigners who now lived in the country. They built the altar where it had stood before and offered on it both morning and evening sacrifices.

⁴Then, in harmony with what is written, they celebrated the Festival of Tabernacles (also called the Festival of Shelters) and offered the appropriate sacrifices required each day. ⁵After the Festival of Shelters they began to offer the regular morning and evening burnt offerings and other sacrifices, such as the New Month sacrifice, sacrifices required at other feasts of the Lord, and

sacrifices brought by the people as freewill offerings. ⁶So even though the people had not yet started to rebuild the Temple, by the first day of the seventh month (which according to their civil calendar was New Year's Day), the sacrificial system had begun. ⁷Then the people gave money to the priests to hire stone masons and carpenters. They sent olive oil and other farm produce to Tyre and Sidon in exchange for cedar wood from Lebanon. The people there shipped the wood to Joppa by the sea and from there it was carried overland in harmony with the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia.

The Temple Restored

⁸In the second month of the second year after the exiles had come back, they began working on rebuilding the Temple of the Lord on its original site in the city of Jerusalem. Zerubbabel, Joshua, their fellow priests and Levites, and all the exiles who had come back home to live in Jerusalem joined in the work of rebuilding the Temple. The Levites twenty years old and up were put in charge of overseeing the details of rebuilding the Temple. ⁹Joshua, the high priest, his sons and relatives, and Kadmiel and his sons and relatives, supervised the others, so they all worked together to rebuild the Temple.

¹⁰When the builders finished laying the foundation of the Temple, the priests put on their robes and took their places with silver trumpets in their hands, the Levites took their places with cymbals, and together, they and all the people praised the Lord according to the guidelines handed down from David, king of Israel. ¹¹They sang praises responsively to the Lord and gave thanks, saying, "The Lord is good. His love to Israel endures forever." Everyone sang with all their hearts, and then the people gave a shout as they praised the Lord, because the cornerstone of the Temple had now been put in place.

¹²But many of the older priests, Levites and other leaders had seen the

glories of the first Temple, and they wailed in grief as they watched the foundation stone being laid, while others shouted for joy so loudly that ¹³no one could separate the joyful singing from the sounds of wailing. Both groups made so much noise that they could be heard far away.

Opposition to Rebuilding the Temple

4 When the enemies of the people of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles had put the cornerstone in place and were rebuilding the Temple of the God of Israel, ²they went to see Zerubbabel, the governor, and the other Jewish leaders. “Let us help you rebuild the Lord’s Temple,” they said. “We worship the same God that you do and have been offering sacrifices to Him as the God of this country. We’ve done this ever since Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, sent us here to live.” ³But Zerubbabel, Joshua and the other leaders answered, “We would rather not have you help us rebuild the Temple of the Lord, because you accept Him as a local god in charge of this area, but we accept Him as the only true God, the Creator of heaven and earth. It would be best if we rebuild the Temple by ourselves as Cyrus, king of Persia, told us to do.”

⁴Then these same people, who had been brought in to live in the land, did their best by threats and intimidations to keep the returned exiles from rebuilding the Temple. ⁵They even bribed the Persian officials in charge of Judah to do all they could to hinder the plans of the exiles to rebuild. They kept this up during the reign of Cyrus and into the reign of Darius, the kings of Persia. ⁶Even in the days of Esther when Ahasuerus (also called Xerxes) was king of Persia, the enemies of Judah had lodged a complaint against the Jews, accusing them of disloyalty.

Opposition to Rebuilding Jerusalem

⁷When Artaxerxes I was king of Persia,

Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and their associates wrote a letter to him in Aramaic about Jerusalem. They wrote their letter in Aramaic, the official correspondence of the Persian Empire, lodging a complaint against the Hebrews for rebuilding the city wall. ⁸Rehum, the commanding officer of Samaria, and Shimshai, the royal secretary, also wrote a letter to Artaxerxes which read:

⁹“Rehum, the commanding officer of Samaria, and Shimshai, the royal secretary, together with our staff of judges and officials, who are men originally from Tripolis, Persia, Erech, Babylon and Susa in the territory of Elam, are sending this letter. ¹⁰Also the people whom the great and powerful Ashurbanipal sent from their homes to live in Samaria and elsewhere in the Trans-Euphrates territory support this letter.”

¹¹That’s how they introduced themselves, and the rest of the letter read: “To King Artaxerxes, from your servants, the men you placed in charge of the Trans-Euphrates territory. ¹²We want the king to know that the Jews who came back from your territories have settled in Jerusalem. They are rebuilding their rebellious and wicked city without your permission. They have already rebuilt sections of the wall and are preparing the foundations of the remaining sections. They are the cause of the current trouble in our territory. ¹³Furthermore, the king should know that if this city is rebuilt and its walls restored, the people will stop paying taxes and the income to the crown will decrease. ¹⁴Since we are under orders from the king of Persia, we are responsible to see that the crown is not dishonored and that the royal treasury does not suffer. That is why we are sending this letter, to inform the king what is happening. ¹⁵We suggest that a search be made in the royal archives, and if this is done, the king will see that for centuries this city has been rebellious and very troublesome to kings and rulers of these territories. That is why Nebuchadnezzar,

King of Babylon, destroyed this city and took many of its people captive. ¹⁶We therefore inform the king that if this city with its wall is allowed to be rebuilt, Persia will no longer be in full control of the Trans-Euphrates territories.”

¹⁷King Artaxerxes was in a disagreeable mood and replied: “To Rehum, the commanding officer, to Shimshai, the royal secretary, and to their associates in Samaria and in the Trans-Euphrates territories, greetings. ¹⁸The letter that you sent has been plainly read to me. ¹⁹I ordered an investigation into the matter, and, as you have said, it was found that for centuries this city of Jerusalem was indeed a troublesome city, in almost constant rebellion against kings, a place of intrigue and sedition. So I want to thank you for your loyalty. ²⁰Yes, there have been mighty kings in Jerusalem ruling the whole Trans-Euphrates territory, and taxes, tribute and import duties were paid to them by the people throughout the territory. So we need to be careful, as you have suggested, that Jerusalem does not become strong again. ²¹Therefore, you are to give orders for these people to stop rebuilding the city and its wall until I order otherwise. ²²Do this at once, so this threat to my throne does not materialize, my authority is not questioned and the royal treasury is not diminished.”

²³As soon as the letter from King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum, Shimshai and their associates, they hurried to Jerusalem with armed troops and forced the Jews to stop rebuilding the city. ²⁴These are examples of what people living in the land did over the years, first to stop rebuilding the Temple and later to halt the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Years earlier work on the Temple had stopped, and it did not start again until the second year of King Darius.

Temple Building Resumed

5 It was during those up and down years of rebuilding the Temple that two

prophets, Haggai and Zechariah (son of Iddo), began to speak to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel urging them to proceed as Cyrus, king of Persia, had ordered them to do. ²Then Zerubbabel and Joshua organized work crews and again began work on the Temple, and the two prophets of the Lord, Haggai and Zechariah, helped them.

³That’s when Tattenai, the governor in charge of the Trans-Euphrates territory, and Shether-Bozenai, the royal secretary, together with other government officials, came to Jerusalem and said, “Who authorized you to rebuild this Temple so you can worship here?” ⁴He requested a list of the names of all men who were working there. ⁵But the Lord was with His people and the governor agreed that work on the Temple could continue until a reply to his letter was received from Darius the Great, the new king of Persia, which included the territory of the former kingdoms of Assyria and Babylon.

⁶This is the report that Tattenai, the governor in charge of the Trans-Euphrates territory, Shethar-Bozenai, the royal secretary, and other government officials sent to Darius: ⁷“To King Darius, greetings. ⁸Your Majesty should know that we visited the province of Judah and found that the Temple of the one they call the Great God is being rebuilt. The people have chiseled out large stone blocks and put them in place, and they are already setting timbers into the walls. They are doing it with great care and are making steady progress. ⁹We questioned their leaders and asked who authorized them to rebuild the Temple. ¹⁰We also asked for the names of their leaders so you could know who they were. ¹¹This is what they said, ‘We are servants of the God of heaven and earth and are rebuilding His Temple which was built many years ago by one of the great kings of Israel. ¹²But because our forefathers displeased the Lord, He stopped protecting them, and they were defeated by King Nebuchadnezzar. He destroyed

the Temple and took many of our people as captives to Babylon.

¹³Seventy years later, King Cyrus, in the first year of his reign as king of Persia, issued a decree to rebuild this Temple and authorized us to do it. ¹⁴He even returned the gold and silver utensils which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem and put in the temple of his god in Babylon. He gave these utensils to Zerubbabel, one of our princes, whom he appointed as governor of Judah. ¹⁵King Cyrus told him to put them in the Temple in Jerusalem when it was rebuilt. ¹⁶So Zerubbabel led the people back to Judah, laid the foundation of the Temple and continued his interest in finishing the Temple until this day. But as you can see, the Temple is a long way from being finished.

¹⁷"This is what the people here told us. If it pleases the King, let a search be made in the royal archives of Babylon to see if King Cyrus did issue an order for rebuilding the Temple, and send us a copy of his decision concerning this matter."

The Decree of Darius

6 So King Darius ordered a thorough search to be made in the royal archives of Babylon. ²And in the city of Ecbatana, in the province of Media, they found a scroll with this directive on it: ³"In the first year of the reign of King Cyrus, the king issued the following decree concerning the Temple of God in Jerusalem: Let the Temple in Jerusalem be rebuilt as a place to offer sacrifices. Let the foundations be laid, and let the front of the Temple be a hundred feet high and a hundred feet wide. ⁴The Temple is to be built with three layers of large blocks of stone followed by a layer of wood. All expenses are to be paid out of the royal treasury. ⁵Also, the gold and silver utensils which King Nebuchadnezzar brought from the Temple in Jerusalem to his temple in Babylon are to be returned and deposited in the Temple of God there."

⁶Then King Darius sent the following letter: "To Tattenai, the governor of the Trans-Euphrates territory, to Shethar-Bozenai, the royal secretary, and to all officials: Stay away from the land of Judah. ⁷Do not interfere with the construction of the Temple at Jerusalem. Let the governor of Judah and his associates rebuild the Temple of God on its original site. ⁸I decree that you are to assist the Jews in rebuilding the Temple of God as follows: The expenses of all the workmen are to be paid out of the royal treasury from the revenues of the Trans-Euphrates territory so that the work on the Temple can go ahead unhindered. ⁹Also, whatever is needed day by day for sacrifices, such as young bulls, sheep or lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, or wheat, salt, unfermented wine and olive oil, are to be given to the priests as they request. ¹⁰This is to be done so that their sacrifices are acceptable to the God of heaven, as well as their prayers for my well-being and that of my sons. ¹¹Furthermore, I decree that if anyone disobeys this order, that a beam be taken from his house on which to impale him. Then his house is to be demolished and left as a pile of rubbish for everyone to see. ¹²May the God who chose Jerusalem as His place of worship destroy any king or people who wish to change this decree or destroy the Temple that is being built there. I, Darius, have decreed it. Let it be done with haste."

The Temple Completed

¹³Then, Tattenai, Shethar-Bozenai and their associates implemented the decree as soon as they received it and did exactly what King Darius had ordered. ¹⁴So the leaders in Judah continued building the Temple, and the work went forward according to the decree of Darius and with the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets. The people finished rebuilding the Temple and later rebuilt the city walls as they had been directed by the God of Israel and in har-

mony with the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, all kings of Persia. ¹⁵The Temple itself was completed on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

¹⁶Then the people of Israel, the priests, the Levites and the returned exiles, joyfully dedicated the Temple of God. ¹⁷For the dedication ceremony they offered one hundred young bulls, two hundred rams and four hundred male lambs as sacrifices of thanksgiving to the Lord, plus twelve male goats as a sin offering, one for each of the tribes of Israel. ¹⁸And they organized the priests and Levites into groups to serve in the Temple according to the instructions left by Moses.

The Passover Celebrated

¹⁹Then on the fourteenth day of the first month of the religious year, the exiles celebrated their first Passover after rebuilding the Temple. ²⁰Both the priests and the Levites had ritually purified themselves and were ready to serve. Then the Levites killed enough Passover lambs for the returned exiles, the priests and themselves. ²¹The sacrifices were eaten not only by the returned exiles, but by faithful Israelites who had remained in their homeland and by all who had given up their pagan ways to worship the God of Israel. ²²For seven days they joyously celebrated the Festival of Unleavened Bread, thanking the Lord for working on their behalf to finish rebuilding the Temple through the decree of Darius, king of Persia.

The Arrival of Ezra

7 Almost sixty years after the Temple was rebuilt, a man named Ezra lived in Persia while Artaxerxes I was king. Ezra could trace his ancestry back to Aaron. He was the great-great-grandson of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, ²son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, ³son of Amariah, son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, ⁴son of Zerariah,

son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, ⁵son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, who was the son of Aaron. ⁶Ezra was one of the exiles and, as a teacher, was well versed in the laws which Moses had received from God. When Ezra asked Artaxerxes for help, the king gave him everything he requested because the God of Israel was with him. ⁷Other Israelites, including priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers and Temple workers, also went back to Jerusalem with Ezra. They returned in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, king of Persia.

⁸Ezra and his people arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. ⁹They had left Babylon on the first day of the first month, stopped at the Ahava Canal and arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month. It took them four months to make the journey of hundreds of miles, and there were no serious incidents because the Lord was with them. ¹⁰Ezra was a dedicated leader and had devoted himself to studying the law and ordinances of God, keeping them himself and teaching them to the people.

¹¹This is the letter King Artaxerxes gave Ezra, the teacher and scribe, who had a thorough knowledge of the commands which God had given to Israel:

Artaxerxes Orders Jerusalem Rebuilt

¹²“Artaxerxes, king of all vassal kings within the Persian Empire, to Ezra, the priest, a reporter to the king of Jewish religious affairs in the Persian government. ¹³I decree that all the Israelites, including their priests and Levites, who are living in my kingdom and who wish to go home, may accompany you to Jerusalem, be free to worship there and help rebuild the walls of the city. ¹⁴I and my seven advisers agree to let you go back to Israel to investigate how things are in Jerusalem and Judah and to see whether or not the law of your God, which you know so well, is being carried out. ¹⁵Also, you are to take with you silver and the gold from

the royal treasury, which I and my advisers have freely given to the God of Israel whose Temple is in Jerusalem. ¹⁶You are to take our gifts, together with the silver and gold which you can collect from others throughout the province of Babylon, as well as the offerings which your own people and priests will give. ¹⁷With some of this money you are to buy young bulls, rams and lambs, together with grain and grapes, and offer them on the altar of the Temple of your God in Jerusalem. ¹⁸Then you and your fellow Jews may do whatever is best with the rest of the money, as long as it is in accordance with the law of your God. ¹⁹Also, take with you all the utensils you need for conducting worship services in the Temple of your God. ²⁰Anything else that you think you might need, you are permitted to take from the royal treasury.

²¹"I, King Artaxerxes, order all the treasurers in the Trans-Euphrates territory to provide whatever Ezra the priest, a teacher of the law of the God of heaven, might need. ²²The limit is to be seven thousand, five hundred pounds of silver, six hundred bushels of wheat, six hundred gallons of unfermented wine, six hundred gallons of olive oil and as much salt as needed. ²³You must be careful to provide everything that the God of heaven requires for His Temple to make sure that He is never angry with me, my sons or those who will reign after me. ²⁴Furthermore, you are not to collect taxes from or impose any tribute on any of the Jewish priests and Levites, musicians, gate-keepers, workers or on anyone else connected with the Temple in Jerusalem.

²⁵"You, Ezra, in harmony with the wisdom God has given you, are to set up a judicial system and appoint administrators and judges to govern your people in the Trans-Euphrates territory as specified by the law of your God. Also, you are to teach the laws of your God to your people who do not know them. ²⁶Whoever does not obey the laws of your God or the king should be punished without hes-

itation, either by death, exile, confiscation of property, or imprisonment."

²⁷Ezra responded to the king, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of our fathers, who has made the king willing to honor the Temple of the Lord God in Jerusalem in such a magnanimous way." ²⁸Because God extended His favor to me before the king, his advisers and all the government officials, I, Ezra, took courage and persuaded nearly two thousand families to return with me to Jerusalem. (In the first return under Zerubbabel about fifty thousand had returned, only a small remnant compared to the large number who were more comfortable staying in Babylon.)

Heads of Families

Who Returned From Exile

8 This is a list of the leaders and heads of families, together with the number of those who registered with me to return to Jerusalem during the reign of King Artaxerxes: ²Gershon, descended from Phinehas; Daniel, descended from Ithamar; Hattush, the son of Shecaniah, descended from David; ³Zechariah, descended from Parosh, and the hundred and fifty men who registered with him; ⁴Eliehoenai, the son of Zerariah, descended from Pahath Moab, and the two hundred men who registered with him; ⁵Shecaniah, the son of Jahaziel, descended from Zattu, and the three hundred men who registered with him; ⁶Ebed, the son of Jonathan, descended from Adin, and the fifty men who registered with him; ⁷Jeshaiah (Jeshua for short), the son of Athaliah, descended from Elam, and the seventy men who registered with him; ⁸Zebadiah, the son of Michael, descended from Shephatiah, and the eighty men who registered with him; ⁹Obadiah, the son of Jehiel, descended from Joab, and the two hundred and eighteen men who registered with him; ¹⁰Shelomith, the son of Josiphiah descended from Bani, and the one hundred and sixty men who registered with him; ¹¹Zechariah, the son of Bebai whose an-

cestor was Bebai, and the twenty-eight men who registered with him; ¹²Johanan, the son of Hakkatan, descended from Azgad, and the one hundred and ten men who registered with him; ¹³Eliphelet, Jeuel and Shemaiah, the younger sons of Adonikam, and the sixty men who registered with them; ¹⁴and Uthai and Zaccur, descended from Bigvai, and the seventy men who registered with them.

Ezra Finds Levites for the Temple

¹⁵I assembled the entire group by the canal that flows toward Ahava, and we camped there for three days. When I checked all the people, I found priests in the group, but no Levites. ¹⁶So I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah and Meshullam, who were recognized leaders, and Joiarib and Elnathan, who were men of learning. ¹⁷I asked them to see Iddo, a leader among the Temple servants now living in Casiphia, to see if he could find some Levites and workers for us who would be willing to go back to Jerusalem to serve in the Temple.

¹⁸The hand of the Lord was with us, and they came back with Sherebiah, a capable man descended from Mahli, who was a descendant of Levi, together with eighteen of his sons and brothers. ¹⁹They also brought back with them Hashabiah and Jeshaiiah, descended from Merari, who was also descended from Levi, together with twenty of his brothers and nephews. ²⁰In addition, they brought back two hundred and twenty workers, whose ancestors had been chosen by King David to assist the Levites. All of these registered to go to Jerusalem.

Ezra Leads People in Fasting and Prayer

²¹There by the Ahava Canal I proclaimed a time of fasting and prayer, to humble ourselves before our God and ask Him to protect us, our children and our possessions over the hundreds of miles we had to travel on foot to

get back home. ²²After telling King Artaxerxes about how powerful the Lord God of heaven was, I couldn't turn around and ask him for a band of soldiers to protect us. I had told the king that our God blesses and protects all who look to Him for help, but that He withdraws His protection from anyone who turns away from Him. ²³So we fasted and prayed and asked our God to help us, and He answered our prayers as we believed He would.

Gifts for the Temple

²⁴Then I chose twelve leading priests, together with Sherebiah and Hashabiah and ten of their brothers. ²⁵I weighed out the silver and gold and the other utensils that the king, his advisers, officials and our own people had given for the Temple in Jerusalem and gave it to them. ²⁶Altogether I gave them twenty-five tons of silver, three-and-a-half tons of gold, one hundred silver utensils weighing three-and-a-half tons, ²⁷twenty gold bowls weighing twenty pounds and two fine articles of polished brass equal in value to gold.

²⁸I said to them, "You are set apart for the Lord, and so are these offerings. This silver and gold has been given to us freely to take to the Temple of our God, so it all belongs to Him. ²⁹Guard these offerings with your life, and when we get to Jerusalem, we'll weigh them out in front of the leading priests and Levites and the other leading officials in Israel." ³⁰So the priests and Levites who were with us took charge of the silver, gold and other items and saw to it that they reached the Temple of the Lord safely.

The Return to Jerusalem

³¹On the twelfth day of the first month we left the Ahava Canal for Jerusalem. The hand of the Lord was with us, and He protected us from our enemies and from bandits all along the way. ³²After hundreds of miles of weary travel on foot, we finally arrived in Jerusalem and rested for

three days. ³³Then on the fourth day, we went to the Temple and weighed out silver, gold and other articles in the presence of Meremoth the priest, son of Uriah who was one of the older priests. With him was Eleazar, a descendant of Phinehas, and two Levites, Jozabad, son of Jeshua, and Noadiah, son of Binnui. ³⁴After we had counted, weighed and recorded everything, we found that it was all there. We then gave it to the Lord.

³⁵Then the exiles who had returned with me also brought their individual offerings to the Lord in thanksgiving for His protection. Together we gave twelve young bulls, one for each of the tribes of Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven male lambs and twelve male goats as a sin offering. ³⁶We also delivered the decree of King Artaxerxes to the officials of the Trans-Euphrates territory, who then gave us what we needed for the Temple and for worship as specified in the king's letter.

Intermarriage With Non-Jews

9 Afterward, some of the leaders came to me and said, "The people of Israel, including some of the priests and Levites, have not kept away from the evil practices of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites, who are our neighbors. ²Some have married women from these people and brought them to live in Israel. The faith of God's people has been compromised through these intermarriages. Some of the leaders and officials have been the chief offenders."

³When I heard this, I tore my robe and tunic in despair, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down in shock.

⁴Those who had been faithful to God gathered around me. They, too, were pained and alarmed over the sins of the exiles who had returned home earlier. I sat in a stupor, identifying myself with their sins, until it was time for the evening sacrifice. ⁵Then I got up and again tore my robe in the presence of

those who had gathered, and made my way to the Temple.

There I fell on my knees, spread my hands out to the Lord and prayed, ⁶"O God, I am ashamed to come into your presence and to speak to you on behalf of your people. Our sins are piled up over our heads, and our guilt reaches to the heaven of heavens. ⁷From the days of our ancestors until now, we have sinned, and our guilt is beyond words. Because of our sins, we, our kings and our priests, have been given into the hands of foreign powers and been slaughtered, robbed, humiliated and carried away captive into a strange land. Today the people are committing the same sins. ⁸Now for a little while, you, the Lord our God, have been gracious to us by letting some of us return in safety to your city to worship again in your Temple. You have given us a new outlook on life by taking us out of bondage and setting us free. ⁹Though we were captive, you did not forsake us. You have been kind to us and granted us mercy in the sight of the kings of Persia. They have allowed us to rebuild your Temple, which was in ruins, and also to rebuild the walls of our cities throughout Judah and even around Jerusalem.

¹⁰"But now, O God, what can we say after all that has happened among us? We have once again disregarded your commandments. ¹¹Through your servants the prophets, you said to us, 'The land you went in to possess is morally filthy. The people have polluted the land from one end to the other with their detestable practices. ¹²Therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. Do not intermarry with these people or make a treaty of friendship with them at any time if you want to remain strong and eat the good things of the land. Be happy and pass this land on to your children as their inheritance.'

¹³"So what happened to us was the result of our sins. Our guilt is great, yet, O God, you have been kind and have not

allowed the consequences of our sinning to destroy us, even though we deserved it. You have kept watch over us all these years and have brought us safely back home. ¹⁴Shall we again disregard your instructions and intermarry with these people who do such wicked things? If so, you would be justified in removing your protection from us and letting us be totally destroyed, leaving no remnant or survivor. ¹⁵O Lord, God of Israel, how righteous and gracious you are! We come before you with all of our guilt, acknowledging our sins but knowing that because of what we have done, we really have no right at all to come into your presence.”

Confession of Improper Marriages

10 While Ezra was praying in the Temple, weeping and confessing the sins of the people, a large group of men, women and young people gathered around him and also began to weep and pray. ²Then Shecaniah, the son of Jehiel, a descendant of Elam, said to Ezra, “We have disregarded the Lord’s instructions by marrying women from the heathen people around us, but there is still hope for us through the God of Israel. ³We must renew our covenant with the Lord by sending these women and children back home to their own people. We promise to do whatever you and the other leaders who love and respect the Lord, tell us to do. We are ready to follow God’s instructions just as He gave them to Moses.

⁴“Ezra, it’s your responsibility to lead our people to do the right thing. We will support you in your leadership. So take courage in the Lord and do it.” ⁵Ezra followed Shecaniah’s suggestion and took over the responsibility of leadership. The first thing he did was to make the priests, Levites and leaders of Israel take an oath of support for what the Lord had told their forefathers to do.

⁶Then he left the Temple and went to spend the night with Jehohanan, the son of Eliashib, who lived in one of the

Temple apartments reserved for priests. There Ezra continued his fast. He neither ate nor drank anything while grieving over the sins of Israel, especially those committed by the returned exiles. ⁷The next day, he and the leaders of Israel issued a proclamation in the city and throughout Judah for all the exiles to meet him in Jerusalem. ⁸The proclamation read: “Anyone who fails to appear within three days will have his property confiscated and will lose his right to live in the community. He will then be expelled from Israel.”

⁹Within three days, all the men of Jerusalem and Judah met in Jerusalem. It was the twentieth day of the ninth month when they assembled in the square in front of the Temple. They shivered, not only outwardly because of the rain and wind, but inwardly because of the seriousness of the meeting.

¹⁰Then Ezra stood up and said to them, “Men of Israel, you have been unfaithful to the Lord. You have married women from the people around us and brought renewed guilt on all of Israel. ¹¹Now confess your sin to the Lord God of our fathers, who has been so forgiving and gracious to us, and determine to follow the instructions He gave us through His servant Moses. Stop establishing family ties with non-Israelites and send your foreign wives and children back to their own people.”

¹²The men chorused back with one voice, “You are right! We will do it!”

¹³Then their spokesmen said, “We are ready to do it, but there are too many of us for each one to make a personal pledge all in one day. Besides, it’s the rainy season so it’s hard to camp outside, even if we decided to do so. This can’t be settled in a day or two, because so many of us are involved in this common sin. ¹⁴Let the officials in each of our towns take our personal pledges. Let them set a time for each one of us who has married a foreign woman to appear before the elders and judges and

do what is right so that the Lord will not be displeased with us again." ¹⁵The only ones who opposed this idea were Jonathan, the son of Asahel, and Jahzeiah, the son of Tikvah, and they were supported by Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite.

¹⁶But the majority accepted the plan. So Ezra immediately appointed men from each family group to carry out this responsibility in the various towns. He announced their names to the group that day and set the first day of the tenth month as the date on which to begin taking pledges from each of the men. ¹⁷More than three months passed. By the first day of the first month, they had finished their work of personally contacting each man who had a foreign wife.

Men With Foreign Wives

¹⁸Here is the list they handed to Ezra: From among the priests who married foreign wives there were four sons and relatives of Joshua, the high priest who had returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel. These were: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib and Gedaliah. ¹⁹They pledged to divorce their foreign wives and send them back to their own people. Then each offered a ram as an acknowledgment of his sin. ²⁰From the descendants of Immer there were Hanani and Zebadiah. ²¹From the descendants of Harim there were Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel and Uziah. ²²From the descendants of Pashhur there were Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad and Elasa.

²³From among the Levites there were Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (or Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah and Eliezer. ²⁴From

among the Temple musicians there were Eliashib; and from among the Temple guards there were Shallum, Telem and Uri.

²⁵Among the rest of the Israelites there were the descendants of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malchiah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malchijah and Benaiah. ²⁶From the descendants of Elam there were Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth and Elijah. ²⁷From the descendants of Zattu there were Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad and Aziza. ²⁸From the descendants of Bebai there were Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai and Athlai. ²⁹From the descendants of Bani there were Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal and Jeremoth. ³⁰From the descendants of Pahath Moab there were Adna, Kelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui and Manasseh. ³¹From the descendants of Harim there were Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, Benjamin, Malluch and Shemariah. ³²From the descendants of Hashum there were Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh and Shimei. ³³From the descendants of Bani there were Maadai, Amram, Uel, ³⁵Benaiah, Bedeiah, Keluhi, ³⁶Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, ³⁷Mattaniah, Mattenai and Jaasu. ³⁸From the descendants of Binnui there were Shimei, ³⁹Shelemiah, Nathan, Adai. ⁴⁰Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, ⁴¹Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, ⁴²Shallum, Amariah and Joseph. ⁴³From the descendants of Nebo there were Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel and Benaiah. ⁴⁴All these men had married foreign women, and some had children by them. Yet they all agreed to send them back to their own people.

NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah's Concern

1 This is a report of what Nehemiah, the son of Hacaliah, did for Jerusalem in the month of Kislev in the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes I, king of Persia. I, Nehemiah, was with Artaxerxes at his winter residence in Susa. I had served as his cupbearer and while doing so, he and I became good friends. At times he sought my advice and accepted my counsel. It had been about thirteen years since Ezra had taken the second group of exiles back to Judah. ²One day my brother Hanani and some other men came from Jerusalem. I asked them about the people there, especially those who had returned from exile. ³They told me that the former exiles, as well as the Jews who had remained there, were in great difficulty. Their heathen neighbors had destroyed parts of the restored wall and set the gates on fire, and a large part of the city was still in ruins.

⁴When I heard this, I was shocked and sat down and wept. For days I fasted and prayed to the God of heaven, saying, ⁵"O Lord God of heaven, you are great, and we stand in awe of you and your power. You are faithful to the covenant you made with us and with those who love you and keep your commandments. ⁶Please listen to me, Lord, and open your ears to my petition. I'm praying for our people in Judah and particularly for those in Jerusalem. I have fasted for days now and my heart is heavy for my people back home. We have all sinned. My fathers and I have sinned. ⁷We have been very wicked. We have disregarded your commandments. We have not kept the laws which you have given us through Moses.

⁸"You not only warned us that if we were unfaithful, you would permit us to be scattered among the nations, ⁹but you also promised that if we would come back to you and respect your laws and obey them, you would bring us back to the place you chose for us to live and

worship, even if you had to bring us back from the ends of the earth. ¹⁰O Lord God, these exiles who returned home are your very own people. You are the One who rescued them through your great power and might. ¹¹Please listen to my prayer and to the prayers of all your other servants who want to honor you. If only I could get the king's permission to leave here and he could supply me with building materials, I would be willing to go back and take over the job of rebuilding Jerusalem. Please help the king to have mercy on me and grant my request."

Nehemiah Returns to Judah

2 For four months I tried to hide the sadness of my heart as I served the king. I had never been sad in his presence before. Then one day in his twentieth year in the month of Nisan, he detected it and said, ²"Why are you so unhappy? You don't look sick. Is something bothering you?" ³Sadness was not permitted in the king's presence, so I feared for my life and the end of my plans. My eyes filled with tears as I answered him, "May the king live forever! How can I be happy when the city of my ancestors lies in ruins and whole sections of its walls are still broken down and its gates have been set on fire again?" ⁴The king asked, "Well, what can I do to help you?" I quickly prayed to the God of heaven for wisdom to say the right thing. ⁵Then I answered, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in your sight, let me be relieved of my duties to go to the land where my fathers are buried and rebuild their city." ⁶Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, replied, "How long would it take? When would you be back?" I told him that it would probably take a couple of years. To my surprise, he granted my request. (This was the same Artaxerxes who had ordered a halt to the rebuilding of Jerusalem years earlier.)

⁷When I saw that my prayers were

being answered, I gathered courage to ask, "If it pleases the king, may I have Your Majesty's written authorization to the governors of the Trans-Euphrates territories to grant me safe passage until I reach Judah? ⁸In addition, may I ask the king for a letter to Asaph, supervisor of the royal forests, requesting timber to rebuild the gates of the city, the watchtower and a house to live in while I'm there?" God was with me for, to my surprise, the king granted all my requests. ⁹Everything I asked for, the king granted. He even sent a royal guard of horsemen to accompany me on my trip through the territories.

As I passed through each one, I stopped and gave a copy of the king's letter to the local governor and his officials. They received me graciously. ¹⁰But when Sanballat, a Moabite from Horonaim, the governor in Samaria, and Tobiah, the Ammonite official, heard that a Jew had been sent from Persia to govern Judah and rebuild the city, they were very upset. They remembered how Zerubbabel had refused their help in rebuilding the Temple.

Nehemiah Inspects the Wall of Jerusalem

¹¹I hurried through their territory and on to Jerusalem. ¹²For three days I told no one except a few of my trusted friends what God had convicted me to do for Jerusalem. One night we quietly inspected the walls of the ancient part of the city. The only animal we took with us was the donkey that I rode on. ¹³We went west and out of the city through the Valley Gate, then south past the Dragon Well and on to the Rubbish Gate, carefully examining the condition of the walls and the gates that had been burned down. ¹⁴Then we headed east toward the Fountain Gate, then north toward the King's Pool and on to the Water Gate. There the donkey couldn't find a path through the rubble. ¹⁵So we had to go down the side of the mountain into the Kidron Valley and look at the condition

of the wall from some distance. Then we retraced our steps to complete our inspection and turned back into the city through the Valley Gate.

¹⁶The city fathers did not know that I had inspected the walls the night before because I decided not to tell them. Nor did I say anything to the Jewish officials, priests or anyone else who might show an interest in rebuilding the walls. ¹⁷I simply called them together and said, "I am not here as just another Jewish visitor from Persia. The king has appointed me governor of Judah with authority to rebuild the city. Just look at Jerusalem! After all these years, it's still in ruins! The wall isn't finished, and the burned gates haven't been replaced. The city is a disgrace to our ancestors and our heritage as God's people. We need to do something about this. Come, let's build!"

¹⁸Then I told them how God had been with me when I had spoken to the king and I showed them the king's letter. When they read it, they shouted for joy, "Let's go ahead and build!" So they began to rebuild the city with renewed enthusiasm.

¹⁹When Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem from Edom heard about the meeting we had had, they came to ridicule us, saying, "What do you think you people are doing, getting ready to revolt against the king by declaring your independence?" ²⁰I answered, "The God of heaven will bless us and give us success in rebuilding the city. Simply because your people are descendants of Lot or live in the land of Esau, you have no right to this city nor any say as to what's being done here."

Plans to Rebuild the Wall

3 Now Eliashib, the high priest, and his fellow priests worked on the wall starting at the Sheep Gate. They rebuilt that section, put in the gates and dedicated it to the Lord. Then they went as far as the Tower of the Hundred (also called the Tower of Meah) and from there as far as the Tower of Hananel. ²The men from Jericho worked on the

next section of the wall, and Zaccur, son of Imri, led out in rebuilding the section next to them.

³The sons of Hassenaah worked on the section of the wall by the Fish Gate. They put the side beams in place, then the gates and also bolts and bars for locking the gates. ⁴Meremoth, son of Uriah and grandson of Hakkoz, worked on the next section. Meshullam, son of Berekiah and grandson of Meshezabel, rebuilt the section after that. Zadok, son of Baana, took the next section. ⁵The men of Tekoa took the responsibility for the section after that, but their leading men refused to put their shoulders to the work and do any kind of manual labor assigned to them by their supervisors.

⁶The Old Gate into the city was repaired by Joiada, son of Paseah, and Meshullam, son of Besodeiah. They put the beams and gates in place, together with the needed bolts and bars. ⁷Next to them worked the men from Gibeon, who were supervised by Melatiah; and next to them the men from Mizpah, who were supervised by Jadon of Meronoth. They came from places all across the Trans-Euphrates territory. ⁸Uzziel, son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, and his men worked on the next section of the wall. And Hananiah, one of the perfume makers, and his men worked on the section after that. They rebuilt the wall as far as the place called the Broad Wall. ⁹Rephaiah, son of Hur, one of two city supervisors, and his men worked the next section. ¹⁰Next to them, Jedaiah, son of Harumaph, and his men worked on the section of the wall nearest his house; and Hattush, son of Hashabneiah, and his men did the section after that. ¹¹Malkijah, son of Harim, and Hasshub, son of Pahath-Moab, together with their men worked the next section and repaired the Tower of Ovens. ¹²Shallum, son of Hallohesh, the other city supervisor, with his daughters took responsibility for the section after that.

¹³The Valley Gate was rebuilt by

Hanun and the men of Zanoah. They not only rebuilt it, but put the proper bolts and bars in place for locking it. Also they rebuilt fifteen hundred feet of the wall as far as the Rubbish Gate.

¹⁴The Rubbish Gate was rebuilt by Malkijah, son of Recab, who was supervisor of the Beth Haccherem District, together with his men.

¹⁵Shallum, son of Colhozeh and supervisor of the Mizpah District, and his men rebuilt the Fountain Gate. They put a roof over it, put its doors in place and secured it with bolts and bars. He and his men also repaired the wall by the Pool of Siloam next to the King's Garden, as far as the stairs leading down from the section of Jerusalem called David's city.

¹⁶After him came Nehemiah, son of Azbuk, supervisor of half the Beth Zur District. He and his men worked on the wall as far as David's tomb, the man-made pool and the House of Heroes near the lower Water Gate. ¹⁷The next sections of the wall were rebuilt by the Levites. Rehum, son of Bani, supervised the first group. The next group was supervised by Hashabiah, who was also the supervisor of half the Keilah District.

¹⁸Next to him repairs were made by men under the supervision of Bavvai (or Binnui), son of Henadad, supervisor of the other half of the Keilah District.

¹⁹Ezer, son of Jeshua and supervisor of the Mizpah District, rebuilt the section in front of the armory as far as the place where the wall turns. ²⁰After him came Baruch, son of Zabbai, who eagerly worked to rebuild the next section from where the wall turned up toward the house of Eliashib, the high priest. ²¹The last of the Levite group was led by Meremoth, son of Uriah and grandson of Hakkoz. He and his men rebuilt the wall from near Eliashib's house to the far end of the wall.

²²The next sections of the wall were rebuilt by the priests from the areas around Jerusalem. ²³Benjamin and Hasshub rebuilt the section of the wall in

front of their houses. Next to them, Azariah, son of Maaseiah and grandson of Ananiah, rebuilt the wall in front of his house. ²⁴Binnui, son of Henadad, repaired another section from Azariah's house to the corner of the wall by the tower. ²⁵Palal, son of Uzai, rebuilt the section beginning with the corner by the tower near the court of the palace guards. ²⁶Next to him Pedaiah, son of Parosh, together with the Temple workmen living nearby on the hill of Ophel, repaired the wall up to the point where it turns east to the upper Water Gate tower guarding the Palace-Temple complex. ²⁷The men from Tekoa rebuilt the next section of the wall, beginning with the point this side of the tower guarding the Temple up to the hill of Ophel. This was the second section of the wall they built.

²⁸A group of priests repaired the section after that, beginning with the point at the hill near Ophel going north toward the Horse Gate, each one working on the wall in front of his own house. ²⁹Next to them, Zadok, son of Immer, rebuilt the wall by his house. Shemiah, son of Shecaniah, rebuilt the next section to the East Gate where he was a guard. ³⁰Hananiah, son of Shelemiah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired the section after that. Next to them, Meshullam, son of Berekiah, also worked on the section of the wall by his house. ³¹Malkijah, a goldsmith, repaired the next section to the houses of the Temple workmen and the merchants. This was opposite the Inspection Gate (also called Muster or Guard Gate). He continued to rebuild the wall to the guard room above the northeast corner. ³²The last section of the wall was rebuilt by the goldsmiths and merchants, from the guard room above the northeast corner back to the Sheep Gate.

Nehemiah Overcomes Opposition

4 When Sanballat, governor of the Samaritan territory, heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he came to

check it out. He became very angry when he saw what was going on. ²So he began ridiculing us in front of his associates and his Samaritan troops, saying, "What do these pathetic Jews think they're doing? Do they think that by rebuilding this wall, they'll be safe? Will their burnt sacrifices save them? Can they finish the wall in one night before we gather our forces and attack them? Besides, where will they get all the stones they need? Can they bring new stones to life out of all the rubble? They'll never be able to finish rebuilding the wall, no matter how hard they work." ³Tobiah the Ammonite who was with Sanballat, spoke next, "The only kind of wall they'll be able to build, a fox could knock down."

⁴When I heard this, I prayed silently, "Hear us, O God. Listen to how they hate us. Please help us, and turn their insults back on their own heads. Let them taste what it's like to be taken captive and marched into a strange land as we were. ⁵Lord, don't overlook what they're doing to us. They're discouraging our people by the insults they're throwing at us."

⁶Then Sanballat and Tobiah went back home, and we continued to rebuild the wall. Soon it was half way up, because the people worked with all their hearts and had set their minds to finish it. ⁷Later, when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem and the men from Ashdod heard that we had finished half the wall and all the gaps were closed, they were furious. ⁸They made plans to come to Jerusalem to pick a fight so it would look like we were the troublemakers. ⁹But we prayed to our God and posted men as guards on the wall day and night to watch for them.

¹⁰Then the people of Judah said, "Our energy is giving out, and there's still so much rubble to carry away that we cannot finish rebuilding the wall." ¹¹Our enemies also threatened us, saying, "Before you can see us or know what's happening, we'll slaughter every one of you. That will put an end to rebuilding your city once and for all." ¹²When the Jews who

lived near our enemies heard this, they were afraid and came to tell us ten times that soon we would be attacked. ¹³So I armed some of the men with swords, spears and bows and stationed them by families at the places where the wall was not yet finished. ¹⁴After I was satisfied that we had done all we could to guard against a surprise attack, I saw that the people were still worried. I said to them and to their leaders, "Remember how great and powerful our God is? Let's not be afraid. Let's be ready to fight for our country, our families and our homes."

¹⁵Soon our enemies found out that we had heard about their intention to attack us and realized that our God had frustrated their plans. So they decided to leave us alone. This was good news and left us free to give our attention to finishing the wall. ¹⁶But we didn't totally trust them. So we continued to work and watch. Half of the men worked while the other half stood guard, equipped with spears, shields and bows and arrows. The leaders and officials also equipped themselves and supported this plan. ¹⁷Some carrying building materials did so with one hand while carrying their swords in the other. ¹⁸Others strapped their swords to their sides for ready use. And the man with the ram's horn stayed with me wherever I went. ¹⁹I said to the leaders and the people, "We are quite spread out because the wall is extensive, and it separates us from one another. ²⁰So when you hear the ram's horn, come running. And don't be afraid, because our God will fight for us."

²¹In this state of alert we continued to work, with half the men holding their spears standing guard from the first light of dawn until the stars came out, while the other men worked on the wall. ²²I also told the leaders and the people not to go home at night but to stay with us in the city and take turns standing guard at night and working on the wall during the day. ²³I didn't even take my clothes off at night, nor did my brothers, my compan-

ions, my servants, or my personal guards. We all slept with our clothes on and even when we washed, we had our swords within reach.

Nehemiah Deals With Oppression of the Poor

5 As time passed, both men and women began to complain about some of their more prosperous Jewish brethren. ²They said, "We have large families, and we aren't getting enough to eat. We need more food if we want to stay alive." ³Others said, "We had to mortgage our homes, farms and vineyards to be able to buy food at exorbitant prices." ⁴Still others said, "We had to borrow at high rates of interest from our wealthy brothers in order to pay the Persian king the high taxes he requires. ⁵Are we not all brothers, descendants of the same father? Are not our children as precious to us as are the children of our well-to-do countrymen to them? Yet we feel totally at their mercy. We have come to the place where we have to sell our sons and daughters as servants and our fields and vineyards to our rich brothers just to stay alive."

⁶As I listened to these complaints I became very upset. ⁷I thought about this for a while, then decided to act. So I called together the nobles and officials of the city, as well as the men of wealth, and said to them, "You men are taking advantage of your own brothers and oppressing your own flesh and blood! That's not right!" ⁸Then I called a public meeting to deal with the problem and said to the people, "We have done our best to buy back every one of our brothers and sisters who was sold as a servant to our non-Jewish neighbors. Now you're buying and selling your sons and daughters to each other! This has got to stop!" Everyone was quiet. ⁹So I continued, "What you're doing is wrong. Shouldn't we respect our God and do what is right? Why should we make ourselves and our God a laughingstock to our enemies? ¹⁰I have loaned our people

money and grain, as have my friends and those who work for me. The best way to demonstrate our brotherhood is to cancel repayment of whatever we have loaned our brothers. ¹¹Let's give them back their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses now! Also give them back the one percent per month interest you charged them on the money you loaned them to buy oil, grain and new wine."

¹²They said, "We will do it! We will give everything back and will demand nothing more from them on their outstanding debts." Then I called for the priests and asked these men to take an oath in front of them to do what they had said they would. ¹³I emptied the pockets of my robe in a symbolic gesture and said, "In this way God will empty your pockets if you don't keep your promise. He will take away everything you have, your houses, lands and anything else you own and leave you with nothing." They all responded, "So be it!" And they kept their promise, leaders and people alike.

The Generosity of Nehemiah

¹⁴Now I had been appointed governor of Judah in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes and served until his thirty-second year for a total of twelve years. During these years, my brothers and I and those who worked for me did not ask for a percentage of taxes as governors usually do. ¹⁵In contrast, the governors ahead of me placed an extra heavy tax on the people and acted as if they owned them. They demanded a pound of silver from each person, the amount they spent each day just for food and wine. They also let their servants get more if they could. But I couldn't bring myself to do that because I had too much respect for my God and the kind of person He wanted me to be. ¹⁶In addition, I personally worked on the wall as did my own servants and everyone else who worked for me.

¹⁷Furthermore, I regularly fed one hundred and fifty Jewish leaders and offi-

cials at my table at no charge, as well as any foreign visitors who came to see our city. ¹⁸Each day this cost me one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry, and every tenth day, large supplies of fresh unfermented wine. In spite of this, I did not demand anything that would normally go with the governor's office, because the burden was already heavy on the people in building the city. ¹⁹"O God, remember me for all I have done to help my people."

Plots Against Nehemiah

6 When word reached Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem and the rest of our enemies that we had continued to build the wall after their visit and that all the gaps were now closed except for the city gates, ²they sent me a message asking me to meet them in one of the villages on the Plain of Ono for a conference. But I knew they were scheming to harm me. ³So I sent messengers to them with this answer, "I am engaged in a great work, and I can't come. I can't let the rest of the work go unsupervised and come down to visit with you or the others would stop also."

⁴Four times they sent me the same invitation, and four times I gave them the same answer. ⁵The fifth time Sanballat sent his servant with an open letter to me, intending all along that it be made public. It read, ⁶"Geshem tells me that people everywhere are saying that you and the Jews are intending to revolt against the Persian Empire and declare your independence, and that is why you've rebuilt the wall. Rumor also has it that you're planning to set yourself up as king. ⁷The people are saying that you're already appointing prophets to proclaim you king in Jerusalem as soon as the right time comes. I suggest we get together and talk the situation over before this gets back to the King of Persia." ⁸I sent Sanballat this reply, "Nothing Geshem told you that he heard is true. You have made this whole thing up. I am not coming." ⁹I knew Sanballat and his

friends were just trying to keep me from finishing the work. So I prayed, "O God, make me strong for you!"

¹⁰Soon afterward I went to visit Shemaiah, son of Delaiah and grandson of Mehetabel, in whom I had some confidence. He had asked me to come to see him because he was too frightened to leave his house. He suggested that we protect ourselves by hiding in the Temple and locking the gates because there was a plot to kill me that very night. ¹¹I said, "Why should I run and hide in the Temple? What would the people think? If I showed a lack of faith in God, they, too, would be afraid and hide. I refuse to hide!" He tried to assure me that his message was from the Lord. ¹²But the more I thought about my visit with Shemaiah and his message, I began to realize that he could not be a prophet as he claimed to be and that Sanballat and Tobiah had probably paid him to frighten me. ¹³They wanted me to sin against God by not finishing the job He had sent me to do. They also wanted to humiliate me and by doing that, destroy the people's confidence in me as their governor. ¹⁴So I prayed to the Lord, "O God, remember Sanballat and Tobiah and what they have done to me. Also remember Noadiah, the false prophetess and all the other self-appointed prophets like Shemaiah who have tried to frighten me."

The Wall Completed

¹⁵So we pushed ahead with the final work on the wall, and on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul, after fifty-two days of working and guarding the city, we finished the job. ¹⁶When our enemies heard this, they lost their boldness. They finally realized that the wall had been built because God was with us and not just because of our own efforts. ¹⁷I learned later that all during this time some of the Jewish leaders had been writing to Sanballat and Tobiah telling them what was going on. ¹⁸I also learned

that some of the people felt under obligation to Tobiah because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah, son of Arah. And Tobiah's son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam, son of Berekiah. ¹⁹These people were always telling me what a good fellow Tobiah was, then they'd go back and tell him how I felt about what he was doing. That's why he kept sending me letters trying to intimidate me, because he felt he had the backing of our people.

7 When the wall was finished, the gates set in place and the gate keepers appointed, we selected guards for the Temple. We also formed a choir and organized the Levites to carry on their work. ²Then I appointed two men to govern the city, my brother Hanani and Hananiah, the commanding officer of the fortress, because he was a man of integrity who respected God more than most other men I knew. ³I said to them, "Don't open the city gates until after sunrise, and be sure to close them while the guards are still on duty before the sun sets. Also, set up neighborhood watches all through the city and assign people specific duties, some to guard the neighborhood and others to keep close watch around their own homes."

A List of Captives Who Returned to Jerusalem

⁴The city was considered large for its time and very spacious, but few people lived there. Most of the houses were still in ruins.

⁵So God put it in my heart to call for a meeting of the people, together with their leaders and the officials of the city, to register them by families. Also, I found the list of the first families who years before had returned from Babylon. This is how it read:

⁶These are the people who returned to their own homes in Jerusalem and Judah after their families had been taken cap-

tive by Nebuchadnezzar and deported to Babylon. ⁷They returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum and Baanah.

⁸The number of men who returned and registered according to their families was as follows: Two thousand, one hundred and seventy-two registered under the name of Parosh, ⁹three hundred and seventy-two under Shephatiah, ¹⁰six hundred and fifty-two under Arah, ¹¹two thousand, eight hundred and eighteen under Pahath-Moab through the line of Jeshua and Joab, ¹²one thousand, two hundred and fifty-four under Elam, ¹³eight hundred and forty-five under Zattu, ¹⁴seven hundred and sixty under Zaccai, ¹⁵six hundred and forty-eight under Binnui, ¹⁶six hundred and twenty-eight under Bebai, ¹⁷two thousand, three hundred and twenty-two under Azgad, ¹⁸six hundred and sixty-seven under Adonikam, ¹⁹two thousand and sixty-seven under Bigvai, ²⁰six hundred and fifty-five under Adin, ²¹ninety-eight under Ater through Hezekiah, ²²three hundred and twenty-eight under Hashum, ²³three hundred and twenty-four under Bezai, ²⁴one hundred and twelve under Hariph, and ²⁵ninety-five under Gibeon. ²⁶Others registered according to the towns their ancestors came from. One hundred and eighty-eight came from Bethlehem and Netophah, ²⁷one hundred and twenty-eight from Anathoth, ²⁸forty-two from Beth Azmaveth, ²⁹seven hundred and forty-three from Kiriath Jearim, Chephirah and Beeroth, ³⁰six hundred and twenty-one from Ramah and Geba, ³¹one hundred and twenty-two from Michmash, ³²one hundred and twenty-three from Bethel and Ai, ³³fifty-two from the city of Nebo, ³⁴one thousand, two hundred and fifty-four from the family of Elam, ³⁵three hundred and twenty from Harim, ³⁶three hundred and forty-five from Jericho, ³⁷seven hundred and twenty-one from Lod, Hadid and Ono,

and ³⁸three thousand, nine hundred and thirty from Senaah.

³⁹Then there were the priests who registered according to their ancestors: Nine hundred and seventy-three under the name of Jedaiah through Joshua, ⁴⁰one thousand and fifty-two under Immer, ⁴¹one thousand, two hundred and forty-seven under Pashhur, and ⁴²one thousand and seventeen under Harim.

⁴³There were also a number of Levites who returned. Seventy-four of them registered under the name of their ancestors Jeshua and Kadmiel through the line of Hodaviah. ⁴⁴One hundred and forty-eight Temple musicians registered as descendants of Asaph. ⁴⁵One hundred and thirty-eight Temple guards registered as descendants of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita and Shobai.

⁴⁶A number of Temple workmen returned and registered under the names of Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, ⁴⁷Keros, Sia, Padon, ⁴⁸Lebana, Hagaba, Shalmal, ⁴⁹Hanan, Giddel, Gahar, ⁵⁰Reaiah, Rezin, Nekoda, ⁵¹Gazzam, Uzza, Paseah, ⁵²Besai, Meunim, Nephishesim. ⁵³Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, ⁵⁴Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, ⁵⁵Bar-kos, Sisera, Temah, ⁵⁶Neziah and Hatipha.

⁵⁷Then there were those who descended from the servants of Solomon and registered according to their ancestors under the names of Sotai, Sophereth, Perida, ⁵⁸Jaala, Darkon, Giddel, ⁵⁹Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-Hazzebaim and Amon.

⁶⁰So the total number of Temple workmen and descendants of Solomon's servants who registered was three hundred and ninety-two.

⁶¹Then there were others who could not prove their Israelite ancestry, but their fathers had come from the towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addon and Immer. ⁶²Others had descended from Delaiah, Tobiah and Nekoda. There were six hundred and forty-two of them. ⁶³Then there were a few who claimed to be priests but could not prove their ancestry. They were descendants of

Hobaiah, Hakkoz and Barzillai who had married a daughter of a man who had the same name as his. ⁶⁴But since they could not prove their ancestry, they were not accepted as priests. ⁶⁵Zerubbabel, the governor, had ordered them not to eat the sacrifices offered to God until a descendant of the high priest's family could be found to ask the Lord about their ancestry through the Urim and Thummim.

⁶⁶The total number of exiles who had returned and registered was forty-two thousand, three hundred and sixty. ⁶⁷This did not include their seven thousand, three hundred and thirty-seven male and female servants, nor their two hundred and forty-five male and female musicians and singers. ⁶⁸They also brought back with them seven hundred and thirty-six horses, two hundred and forty-five mules, ⁶⁹four hundred and thirty-five camels and six thousand, seven hundred and twenty donkeys.

⁷⁰Many of those who had returned gave liberally toward the work of completing the wall. Zerubbabel, the governor, gave twenty pounds of gold, fifty ceremonial bowls and five hundred and thirty robes for the priests. ⁷¹The various heads of families gave three hundred and seventy-five pounds of gold and two thousand, six hundred pounds of silver. ⁷²The total given by the rest of the people was three hundred and seventy-five pounds of gold, two thousand, five hundred pounds of silver and sixty-seven robes for the priests.

⁷³All these people—priests, Levites, Temple musicians, Temple guards, Temple workmen and all the other people—had settled in the towns and villages of Judah to which they belonged.

Ezra Reads the Law to the People

8 On the first day of the seventh month the people came to Jerusalem and assembled inside the Water Gate to celebrate the beginning of the civil year with the Festival of Trumpets. Ten days later they celebrated the Day of Atonement

and then the Festival of Tabernacles or Shelters. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had given to Israel and read it to them.

²The first day, the aged Ezra, who was both priest and scribe, brought out the Book of the Law before the people, which were made up of men, women and children who were old enough to understand. ³There in the square by the gate he read the Law to them from morning until about noon. All that time, the people listened eagerly to what he said. ⁴He stood on a wooden platform which had been made for just such occasions so all the people could see him. To his right on the platform stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; on his left stood Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam. ⁵Ezra could be seen by all the people, and as he opened the book, they all stood to their feet. ⁶He praised the Lord, and all the people raised their hands and said, "Amen! Amen!" Then they knelt and reverently bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord God as their forefathers had done.

⁷After Ezra had finished, the Levites, led by Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiiah went in among the people and explained the Law to them because intermarriage had led them to forget their Hebrew language. ⁸They gathered the people in small groups, read from the Book of the Law again, put it in the language of the people and explained it so clearly that they could not misunderstand it.

⁹When they understood what the Law said and what was required of them, they began to weep because of their sins. Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and the Levites who had taught the people said, "This is a special day to the Lord our God. It's a day for celebration, not a day for mourning!" ¹⁰Nehemiah said, "Let's celebrate the finished work with

good food and the sweet drink of fresh grapes. Share what you have with those who have nothing. Don't be sad. The Lord loves you. The joy of the Lord is your strength." ¹¹The Levites went among the people calming those who were still weeping, telling them not to cry on such a festive occasion but to rejoice in the Lord. ¹²Then the people who lived nearby went home to eat and drink in the joy of the Lord. They invited to their homes those who hadn't brought food with them, or they sent some of their food to them. All Israel celebrated what the Lord had done for them.

The Festival of Tabernacles

¹³The next day the heads of families, the priests and the Levites all met with Ezra to learn more about what the Law of God said. ¹⁴They learned that the Law, as it was given by the Lord to Moses, required Israel not only to observe the Day of Atonement, but to camp in tents or temporary shelters during the Festival of Tabernacles also held in the seventh month. ¹⁵They decided to follow the Lord's instructions and spread the word throughout the towns of Judah and in Jerusalem that on the fifteenth of that month, the Festival of Tabernacles would be held. They said, "Go to the hills and get branches from the olive tree, the myrtle, the palm and other trees to make temporary shelters, for we will observe the Festival of Tabernacles as it is outlined in the book of the law."

¹⁶Then the people, the priests and the Levites went out and brought back branches to make shelters wherever they could, in their yards, on their flat roofs, in their courtyards, in the Temple courtyard and in the square by the Water Gate and the Gate of Ephraim. ¹⁷All the people made temporary shelters and lived in them for seven days just as the Lord had said. This was the first time it had been done since the days of Joshua, son of Nun, centuries before. Everyone rejoiced in the Lord. ¹⁸Day

after day, from the first day of the festival to the last, Ezra read to the people from the Book of the Law of God. And the people celebrated the festival for the full seven days. On the eighth day, they had the extra meeting just as it is written in the Law to joyously recount what the Lord had done for them.

The People Confess Their Sins

9Two days later, on the twenty-fourth of the month, the people came back wearing sackcloth and with ashes on their heads. They fasted and prayed, confessing their sins as on the Day of Atonement. ²The people of Israel separated all heathen foreigners from themselves and stood in the city square confessing their own sins and acknowledging the sins of their fathers. ³First, they stood there for three hours listening to Ezra read to them from the Book of the Law. Then they stayed there another three hours confessing their sins until they were told they were forgiven and to praise the Lord. ⁴The Levites who were on the platform with Ezra were Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Kenani. After Ezra had read the Law they offered prayers to the Lord, both for themselves and for the people. ⁵Then Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Sherebiah and Shebaniah plus Hashabneiah, Hodiah and Pethahiah invited them to stand and praise the Lord. They said, "Let His name be praised for ever and ever. Let everyone in heaven and earth praise His name."

⁶With all the people standing, the Levites led them in a joint prayer of praise, saying, "You alone, O Lord, are the Lord of heaven and earth. You made the heavens and the heaven of heavens, together with all the planets and stars. You made the earth and everything that's in it. You made the seas and everything in them. You gave life and breath to everything. All creation respects you and worships you. ⁷You are the One who called Abram from his home in Ur in old Babylon

and changed his name to Abraham. ⁸You found that he was faithful to you, so you made a covenant with him. You promised to give him the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites as a place where he could live. You kept your promise because you are true to your word.

⁹You saw the suffering of our people in Egypt and heard their cry for help at the Red Sea. ¹⁰You performed signs, wonders and amazing miracles against Pharaoh, his officials and the people because you knew how arrogantly they had treated us. You gained a fame in Egypt that still exists today. ¹¹You divided the Red Sea for our forefathers and they walked across on dry ground. Then you closed the waters over the heads of their pursuers, and like stones in the water, the Egyptian troops sank and drowned. ¹²By day you led them with a pillar of cloud to give them shade, and at night you were present in a pillar of fire to light their camp and keep them warm.

¹³At Sinai you spoke to them from the mountain and gave them good laws and sound teachings. ¹⁴It was there that you wrote the Ten Commandments and made the Sabbath plain. Also, through your servant Moses, you gave them precepts, statutes and laws to govern their worship and their land. ¹⁵When they were hungry, you gave them bread from heaven, and when they were thirsty, you gave them water from the rock. You told them to go in and possess the land you had promised to give them.

¹⁶But our ancestors were stubborn and refused to follow your instructions. They became so arrogant, they didn't even listen to you. ¹⁷They forgot all you had done for them in Egypt. They became stiff-necked and even appointed a leader to take them back to Egypt. But you were gracious and compassionate. You are always ready to forgive, slow to discipline and full of love. That's why you didn't forsake them, ¹⁸even when they made themselves a golden calf to

worship and said, 'This is to symbolize the god who brought us out of Egypt, not the God we cannot see.' In spite of all these insults you did not abandon them. ¹⁹Because of your great faithfulness and compassion, you stayed by them. Your presence in the pillar of cloud during the day and in the pillar of fire at night never left them all the time they were in the wilderness. ²⁰You gave them the presence of the Spirit to help them better understand your word and to encourage them. You gave them bread from heaven for food and water out of the rock to quench their thirst.

²¹For forty years you kept them in the desert and gave them all they needed. Their clothes didn't wear out. They never had swollen feet from all that walking. And they were never sick. ²²You let them conquer nations and kingdoms. They took the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and the land which Og the king of Bashan ruled. ²³You gave them so many sons that they were like stars in the sky for number. You brought them into the land you promised their forefathers and told them to go in and possess it. ²⁴The people went in and conquered the land, and you went ahead of them, subduing the people who lived there. You gave kings into their hands to do what they wanted with them. ²⁵Our ancestors were successful. They captured fortified cities, fertile lands, houses filled with wealth, wells already dug, fields full of olive trees and fruit trees, and entire hillside covered with choice vineyards. They ate to the full and grew fat and delighted themselves in what you had given them.

²⁶But they became disobedient and rebelled against your restraints. They turned their backs on your laws and on your counsels. They killed your prophets whom you sent to correct them and who tried to turn them back to you. They insulted you time and time again. ²⁷So you allowed their enemies to conquer and oppress them. But when they were hurting, they cried out to you for help, and you

heard their cry and answered them. In your great mercy, you sent them leaders who delivered them from their enemies.

²⁸“But as soon as they had peace and plenty, they sinned again. Once more, you let their enemies conquer them. And when they cried to you for help, you again heard their cries and answered their prayers. This happened many times. ²⁹You repeatedly warned them about the consequences of disobeying your law, but they became still more stubborn and refused to listen. You had given them your law for their good. But they became arrogant in their wickedness and refused to listen to what you had to say. ³⁰Year after year you gently cautioned them and told them the consequences their disobedience would bring. You spoke to them by your Spirit through the prophets, yet they would not listen. So you let them be conquered and carried away captive. ³¹Even then, because of your compassion and kindness, you did not abandon them or let them be completely destroyed. What a merciful and patient God you are!

³²“O God, our God, how great you are! You didn’t forget the love-covenant you made with your people. You didn’t let the sufferings and hardships of your people seem unimportant in your eyes. From the days of the kings of Assyria until today, our kings and leaders, our prophets and priests, our fathers and our people in general have suffered much. ³³Yet through it all you have been faithful and just with us, even though we’ve been a rebellious people and have repeatedly turned against you.

³⁴“Our kings, leaders, priests and forefathers did not keep your law. They did not listen to what you said, nor did they keep your commandments as they should have. ³⁵Even while our ancestors had their own kingdom and were living in peace and enjoying your goodness in this rich and fertile land that you gave them, they did not listen to you, nor did they turn from their evil ways. ³⁶So today

we are like slaves in our own land, this land that you gave us, so filled with the good things of life. ³⁷Because of our sins, much of our harvest goes for taxes to the foreign kings who have conquered us. They control our lives and take our cattle whenever they please. We live in constant fear and distress.

³⁸“In view of all this, we, the people of Israel solemnly promise to listen to you. We realize that it never pays to disobey. Our leaders, priests and Levites are writing all this down and putting their seals on it.”

The Covenant Renewed

10 Now those who sealed the agreement the people made with the Lord were, first, Nehemiah, the governor; ²then the priests: Zedekiah, Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, ³Pashhur, Amariah, Malkijah, ⁴Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, ⁵Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, ⁶Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, ⁷Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, ⁸Maaziah, Bilgai and Shemaiah. ⁹After that, the Levites: Jeshua, son of Azaniah; Binnui, one of the sons of Henadad; and Kadmiel; followed by ¹⁰Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, ¹¹Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, ¹²Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, ¹³Hodiah, Bani and Beninu. ¹⁴Next came the leaders: Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, ¹⁵Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, ¹⁶Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, ¹⁷Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, ¹⁸Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, ¹⁹Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, ²⁰Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, ²¹Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, ²²Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, ²³Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, ²⁴Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, ²⁵Rehan, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, ²⁶Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, ²⁷Malluch, Harim and Baanah.

The Covenant That Was Sealed

²⁸The rest of the people, the priests, Levites, Temple guards, musicians, workmen and all who for the sake of keeping the Law of God had separated themselves from the people of other lands, together with their wives and sons and

daughters who were old enough to understand, took an oath to obey the Lord. ²⁹They also joined their leaders in putting themselves under a curse if they did not carry out what the Lord had given them to do through Moses.

³⁰The solemn agreement made by the people read as follows: "We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the people of the lands around us, nor take their daughters for our sons. ³¹We promise that if foreigners bring merchandise or grain to sell to us, we will not buy anything from them on the Sabbath or on any other holy day. We promise to let the land rest every seventh year to keep its Sabbath. That year we promise to cancel all unpaid debts owed us by our brothers.

³²"We promise that each of us will contribute one-eighth of an ounce of silver annually for the operation of the Temple. ³³This will be for the sacred bread in the Temple and grain for daily offerings. It will be for the animal sacrifices needed every day, on special Sabbaths, New Moon Festivals and other holy days. We also promise to provide anything else needed for worship services in the Temple. ³⁴We, the people, priests and Levites, will cast lots to decide which family is to provide wood needed for the sacrifices to be burnt on the altar as directed by the law. ³⁵We promise that each year we will bring to the Temple an offering of the first grain we harvest and the first fruit that ripens on our trees.

³⁶"We promise to bring the first son born to each of us to the priests in the Temple to be dedicated to the Lord as required by the Law. Also, we will give God the first calf born to each of our cows, the first lamb born to each of our sheep and the first kid born to each of our goats. ³⁷We promise to bring to the priests in the Temple the first flour ground from our crops, the first juice from our vines and the first oil from our olive trees each time we harvest. Also, we will give to the Levites, who come to our towns to collect the Lord's tithe,

an accurate tenth of all we harvest.

³⁸"We agree that a priest descended from Aaron must go with each group of Levites to collect the Lord's tithe and see to it that one tenth of all the tithe collected is put in the Temple storehouse for the priests as a reserve supply. ³⁹We, the people, the Levites and the priests, agree to bring one-tenth of whatever we have, whether grain, grapes, olive oil or anything else, to the storehouse where the articles for the Sanctuary are kept and where the priests, Temple guards and members of the Temple choir stay. We promise never to neglect the House of our God."

The People Dwelling in Jerusalem

11 The next question to be settled by the community was who besides the leaders should live in Jerusalem. Then the people cast lots to choose one family out of every ten to move there, while other families were urged to settle in their own towns. ²In addition, some families volunteered to move to Jerusalem. The people commended them for their patriotism and willingness to do this.

³Some provincial leaders, priests, Levites, Temple workmen and descendants of Solomon's servants returned from Babylon and settled in other towns, ⁴while people from different places in Judah and Benjamin came to live in Jerusalem. From Judah there was the family of Athaiah, son of Amariah, son of Zechariah, son of Mahalalel, all descendants of Judah's son Perez. ⁵And there was the family of Maaseiah, son of Baruch, son of Colhozeh, son of Hazaiah, son of Adaiah, son of Joiarib, son of Zechariah, all descendants of Judah's son Shelah. ⁶There were four hundred and sixty-eight male descendants from Perez who lived in Jerusalem; others lived outside.

⁷From Benjamin there was the family of Sallu, son of Meshullam, son of Joed, son of Pedaiah, son of Kolaiah, son of Maaseiah, son of Ithiel, son of Jeshaiiah,

⁸and Gabbai and Sallai, his two relatives. There were nine hundred and twenty-eight Benjamite men and their families who lived in Jerusalem. ⁹Joel, son of Zichri, was their leader, and Judah, son of Hassenuah, was the second officer of the city.

¹⁰From the priests there were the families of Jedaiah, Joiarib and Jachin. ¹¹Then there was the family of Seraiah, son of Hilkiah, son of Meshullam (also called Shallum), son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub, who once served as high priest, ¹²and his associates who made up the eight hundred and twenty-two who were assigned to carry on the work of the Temple. Then there was Adaiah, son of Jeroham, son of Pelaliah, son of Amzi, son of Zechariah, son of Pashhur, son of Malchijah, ¹³and his associates who numbered two hundred and forty-two. Also there was Amashsai, son of Azarel, son of Ahzai, son of Meshillemoth, son of Immer, ¹⁴and his associates who were also brave soldiers and who numbered one hundred and twenty-eight. Their leader was Zabdiel, son of Haggadolim.

¹⁵From the Levites there was the family of Shemaiah, who was the son of Hasshub, son of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, son of Bunni. ¹⁶There were the families of Shabbethai and Jozabad, two Levites who were in charge of the outside work of the Temple. ¹⁷Then there was the family of Mattaniah, who was the son of Mica, son of Zabdi, son of Asaph, director of the Temple choir, and Bakbukiah, who was Mattaniah's assistant. Also there was Abda, son of Shammua, son of Galal, son of Jeduthun. ¹⁸Altogether the Levites who lived in the city of Jerusalem totaled two hundred and eighty-four.

¹⁹From the original Temple guards there were the families of Akkub and Talmon and their associates who kept the city gates. Altogether there were one hundred and seventy-two guards fit to serve. ²⁰The rest of the priests and the Levites all lived on their own property in

their own towns throughout Judah.

²¹The Temple workmen lived in the part of Jerusalem called the Hill of Ophel. Ziha and Gishpa were in charge of them.

²²The one in charge of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi, the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mica. He belonged to the clan of Asaph whose descendants were responsible for the Temple music. ²³There were regulations from the Persian King Artaxerxes who paid the stipend for these singers and stated how often they should take turns providing music daily for the Temple. ²⁴Pethahiah, son of Meshezabel—one of the descendants of Judah's son Zerah, was the Persian king's personal agent in all the affairs relating to Judah.

The People Living Outside Jerusalem

²⁵Now some of the people of Judah lived in Kiriath Arba and its surrounding villages, in Dibon and its villages and in Jekabzeel and its villages. ²⁶They lived in the city of Jeshua (also called Shema) and in Moladah, Beth Pelet, ²⁷Hazar Shual and Beersheba and their villages. ²⁸They also lived in Ziklag, Meconah and their villages, ²⁹in En Rimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth, ³⁰Zanoah, Adullam and their villages. Some lived in Lachish or on its nearby farms, in Azekah and its surrounding settlements. So there were people living all the way from Beersheba in the south to the Valley of Hinnom in the north. ³¹The descendants of Benjamin lived in Geba just north of Jerusalem, in Michmash to the northeast and in Ai (Aija), Bethel and their surrounding villages. ³²They lived in Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, ³³Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, ³⁴Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, ³⁵Lod, Ono and in the Valley of the Craftsmen. ³⁶Some of the Levites who lived in Judah were asked to live with the people of Benjamin.

The List of Priests and Levites

12 Following is a list of some of the priests and Levites who had returned from exile with Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and with Joshua, the high priest: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, ²Amariah, Mulluch, Hattush, ³Shecaniah, Rehun, Meremoth, ⁴Iddo, Ginnethon, Abijah, ⁵Mijamin, Moadiah, Bilgah, ⁶Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, ⁷Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah and Jedaiah. These were leaders among their fellow priests in the days of Joshua, the high priest.

⁸The Levites in charge of the Temple music were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah and Mattaniah. ⁹Those who led the choir that sang responses were Bakkukiah and Unni. ¹⁰Now Joshua, the high priest, was the father of Joiakim, Joiakim the father of Eliashib, Eliashib the father of Joiada, ¹¹Joiada the father of Johanan (or Jonathan) who was the father of Jaddua.

¹²When Joiakim was high priest, the following priests were in charge of the various priestly houses: Meraiah was in charge of the priestly house of Seraiah; Hananiah led the house of Jeremiah; ¹³Meshullam, the house of Ezra; Jehohanan, the house of Amariah; ¹⁴Jonathan, the house of Malluch; Joseph, the house of Shecaniah; ¹⁵Adna, the house of Harim; Helkai, the house of Meremoth; ¹⁶Zechariah, the house of Iddo; Meshullam, the house of Ginnethon; ¹⁷Zichri, the house of Abijah, and Piltai, the houses of Miniamin and Moadiah; ¹⁸Shammua, the house of Bilgah; Jehonathan, the house of Shemaiah; ¹⁹Mattenai, the house of Joiarib; Uzzi, the house of Jedaiah; ²⁰Kallai, the house of Sallu; Eber, the house of Amok; ²¹Hashabiah, the house of Hilkiah; and Nethanel, the house of Jedaiah.

²²A record was kept of the heads of the Levites and of the priests during the lifetime of the following high priests: Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan and Juddua. This list was kept when Darius was king of Persia. ²³A list of the heads of the var-

ious Levite houses was kept until the time of Johanan, the grandson of Eliashib, and was written in the Chronicles of Israel and Judah. ²⁴The Levites were assigned their Temple duties under the leadership of Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Jeshua, Bunni and Kadmiel. The singers stood opposite them and sang praises to God responsively, as instructed by David, that man of God. ²⁵The Temple guards in charge of the storerooms located near the gates of the Temple were placed under the leadership of Mattaniah, Bakkukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon and Akkub. ²⁶All of the above leaders in charge of the Levites and the Temple guards served during the time of Joiakim, the high priest, son of Joshua and grandson of Jozadak. This was when Nehemiah was governor and Ezra the priest was the scribe in charge of the law.

Nehemiah Dedicates the Wall

²⁷When the wall of Jerusalem was finished and ready to be dedicated, Levites from all over the country were called in to help with the celebration. They came with their cymbals, harps and lyres and provided music for the songs of joyous thanksgiving. ²⁸Families of singers were also called in for the celebration. Many of them came from the more distant villages of the Netophathites, such as ²⁹Beth Gilgal, Geba and Azmaveth. Others came from villages closer to Jerusalem. ³⁰Before the dedication service, the priests and Levites went through the purification ceremony first for themselves, then for the people, the gates and the wall.

³¹For the dedication, I divided civil and religious leaders into two groups and had them walk on top of the wall. A large chorus preceded each group singing songs of praise and thanksgiving as they walked in opposite directions. The first group went right, toward the Rubbish Gate. ³²It was led by Ezra the priest, followed by Hoshaiiah and half the leaders of Judah, ³³along with Azariah, who is

also called Ezra, Meshullam, ³⁴Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah and Jeremiah. ³⁵Then came the priests with their trumpets who, in turn, were followed by Zechariah, son of Jonathan, whose ancestry went back through Shemaiah, Mattaniah, Micaiah, Zaccur and Asaph. ³⁶Then came Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani, with their musical instruments as prescribed by David, that man of God. ³⁷At the Fountain Gate they ascended by the way of the steps to the section of Jerusalem called David's City, then continued on the wall and followed it to the Water Gate on the east.

³⁸I led the second group with the other half of the leaders of Judah to the left as you approach the city, past the Tower of the Furnaces to the Broad Wall. ³⁹From there we went over the Gate of Ephraim, then to the Jeshanah or Old Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred as far as the Sheep Gate, ending our march at the Guard Gate.

⁴⁰Both groups entered the Temple at the same time, singing praises and giving thanks to God, ⁴¹while the priests Eliakim, Maseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah were playing their trumpets. ⁴²They were followed by Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam and Ezer. The choir sang loudly and with all their hearts under the direction of Jezrahiah their leader. ⁴³We celebrated the day by offering numerous sacrifices to the Lord and rejoiced over what our God had done for us. The women and children also joined in the celebration, and our shouts of joy could be heard for miles around.

Temple Worship Restored

⁴⁴After the celebration, we chose honest and reliable men to be in charge of the storerooms where the offerings, the firstfruits and the tithes were kept. These men were responsible for collecting from the people on the farms and in the cities

for the priests and Levites as the law required. All the people of Judah were pleased with the ministry of the priests and Levites, ⁴⁵because they performed the services of the Lord well and did so according to the law, as did those who served as Temple musicians and guards. They all did their duty according to the instructions left by David and his son Solomon. ⁴⁶For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were Temple singers who led out in songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. ⁴⁷So in the days of Zerubbabel and later in the days of Nehemiah, Israel included in their contributions, gifts for the Temple musicians and guards. This was in addition to the tithes set aside for the Levites who, in turn, set aside their tithes for the priests, the descendants of Aaron.

Necessary Separation

13 About a year later I returned from Persia, and decided from what I saw to call the people together. Then I ordered the Book of Moses to be read aloud. It clearly stated that no Ammonite or Moabite should be allowed into the Sanctuary courtyard. ²These two nations had not only refused to offer the Israelites food and water when they came out of Egypt after wandering in the desert, but the Moabites had also hired Balaam, the backslidden prophet, to curse God's people. It was only the power of God that turned the curse into a blessing. ³When the people heard this experience read to them, they separated from Israel all foreigners whose ancestry went back to these two nations.

Nehemiah's Reforms

⁴Now Eliashib, the high priest, who was in charge of the Temple storerooms and living quarters, was quite friendly with Tobiah, the Ammonite, a son-in-law of Shecaniah, son of Arah. ⁵Eliashib not only allowed him into the courtyard but furnished an apartment for him in one of the large storerooms supposed to be

used for grain offerings, incense and other Temple articles. In these storerooms, tithes of grain, grape juice and oil had been kept from which the Levites, musicians and guards were paid.

⁶All this had happened while I had been away. I had left Jerusalem in the thirty-second year of the reign of Artaxerxes, who was king over the territory of Babylon and Persia, to go back to serve him. A short time later, I again asked the king for permission to return to Jerusalem to see how things were going. ⁷He graciously granted my request, so I returned to Jerusalem for a second term as governor. That's when I learned about the evil that Eliashib had done by furnishing an apartment for Tobiah the Ammonite in the very precincts of the Temple. ⁸I was furious and threw all of Tobiah's belongings out of the apartment. ⁹Also, I ordered the rooms ritually purified and the grain offerings and things for the Temple to be put back.

¹⁰I further discovered that the Levites and musicians had gone back home because the people had not been giving enough for them to live on. ¹¹So I reprimanded those in charge for neglecting the House of God. I brought the Levites and musicians back and assigned them their posts of duty and put them to work. ¹²The confidence of the people was restored and they started bringing in the Lord's tithe of grain, grape juice and olive oil, and soon the Temple storerooms were full again. ¹³Then I put Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah the Levite, in charge of the Temple storerooms. Also, I appointed Hanan, son of Zaccur and grandson of Mattaniah, as their assistant. I picked these men because they were honest men and would distribute things equitably. ¹⁴"O Lord, remember me for this and don't blot out what I have done for the Temple and its services."

¹⁵It was also after my return to Jerusalem that I saw some of our people working the vineyards and grape presses

on the Sabbath. Others were harvesting grain, and still others were loading their donkeys with either grain, grapes or figs to take to the market that had been set up in Jerusalem for a special sale on the Sabbath. It didn't take me long to put a stop to this and tell the people that nothing was to be sold on the Sabbath, whether inside or outside the city. ¹⁶I saw people from Tyre who had moved to Jerusalem and had set up their markets to sell fish and all kinds of other imported merchandise to our people on the Sabbath. ¹⁷So I confronted the city fathers and said, "What is this wicked thing you are doing and letting others do? It's desecrating the Lord's day and is against all reasonable Sabbath keeping. It's openly breaking the fourth commandment." ¹⁸I reminded them that their forefathers had done the same thing and that's why the Lord had allowed the Babylonians to come and destroy the city. Now they were desecrating the Sabbath again as their fathers had done and the consequences would be the same, because the Lord had not changed.

¹⁹So I ordered the city gates to be shut as soon as the evening shadows began to fall on the sixth day of the week and not to be opened again until the sun had set and the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my own men at the gates of the city to make sure my orders were carried out and that nothing was brought in through the gates into the city on the Sabbath. ²⁰Once or twice after this, the merchants who were accustomed to selling their goods to our people on the Sabbath spent the night before outside the city walls. ²¹But I warned them not to wait there hoping to come into the city Sabbath morning, because the gates would not open until sundown. If they persisted and tried to come in, I would have them arrested. From then on, they stopped sitting outside the city walls during the Sabbath. ²²Also, I ordered the Levites to ceremonially purify themselves and then go and guard the small

walk-in gates to make sure the Sabbath was kept in the right way. "O Lord, remember me for this too, and be merciful to me according to your great love."

²³In addition, I found out that while I was gone, many Jewish men had married non-Jewish women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. ²⁴Their children didn't even know how to speak the language of Judah, but spoke their mother's language. ²⁵I called these men together and confronted them. I took hold of some and tried to shake some sense into them. In some cases I grabbed their beards to make them realize that I meant business. I made them take an oath that they would not let their sons and daughters marry foreigners.

²⁶I told them that because of such marriages, Solomon was led into sin and then away from God. At first there was no king like him in any of the nations. He had loved God, and God loved him and made him king over all of Israel. Yet, he was led into sin and against God by his pagan wives. ²⁷Then I said, "Now we find

that you are doing this same terrible wickedness and also allowing our men to marry pagan wives."

²⁸In fact, one of the sons of Joiada, and a grandson of Eliashib the high priest, had married one of the daughters of Sanballat, the Horonite who had tried to keep us from building the wall. When he refused to send his wife back home, I dismissed him from the priesthood and made him go and live with his father-in-law in Samaria. ²⁹"O Lord, remember me and what I did to honor you. These people have disgraced the priestly office and have broken the covenant of the priests and Levites that you made with them."

³⁰So I purified the community from everything foreign and wrote policies for the priests and Levites to follow. ³¹Also, I made arrangements for wood to be brought to the Temple at regular intervals for the burnt offering and for the people to bring the first of their harvests of grain and fruits. "O Lord, remember me, for the good I'm trying to do because I love you so much."

ESTHER

The King and Queen Vashti

1 When Ahasuerus (also called Xerxes), became king of Persia, his empire encompassed one hundred and twenty-seven provinces and stretched from the borders of India to Ethiopia. ²He ruled his empire from the city of Susa. ³In the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his officials and administrators. He also invited the heads of the armies of Persia and the governors and nobles from all across his country. ⁴For six months the king displayed the vast riches and splendor of the imperial court to all guests who came by rotation to the imperial palace. ⁵At the end of the six months, he held a seven-day feast in the courtyard of the royal gardens at Susa for all those who worked in his palace, from the greatest to the least.

⁶The courtyard was decorated with blue and white cotton awnings fastened with purple cords. The cords fit through silver rings attached to marble columns. Couches of silver and gold were tastefully arranged on a mosaic pavement made of white marble, inlaid with imported stones of blue and purple and decorated with mother-of-pearl. ⁷Wine was served in golden goblets, each one different from the other, and there was no limit to the king's liberality and the amount of wine he made available to his guests. ⁸He had ordered his servants to bring each guest as much or as little as he wished. ⁹Meanwhile, inside the palace, Queen Vashti gave a royal banquet for the women.

¹⁰On the last day of the king's banquet when he was in high spirits, he ordered Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carcas, his seven personal eunuchs, ¹¹to bring Queen Vashti in before his guests. The king wanted her to wear her royal crown and yet to dress in such a way that everyone could see what an exceptionally attractive woman she was. ¹²When the eu-

nuchs told Queen Vashti the king's request, she refused to go and be put on display. The king became furious. By refusing his request, Vashti was challenging his authority and making him lose face in front of all his guests.

¹³Following the banquet, King Ahasuerus consulted with his advisers to determine what to do about Vashti's refusal. ¹⁴The men he most often consulted were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, the seven highest officials in the kingdom. ¹⁵The king said, "I sent my personal eunuchs to invite Queen Vashti to my banquet on the last day of the feast, and she refused to come. What does the law say should be done to someone who refuses the king's request?"

¹⁶Memucan spoke first to the king and all his nobles, "Queen Vashti has not only insulted the king, but also his officials, and, in the broadest sense, every man in the empire. ¹⁷When the queen's refusal becomes known to the women of the empire, they will look down on their husbands and say, 'Queen Vashti didn't listen to her husband, so why should we?' ¹⁸Unless something is done quickly, the first ones to copy the queen's example of disrespect for their husbands will be the Persian women of nobility. This will make their husbands angry, and there will be trouble and discord throughout the empire. ¹⁹Therefore, if it pleases the king, let his Majesty issue a royal proclamation according to the laws of the Medes and the Persians which cannot be changed, that Vashti may never again appear in the king's presence. Then let her royal position be given to someone better than she. ²⁰When this royal proclamation is made throughout the empire, all women from the least to the greatest will know that it's important to respect their husbands."

²¹The king, all his nobles and royal advisers were pleased with this suggestion.

²²So the king sent letters to the governors of each province and to each provincial officer in their own script and written in their language stating that every husband should be ruler in his own house and that his word should have final authority with everyone in the family.

Esther Becomes Queen

2 Later, after the anger of the king subsided, he missed Vashti and couldn't help thinking about her and what he had done to her. ²Then the king's advisers said to him, "The answer to your problem is to hold a beauty contest throughout the empire and let the most beautiful girl in the kingdom become the new queen. ³Let the king appoint officials in every province of the nation to hold a local beauty contest to find the most beautiful virgin in their area, then bring all the finalists here to Susa to pick the nation's new queen. Let these young women be placed under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch in charge of the king's virgins. Let him get the girls ready for the beauty pageant to be held by the king. ⁴Then let the young woman chosen by the king be made queen in place of Vashti." This pleased the king, and before going to war, he gave orders to carry it out.

⁵Now there lived in Susa a Jew named Mordecai, the son of Jair, the grandson of Shimei and great-grandson of Kish from the tribe of Benjamin. ⁶His ancestors had been carried away from Jerusalem into Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar at the same time Jehoiachin, king of Judah, was carried away over a hundred years earlier. But his ancestors chose to stay in Persia and not return home even after Cyrus, the first king of Persia, had let them go. ⁷Mordecai had a young cousin named Esther, whose Hebrew name was Hadassah. He had raised the girl from childhood after her parents died, so she was like his own daughter. Esther was a strikingly beautiful young woman in form and feature.

⁸After the king's order to hold a beauty contest in each Persian province had been carried out, all the beautiful young finalists were brought to the palace in Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther was one of the finalists. So she, too, was brought to the palace and placed under his care, because he was the eunuch in charge of the king's harem.

⁹Esther made a good impression on Hegai, and she soon won his favor. He lost no time in getting her ready for the final event by beginning her beauty treatments early and providing her with a special diet. He gave her the best room in the harem and assigned seven young girls from the palace to help in her training. ¹⁰On the advice of Mordecai, Esther did not tell Hegai that she was a Hebrew and gave him no information about her background. ¹¹Every day Mordecai would go to the palace and walk back and forth in front of the fenced courtyard of the harem until Esther or one of her servant girls came out. He would ask how she was and how her training was coming along.

¹²The beauty treatments and training for these young women lasted one year. The first six months were given to exercises and body treatments of myrrh and oil and the next six months to learning court etiquette and the use of perfumes and cosmetics. ¹³When the time came for the king to choose the new queen, each young woman would see him individually as he called for her. She could wear her choice of clothing and take with her whatever else she wanted from the harem. ¹⁴She would go to see the king in the evening and the next morning she would go to the house of the wives and concubines and be placed in the care of Shaashgaz, the eunuch in charge of the king's concubines. She would not see the king again unless he was pleased with her and invited her back by name.

¹⁵When it was Esther's turn to see the king, she let Hegai advise her what to wear, and, unlike the other girls, she took nothing extra with her. No one knew that

Esther was a Hebrew and that after her father Abihail had died, his nephew Mordecai had adopted her. Everyone admired her because she was a very personable young woman. ¹⁶In the tenth month, the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of Ahasuerus' reign, Esther was taken in to see him. ¹⁷When the king met Esther, he was immediately attracted to her. She won his favor and affection more than all the other virgins. So he chose her to be the new queen and placed the royal crown on her head, and she became queen in place of Vashti.

¹⁸Then the king gave an inaugural ball and invited all his governmental officials and ministers. He called it Esther's Banquet. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the empire and liberally distributed gifts in honor of the new queen.

¹⁹After Esther's inauguration she told the king about Mordecai's abilities, so Ahasuerus appointed him to one of the administrative positions at the palace gate. ²⁰In all of this, Esther kept her nationality and family background a secret, as Mordecai had asked her to do. She followed his instructions just as she had when she was a little girl. ²¹One day Mordecai overheard Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the entrance of the king's private quarters, talking about assassinating Ahasuerus. ²²When Mordecai heard this, he told Esther about it, who, in turn, told the king. ²³He ordered an investigation, the plot was uncovered and the two men were hanged. This was recorded as part of the official record of the empire.

Haman's Plot Against the Jews

3 A few years later, Ahasuerus honored a man named Haman, the son of Hammedatha, a descendant of Agag the Amalekite king whom Saul had captured and killed. The king made Haman prime minister in charge of all the other nobles in the empire. ²At Haman's inauguration as prime minister, the king ordered all officials under Haman to bow down to him

whenever he passed through the city gate. They all carried out the king's order except Mordecai, the Jew. ³They asked him, "Why don't you obey the king and bow before Haman? You'll get us all in trouble if you don't."

⁴Day after day they kept after Mordecai to do as the king said, but he always refused. Finally he told them that, as a Jew, he couldn't bow before an Amalekite whose ancestors had slaughtered his people. They asked Haman if he would make an exception in Mordecai's case. ⁵But when Haman heard that Mordecai was not bowing before him like the rest of his officials, he became furious. ⁶And when he learned that Mordecai was a Jew, he decided to have not only him but all the Jews throughout the empire executed.

⁷In the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, in the month of Nisan, the first month of the year, Haman decided to cast lots to determine when to carry out his plan to kill all the Jews in the land. The lot fell on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, the last month of the year. ⁸Then he went to see the king and said, "There's a group of people scattered throughout your kingdom whose customs are entirely different from ours. They don't keep the laws of the king or have the interest of the country at heart. It's not wise to tolerate such people because they stir up dissatisfaction against the king's orders. ⁹If it please the king, let him issue an order that all such people be executed for disloyalty. By executing them and confiscating their property, those who carry out this order will be able to bring more than three hundred seventy-five tons of silver to the royal treasury." ¹⁰The king listened to Haman and was pleased with what he heard. So he took off the ring which he used to stamp his seal on royal proclamations and loaned it to Haman, son of Hammedatha and descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites who had been bitter enemies of the Jews. ¹¹The king said to Haman, "Write out the

execution order, seal it with my ring, and when you've confiscated their property, all their silver will be yours to manage for the good of the country."

¹²So on the thirteenth day of the first month, Haman called in the royal secretaries and dictated an order to be translated into every language used in the empire and sent to all the nobles, governors and officials throughout the land. The order was written in the name of the king and sealed with his ring. Then Haman returned the ring to the king. ¹³Royal couriers took the king's order to all parts of the empire that on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, the last month in the year, all Jews, young and old, men, women and children, were to be killed for their disloyalty, completely annihilated in one day. Their property was to be confiscated and sold and the money put into the royal treasury. ¹⁴The order was to be read publicly and then posted so the people would be ready to carry out the king's order when the day came. ¹⁵The decree was first issued in the capital city of Susa; then the couriers were sent to every province in the empire. The king and Haman sat down and toasted each other, but the people in the city were stunned and confused by the king's irrational behavior.

Mordecai Asks Esther to Help

4 When Mordecai heard the order read and learned that it was all Haman's idea, he tore his robe, dressed in sackcloth, sprinkled ashes on his head and walked through the city streets, crying as he went. ²He got as far as the palace gate and had to stop, because no one in mourning was allowed to go in. ³As the days went on, in whatever province the king's order was read, there was great mourning among the Jews. They dressed in sackcloth, fasted, put ashes on their heads, tore their robes and wept.

⁴When Esther's maids and the royal eunuchs told her that Mordecai was outside dressed in sackcloth and weeping,

she was very concerned. She sent some regular clothes to Mordecai with the message for him to put them on so he could enter the gate. But he refused them. ⁵Then Esther called Hathach, the royal eunuch assigned to her, and asked him to go talk to Mordecai to find out what was troubling him and why. ⁶So Hathach went out to see Mordecai, who was sitting in the city square in front of the palace gate, to find out what the problem was.

⁷Mordecai told him everything that had happened and that Haman had persuaded the king that one way to replenish the royal treasury by a certain amount was to kill all the Jews in the empire, confiscate their property and sell it. ⁸Then he gave Hathach a copy of the king's order against the Jews, which had already been read and posted throughout the city of Susa. Mordecai asked him to be sure to show it to Esther and explain the seriousness of the situation. He also asked Hathach to urge her to go in to the king to plead with him to have mercy on her people.

⁹Hathach went back to Esther and gave her the copy of the king's order and told her everything that Mordecai had said. ¹⁰Upon seeing the document, she told Hathach to tell Mordecai, ¹¹"All the king's officials and people throughout the empire know that if anyone steps inside the inner court and stands at the royal entrance without being summoned by the king, he will be put to death. That's the law. The only exception is if the king decides to hold out his golden scepter to that person, then his life would be spared. To make matters worse, for some reason the king has not called for me for at least a month."

¹²When Mordecai heard what Esther had said, he asked Hathach to tell her, ¹³"Don't think, just because you're in the palace, that you'll escape the king's order. Haman knows that we're related. One way or another you'll be killed also. ¹⁴If you go in to see the king, there's a

chance you might be able to save our people, but if you are silent and God delivers us some other way, you'll forever disgrace yourself in the eyes of our people, and you and your father's family will surely perish. Who knows but that you were chosen to be queen for such a time as this."

¹⁵When Hathach told Esther what Mordecai had said, she determined to approach the king to try to save her people. She sent Hathach back to Mordecai with this message: ¹⁶"Tell all the Jews in Susa to gather in small groups to fast and pray for me. Tell them not to eat or drink anything but water for three days and three nights. I and my servant girls will do the same. The third day from now I'll go in to see the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." ¹⁷So Mordecai went throughout the city and did what Esther had asked him to do.

Esther's Banquet

5 On the third day of the fast, Esther put on her royal robes and went to the inner court of the palace at the entrance of the royal hall and stood waiting to see the king. He was sitting on his throne, facing the doorway. ²When the doors of the royal hall opened, he saw the queen standing there waiting to come in. He was pleased to see her and held out his scepter as a sign for her to come up to him. She approached him, touched his scepter and bowed in his presence. ³Then the king asked, "What is so urgent that you took your life in your hands to come to see me? What is your request? You may have anything you want, up to half the kingdom if you only ask."

⁴Esther said, "If it please the king, I would like to invite you and Haman to be my guests today at a special banquet I have prepared." ⁵The king immediately sent word to Haman, and both of them went to the queen's banquet. ⁶As they ate, the king turned to Esther and questioned again, "What is it that you want? Ask, and it will be yours. You may

have anything you request, up to half my kingdom." ⁷Esther answered, ⁸"If the king is so kind and willing to grant my request, I would like you and Haman to be my guests again tomorrow, then I will answer your question." Esther did this to heighten the king's curiosity and to make him more favorable to granting her request.

Haman's Plot Against Mordecai

⁹Haman left the king's presence that afternoon in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai sitting in the city square right outside the palace gate and noticed that he didn't rise and bow to him as he was supposed to, he was filled with rage. ¹⁰However, he restrained himself, said nothing and went on home. He invited some of his close friends to come and meet with him and his wife. ¹¹Then Haman told them about his vast wealth, his ten fine sons and all the ways the king had honored him since he had become prime minister and set over all the nobles and officials. ¹²"What's more," he said, "Queen Esther has invited the king and me to another banquet tomorrow. ¹³But all of my success is being spoiled by one man. As long as I see that Jew, Mordecai, sitting at the entrance to the palace defying me, how can I be happy?"

¹⁴Then Haman's wife, Zeresh, and his friends suggested to him, "Why don't you build a seventy-five foot gallows near your house. Tomorrow morning go in and ask the king for permission to have this Jew arrested and hanged for disobeying the king. Then everyone can see what will happen to them if they don't bow down to you as the king ordered. Don't worry now. Just think about the banquet you and the king will be attending again tomorrow." Their suggestion pleased Haman, and he immediately ordered the gallows built.

The King Honors Mordecai

6 That night the king couldn't sleep, so in the early hours of the morning he

asked that the records of his reign be read to him. ²It was recorded that Mordecai had uncovered a plot to assassinate the king, a plan of Bigthana and Teresh, two palace eunuchs who had been responsible for guarding the king's private quarters. ³Ahasuerus interrupted the reading and said, "Have we ever honored Mordecai for this?" The servant answered, "According to the record, Your Majesty, nothing has ever been done for him." ⁴As dawn broke, the king noticed someone in the outer court. "Who is in the courtyard at this hour?" he asked his servant. Haman had come early to request that Mordecai be hanged for disobeying the royal proclamation to bow to him as the king had ordered. ⁵The servant said, "It's Haman, Your Majesty." The king said, "Bring him in."

⁶When Haman came in, Ahasuerus asked him, "What do you think I should do for a man I want to honor?" Haman thought to himself, "Who else would the king rather honor than me?" ⁷So he said, "The thing you could do for a man you would like to honor, Your Majesty, ⁸is to ask your servants to bring a royal robe the king himself has worn and saddle a horse the king himself has ridden and put a royal insignia on its head. ⁹Let an important official help him put on the robe and assist him in mounting the horse. Then the official should lead the horse through the city streets, calling out, "This is what the king does for a man he wants to honor!"

¹⁰The king said, "That's a good idea! Go and get one of my robes and one of my horses and do exactly what you have said for Mordecai, because he exposed a plot to kill me. Don't forget to do everything for him that you suggested."

¹¹Haman had no choice but to obey the king's order. So he got the royal robe and one of the king's horses and placed the royal insignia on its head. He helped Mordecai put on the robe and mount the king's horse. He then led him through the streets calling out to the people,

"This is what the king does for a man he wants to honor!"

¹²Afterwards, Mordecai took his place in the city square in front of the palace. But Haman rushed home, covering his head as a sign of grief. ¹³He called his wife Zeres and his counselors and told them what had happened. When they heard this they said, "You've already lost some of your influence. And if Mordecai is a Jew, you can't overcome him. You'll be the one who'll be ruined." ¹⁴While they were still talking, the king's servants arrived and hurried Haman off to the queen's banquet.

Haman Hanged

7 So Ahasuerus and Haman dined with the queen a second time. ²As they were eating and drinking, the king turned to her and said, "Queen Esther, now tell me what it is that you really want. You know you can have anything you ask, even to half of my kingdom."

³The queen responded, "Your Majesty, if I have found favor in your eyes, grant me my life. That is my request. Spare me and the lives of my people. That is all I ask. ⁴My people and I have been singled out for genocide. If we had been told that we were to be sold as slaves, I would have kept quiet and not disturbed you, Your Majesty. But we are to be killed, and our property confiscated and sold." ⁵Ahasuerus asked Esther, "Who dared give such an order? Who is he?"

⁶Esther answered, "It's this evil man Haman. He hates my people and is determined to have all of us killed." When Haman heard the queen's words, he was terrified. He couldn't hide his guilt, for fear was written all over his face. ⁷Ahasuerus stormed from the banquet room in anger and strode out to the palace gardens to regain his composure. Haman knew that his fate was decided, but he implored Esther to intercede for him.

⁸In desperation he threw himself at the queen and begged for mercy. Just as he fell on the large couch where Esther was

reclining, King Ahasuerus returned to the banquet room. When he saw Haman, he cried out, "Don't tell me this man has the nerve to attack the queen right in my own house in front of my eyes!" No sooner had Ahasuerus shouted his outrage than the king's eunuchs rushed over, pulled Haman off the couch and covered his face, a sign that he would die.⁹ Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, "Your Majesty, this man built a seventy-five-foot gallows by his house on which to hang Mordecai, the man who saved your life." The king said, "Take this man and hang him on his own gallows."¹⁰ So they took Haman and hanged him on the gallows he had built for Mordecai. Then the king's anger subsided.

The Jews Are Allowed to Fight Back

8 That same day, Ahasuerus gave Esther all of Haman's wealth. She told the king that Mordecai was her relative and had raised her. The king was pleased and decided to make Mordecai prime minister in place of Haman, with the right to see him without being summoned.² The king also took off his royal ring which he had loaned to Haman, and presented it to Mordecai, and Esther put Mordecai in charge of Haman's estate.

³Some time afterward, Esther again risked her life and went in unannounced to see the king. Again, he held out his scepter to her. She came in, fell at his feet and wept. She begged him to cancel the evil plan of Haman who had issued an order to kill all the Jews.⁴ The king was moved with compassion and offered his scepter as a sign of permission for her to continue. So she stood and said,⁵ "If it please Your Majesty, if you care about me and if it seems right to you, let an order be written overruling the order that Haman, the son of Hammedatha, wrote against my people using your name which he sent out to all the provinces.⁶ I cannot bear to see members of my own family executed. Please help me."

⁷Mordecai was also present, so the king spoke to both of them, saying, "Haman was against the Jews, but I had him hanged on his own gallows and have given all his wealth to Esther. So why shouldn't I also protect the Queen's people?"⁸ I want you, Mordecai, to write an order in my name on behalf of the Jews as you see best, to override the first order which can't be changed. Then seal it with my ring so it can't be declared invalid because it will have the royal seal on it."

⁹So on the twenty-third day of Sivan, the third month, Mordecai called in the royal secretaries and dictated a new order to all the governors, administrators and officials of the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces in the empire stretching from India to Ethiopia. The order was written in the language of each province, including the language of the Jews.¹⁰ Mordecai dictated the order in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed it with the king's ring. Then he sent the decree out with couriers on the fastest horses from the king's stable.¹¹ This new order gave Jews in every city the right to organize for self-defense. If they were attacked by armed men of any nationality in the province where they lived, they could fight back and kill the attackers and their families and take their property just as the aggressors would have done to the Jews.¹² This decree was to go into effect throughout the empire on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the same day that Haman's order to kill the Jews was to go into effect.¹³ A copy of the new order was read and posted in every province so everyone of every nationality would know that the Jews had a right to defend themselves.¹⁴ The royal couriers rode as fast as they could throughout the empire because of the urgency of the king's command. A copy of the decree was also posted in Susa, the nation's capital.

¹⁵It seemed that the entire city of Susa shouted and rejoiced when they saw Mordecai leave the presence of the king

wearing the royal robes of blue and white, with a large golden crown on his head and a robe of purple hanging from his shoulders. ¹⁶As for the Jews in the city, there was a sense of happiness and victory, gladness and celebration. ¹⁷In every city and province where the new order was read and posted there was happiness and joy among the Jews. They celebrated the good news with a feast and holiday. Then many people claimed to be Jews because they were afraid the Jews might turn against them.

The Jews Destroy Their Enemies

9 So on the thirteenth day of Adar, the twelfth month, when the Jews were to have been killed, the situation was totally reversed. The Jews had permission to defend themselves against any armed attacks and, if need be, to kill the attackers and take their property. ²In every city the Jews organized themselves and got ready for any eventuality in case they had to defend themselves. The people of other nationalities feared to attack them. ³All the provincial governors, administrators and officials cooperated and helped the Jews because they knew of Mordecai's influence with the king. ⁴Mordecai grew in importance in the palace and became increasingly powerful throughout the empire.

⁵Some people had been waiting for the day when the king's order to destroy the Jews would go into effect. But the Jews used their right to fight back and destroyed them. ⁶In the capital city alone the Jews killed five hundred of their enemies. ⁷They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, ⁸Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, ⁹Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha, ¹⁰the ten sons of Haman who was the great enemy of the Jews. But they did not confiscate their property.

¹¹At the end of the day the number of people killed in Susa was reported to the king. ¹²Then Ahasuerus called in Esther and said to her, "Right here in Susa the Jews have killed five hundred people, in-

cluding the ten sons of Haman. That gives you an idea what happened in the rest of the provinces. Now is there anything else you want me to do for you? Don't be afraid to ask. I will grant anything you request." ¹³Esther said, "If it please Your Majesty, extend your order one extra day for the Jews here in Susa and let the bodies of Haman's ten sons be hanged from their father's gallows." ¹⁴The king agreed and issued the order immediately to give one extra day of self-defense to the Jews in Susa. So the next morning Esther's people took the bodies of Haman's ten sons and hanged them from the gallows. ¹⁵That day, which was the fourteenth of Adar, the Jews in Susa killed three hundred more of those who had threatened to kill them. But again, they did not take their property.

¹⁶The Jews in the provinces also had organized and successfully protected themselves against their enemies. The total killed by the Jews throughout the empire was seventy-five thousand. But the Jews did not take the belongings or property from those who had hated the Jews and had planned to kill them. ¹⁷In the provinces, all this happened on the thirteenth day of Adar. On the fourteenth they had stopped according to the king's order and celebrated the day with joy and feasting.

The Festival of Purim

¹⁸The Jews in Susa had one extra day in which to defend themselves and defeat their enemies. It was on the fifteenth day of Adar that they stopped, according to the king's order, and celebrated that day with joyful festivities. ¹⁹Then the Jews in the rural provinces made the fourteenth of Adar a permanent holiday, a time to feast and celebrate and give each other gifts.

²⁰Mordecai recorded all this, then sent letters to all Jews throughout the empire. ²¹He asked them to make both the fourteenth and the fifteenth days of Adar permanent holidays. ²²He urged them to

remember both of these days as the time when God delivered them from their enemies and turned their sorrow into joy and their mourning into gladness. He told them to always keep these days as days of joy, not only to give presents to each other but to give presents to those in need.

²³The Jews agreed to celebrate both of these days every year just as Mordecai suggested. ²⁴They called this twin holiday Purim, meaning "lots," because Haman, the great enemy of the Jews, had cast lots to decide the date on which the Jews should be killed. ²⁵But when Esther had told the king about the plot, he reversed the plan by allowing the Jews to defend themselves, and Haman and his sons ended up being hanged from the gallows intended for Mordecai. ²⁶Every Jewish family was to follow Mordecai's suggestion to celebrate these days every year, because they were not to forget the holocaust that nearly engulfed them. ²⁷The Jews not only established these twin holidays as a tradition for themselves, but also for their descendants and for anyone who might become a Jew. They were to be days of feasting and gladness. ²⁸These holidays were to be observed everywhere by every Jewish family in every city and town through each generation.

²⁹Then Queen Esther, daughter of

Abihail, together with Mordecai, the Jew, wrote a second letter to all Jews in the empire, adding the queen's approval to Mordecai's first letter. ³⁰This letter was sent to the Jews in all one hundred and twenty-seven provinces and was filled with a message of peace and security. ³¹It repeated some of the first letter, suggesting that Jews keep the festival of Purim, making it a permanent holiday just as they had done for other important days. This second letter was signed by both Esther and Mordecai. ³²Esther's signature gave added authority to Mordecai's suggestion about making Purim a permanent twin holiday. Both these letters became part of the Jewish national record.

Mordecai Rewarded

10 About this time King Ahasuerus increased taxes throughout the empire, even to its farthest regions. ²He was a powerful ruler. All the great things he did, his power and might, and also what Mordecai did, are recorded in the Books of the Kings of Media and Persia. ³And Mordecai, the Jew, was second in rank only to King Ahasuerus. He was honored and well-liked by all, especially by his own people because of what God had done through him to save them. He always had the good of his people in mind and spoke up for their safety and for the welfare of their descendants.

JOB

Job and His Family

1 There was a time when a man named Job lived in the land of Uz. He was blameless and upright; he loved God with all his heart and avoided evil. ²He had ten children, seven sons and three daughters. ³He owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred pairs of oxen for plowing and five hundred donkeys. In addition, he had a large number of servants. He was the richest man in that part of the East. ⁴His sons took turns at various times of the year holding a banquet for everyone in the family, including their three sisters. ⁵When the days of feasting were ended, Job would send for his children and ask them to recommit themselves to the Lord. Early that day he would sacrifice a lamb for each of them, asking God to forgive them, in case any of them had sinned or secretly cursed God, whether intentionally or not.

Satan Questions Job's Character

⁶In heaven, representatives from various planets in God's created universe come together regularly to meet with Him. One day Satan also came and presented himself for admittance. ⁷God said to Satan, "On what basis do you want to attend this meeting?" The Accuser answered, "I'm from Planet Earth where I have been roaming back and forth for a long time." ⁸The Lord said, "Have you noticed my servant Job? There is no one like him—loyal, blameless and faithful in all he does. He loves me with all his heart and hates evil."

⁹"Do you think he does this for nothing?" Satan sneered. ¹⁰"You've protected him and his family and given them everything they have. You've blessed whatever he does and have given him more herds and flocks than anyone else in the area.

¹¹But if you take away everything he has, he'll turn and curse you to your face."

¹²The Lord said, "Very well, let's test

your accusation. Everything he has is in your hands, only don't lay one finger on the man himself." The Accuser agreed and went back to Earth.

Job's Property and Children Destroyed

¹³One day while Job's children were having a family get-together at their older brother's house, ¹⁴a servant came running breathlessly to Job's house and said to him, "We were plowing the fields with the oxen, and the donkeys were grazing nearby, ¹⁵when suddenly the Sabaeans came riding up and attacked us. They took all your cattle and donkeys, and when we resisted, they killed your servants in cold blood, and I'm the only one who escaped to tell you."

¹⁶He had hardly finished speaking when another servant came running to the house and said, "We were out in the field when a severe thunderstorm came up. Lightning struck and rolled along the ground, killing all the sheep and shepherds, and I'm the only one left alive to come and tell you what happened." ¹⁷The second servant had hardly finished speaking when another came running up and said, "Three raiding parties of Chaldeans attacked us, and took all the camels, and I'm the only one who escaped to come and tell you." ¹⁸The third servant had hardly finished speaking when another servant came running up. He said, "Your children were having a banquet at your oldest son's house ¹⁹when suddenly a fierce twister came blowing in off the desert and struck the house with such force that it collapsed, killing everyone inside. I'm the only one who got out alive."

²⁰When Job heard all this, he was stunned. He got up, tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he went outside, fell to the ground and prayed, ²¹"I was born naked with nothing, and I will depart this world with nothing. The Lord saw fit to give, and He saw fit to take

away. May His name be praised.”

²In all this, Job did not sin by blaming God or by turning against Him because of his troubles.

Satan Attacks Job's Health

2 The next time representatives of the universe came together to meet with God, Satan presented himself for admittance to again accuse God regarding Job. ²God said to Satan, “On what basis do you want to attend this meeting?” The Accuser answered, “I represent Earth. I’m in charge there and have been for a long time.” ³The Lord said, “What about my servant Job? There is no one on Earth like him. He is blameless, upright and loyal. He loves me with all his heart and stays away from evil. And in spite of what you have done to him, he is still innocent of any wrong. When I permitted you to test him, you devastated him in a few short hours for no reason at all, and yet he is as faithful to me as ever.”

⁴“Skin for skin,” the Accuser answered. “A man will do anything to keep his health and strength. ⁵Touch his body and he’ll turn against you and curse you to your face.” ⁶The Lord said, “Very well, let’s test your accusation. You can do anything to him you want, but do not take his life.”

⁷Satan agreed and went back to Earth. He caused festering sores to break out all over Job’s body from his head to his feet. ⁸Job was stunned by everything that had happened to him. He went to the city dump, sat down in the ashes and with a piece of broken pottery, began gently scraping the pus off as it oozed from his sores.

⁹His wife came to see him and said, “Are you still holding on to God? Why don’t you just turn your back on Him and die?” ¹⁰Job answered weakly, “You talk like a fool. When God sends us good, we praise him. When he permits troubles to come, shall we curse Him?” In spite of his pain, Job maintained his innocence and did not curse God.

Job's Three Friends

¹¹Now when Job’s three friends, Eliphaz from Teman, Bildad from Shuah, and Zophar from Naamah heard what had happened to Job and how he was suffering, they agreed to go together to comfort him. ¹²When, from a distance, they saw Job sitting on the edge of the city dump, they hardly recognized him and began to weep aloud. They tore their robes, sprinkled dust on their heads and slowly walked over to him. ¹³Then they sat on the ground next to him for seven days and slept there for seven nights without saying a word. They pitied their friend Job and sensed his pain, because they saw how much he was suffering.

Job Regrets Being Born

3 After a week of silence, Job finally spoke up ²and said to his friends, ³“Cursed be the day of my birth and the night when it was said, ‘A boy is born!’ ⁴May the day I was born be forgotten forever. May God Himself forget it and strike it from His calendar. May He stop the sun from shining on it. ⁵I wish it would ever be a day of gloom with thick dark clouds blotting out the sun. May that day be as dark as the night. ⁶And may that night be the blackest on record. May that day be stricken from the calendar and not even be counted as one of the days of the year. ⁷May no child be conceived on that night and no sound of joy be heard anywhere. ⁸May those who claim to have the power to curse and to control the ancient serpent, curse that day. ⁹May that day not see the morning star and wait for dawn in vain. May it not see even the first rays of the sun. ¹⁰Cursed be the night that did not shut the doors of the womb on me, that night which opened for me a world of trouble.

¹¹“Why didn’t I die when I was born? Why didn’t I perish as I came from my mother’s womb? ¹²Why did my mother deliver me between her knees and feed me at her breasts? ¹³If I had died, I would be at peace. I would be sleeping and be at

rest. ¹⁴I would rest with kings and rulers who have built great palaces which now lie in ruins. ¹⁵I would rest with merchant-princes who had accumulated gold and filled their houses with silver. ¹⁶Why wasn't I stillborn and buried as an infant who never saw the light of day? ¹⁷In the ground the wicked finally stop their evil, and those who are weary of life find rest. ¹⁸There slaves enjoy peace and are free from the shouts and harsh commands of their masters. ¹⁹Yes, the small and the great are there together, and all are finally free from the burdens of life.

²⁰"Why is the light of day given to a man who will be miserable, and life given to those who will live in bitterness of soul? ²¹Why is life prolonged for those who wish to die, who long for the end more than for hidden treasure? ²²Why is death denied to those who would be glad to see it coming and who would rejoice to see the grave? ²³Why does God give life to a man whom He restricts on every side? ²⁴I cry at the sight of food, and all night long I groan aloud with pain. ²⁵Everything I ever feared and dreaded has happened to me. ²⁶There is no peace, no quietness in me. There is no rest in my soul, only confusion."

Eliphaz: Job Has Sinned

4 With fatherly interest, Eliphaz said, ²"If I say something, will you be angry with me? Even if you are, how can I sit here and say nothing? ³You have done a lot of good in your life. You've taught the truth to many people and encouraged those who were weak. ⁴Your words of comfort soothed the sick and gave them new hope. You brought courage to those who had given up. ⁵Now troubles have come your way, and you can't take it. You get sick, and you're ready to die. ⁶Why don't you put your confidence in your love and respect for God? Shouldn't your integrity give you hope?

⁷"Do you ever remember seeing anyone who lived a blameless life suffer? Are innocent people wiped out by personal disas-

ters?" ⁸From what I've seen, those who sow evil reap evil, and those who cause trouble get it back. ⁹Those are the kinds of people God turns against, who perish by a blast of His anger. ¹⁰The wicked may growl in defense like lions, yet their roar against God is meaningless. ¹¹Like lions who have nothing to kill and eat, they die, and their offspring are scattered.

¹²"Something happened to me recently which I've told no one. A message came to me so quietly I could hardly hear it. ¹³It happened during the night. I had just fallen asleep when I had a most disturbing dream. ¹⁴For some reason I was scared and trembling; I shook all the way to my bones. ¹⁵Suddenly I saw a ghostlike figure move right in front of me. I was so frightened, all the hairs of my body stood on end. ¹⁶Then it stopped and turned toward me. I couldn't see its features. I heard a hushed voice say; ¹⁷'Can a human being ever be more righteous than God? Can a mere mortal be more pure than his Creator? ¹⁸If God could not trust angels who were created perfect, but charged some of them with error, ¹⁹how much more, those who are made from the dust of the ground and whose life is as fragile and fleeting as a moth? ²⁰A man may be alive in the morning and be dead by night, and things will go on without him. ²¹Then all he has is taken from him, and what wisdom he had is gone.'"

Eliphaz Reprimands Job

5 "Go ahead, Job, call out to heaven. Who will answer you? Which angel will help solve your problem? ²Resentment kills the fool and envy slays the simple-minded. ³I have seen a self-sufficient man who seemed to be successful, but suddenly things turned against him and his life seemed cursed. ⁴His children were not safe and no one would defend them in court. ⁵Hungry people will steal such a man's crops even if his field is protected by the thickest hedge of thorns. Robbers desire his wealth. ⁶A man's troubles don't just come out of nowhere nor do his mis-

fortunes sprout from the ground. ⁷No! Man brings troubles on himself as surely as sparks fly upward.

⁸“Now, based on what my dream taught me, if I were you, I would appeal to God for forgiveness and turn my problems over to Him. ⁹He can do wonders we can’t understand, and there is no end to His miracles. ¹⁰He sends rain to the earth and water to the fields. ¹¹He blesses the humble and gives joy to the sad. ¹²He upsets the plans of the crafty so that nothing they try seems to work. ¹³He traps the wise in their own schemes, and what they thought would succeed, doesn’t. ¹⁴Throughout the day they grope for answers like someone trying to find their way in the dark. ¹⁵But God helps the needy and delivers the poor from the clutches of the powerful. ¹⁶He gives hope to the poor, and injustice keeps its distance.

¹⁷“Blessed is the man God corrects. So don’t resent it when the Almighty chastens you. ¹⁸God wounds, but He faithfully binds up. He may injure, but He abundantly heals. ¹⁹Whether six or even seven terrible calamities befall you, no evil can destroy you for He will not leave you alone. ²⁰In famine He will feed you, and in war He will protect you from death. ²¹He will save you from the damage of slandering tongues, and you need not fear when destruction comes near you. ²²You will laugh at destruction and famine and will not be afraid of the beasts of earth. ²³It will be easy to plow your fields, and the wild animals will not destroy your crops. ²⁴You will be at peace in your house, and when you take stock of what you own, you will find nothing missing. ²⁵You will have many children, and your descendants will spread themselves like grass over the earth. ²⁶You will come to the grave still vigorous and be harvested like ripened grain. ²⁷Many of us have looked into this and found this to be true. So listen, and apply it to yourself.”

Job Defends Himself

6 Job answered Eliphaz, ²“If only my grief could be weighed and all my misery placed on scales! ³They would weigh more than the sands of the seas, so my resentment and bitterness should not surprise you. ⁴I feel that the arrows of God have hit me, and my body is absorbing poison from their tips. It seems that God has lined up all his terrors to use against me. ⁵Does the donkey bray from hunger when it has grass to eat? Does the ox bellow when he has fodder? ⁶Do people eat tasteless food such as the white of an egg without salt? There’s a reason why people and animals do things. ⁷Right now I have no reason to live. Just looking at food makes me sick.

⁸“How I wish that God would grant my request and give me what I ask for! ⁹I wish that He would just crush me and get it over with, or leave me alone and let me die. ¹⁰If I died now, at least I would have this consolation—this joy in my unrelenting pain—that I never hardened my heart against the commands of the Holy One. ¹¹What reason is there to live? What is there to look forward to? Why should I patiently endure these trials if there’s nothing to live for? ¹²Where would my strength come from, even if I wanted to live? Is my body made of iron? ¹³How can I help myself? My natural strength is gone.

¹⁴“When a man is afflicted with what God allows to happen, he needs devoted friends who will understand and help, even if he has stopped fearing God. ¹⁵And though you are my friends, you are as helpful as wet-weather streams that dry up just when a man needs water. ¹⁶You are like frozen streams covered with snow when a man needs to water his cattle, ¹⁷or that dry up in summer’s heat so there’s no water anywhere. ¹⁸Caravans take detours to search for water, but if the streams are dry, they wander in the desert and die. ¹⁹Traders from Sheba and Tema travel their routes and look for water in the hope of finding it. ²⁰When they find none, they are distressed, be-

cause they were so sure the water they needed would be there. ²¹Now you, too, have proved to be of no help. Suddenly you're afraid to come close to me, as if something strange were going on. ²²Did I ask you to bring me gifts, or pay someone to come and help me? ²³Did I ask you to deliver me from my troubles or expect you to relieve me of my pain?

²⁴"Answer me, and I'll be quiet. Show me where I have done wrong and I'll listen to what you have to say. ²⁵Honest words are often painful, but you've said nothing to convince me that you're right. ²⁶Why do you suddenly discount what I have to say just because I'm sick? Why do you treat my words as if they were hot air? ²⁷Will you barter away your friend as merchants cast lots for the fatherless? Will you handle my words as merchandise?"

²⁸"Look at me! Would I lie to your face? Would I be dishonest to my closest friends? ²⁹Don't play games with me. Don't condemn me for no reason or question my honesty without cause. ³⁰Would I lie to you? Don't you think I can still tell right from wrong?"

Job Left Without Comfort

7 "Life is full of responsibilities and hard work. It's forced on man and he can't escape from it. ²Like a slave longing for the cool evening shadows or a laborer anticipating his wages at the end of the week, ³that's how I've longed for release during these months of misery and these nights of grief. ⁴When I lie down at night, I long for morning; I toss and turn all night waiting for the sun to come up. ⁵My body is covered with scabs from my festering sores, and worms crawl over me as if I were already dead.

⁶"My days are like loose threads on the end of a weaver's cloth; they will soon be cut off because they're no longer useful. ⁷My life has been as brief as a passing wind and my eyes will never see happiness again. ⁸Soon you will see me no more. You'll look for me, and I'll be

gone. ⁹Like a cloud that comes and goes, so is the life of one who dies. He goes down to the grave and comes up no more. ¹⁰He will never come back to his house again, neither will his place see him anymore.

¹¹"I just can't be quiet. I'm speaking out in anguish of spirit and in bitterness of soul. ¹²Why are you looking at me like that? Am I some kind of monster or some strange sea creature? ¹³When I lie down to rest, I hope to get some relief from my pain and from your stares. ¹⁴You come here trying to play God, frightening me with your supposed visions and dreams, and staring at me. ¹⁵I would rather be strangled and die than to continue living in this rotting body. ¹⁶I despise my life. I'm tired of living. Why don't you just leave me alone? Nothing makes sense anymore.

¹⁷"Why am I so important to you? Why are you paying so much attention to me? ¹⁸Every morning you come here questioning me. Why do you keep testing my integrity? ¹⁹How long will you stare at me? Won't you look away long enough for me to swallow my saliva? ²⁰If I have sinned, what have I done to you? Why am I your target? Have I become a burden to you? ²¹If you really want to play God, forgive me and accept me as you did before all this happened. Soon I'll die and you will come looking for me, but I will finally have some peace."

Bildad: Job Needs to Repent

8 Bildad replied, ²"Have you finally finished your windy speech? Your words are like hot air from the desert. ³Does God ever twist the truth or pervert justice? Doesn't He always do what is right? ⁴Your children must have sinned against God and now He has punished them for it. ⁵But you are still alive, and if you would look to the Almighty and plead for forgiveness, He would hear you. ⁶If you were pure and upright, either this never would have happened to you or God would help you. He would give back your health and restore you to your

place of honor. ⁷You would become so prosperous that your beginnings would seem humble.

⁸“Stop for a moment and think back about what previous generations have learned and taught us. ⁹All of us belong to the same generation, so our experience is limited. Compared to those before us, our days are only a shadow. ¹⁰What have the ancients who lived so long taught us? What was their understanding?

¹¹“Can reeds grow where there is no water? Can papyrus thrive where there is no marsh? ¹²If the water dries up, they wither faster than grass, even though they are small and uncut. ¹³That’s the destiny of all who forget God. Their hope dries up and they are gone. ¹⁴What they put their trust in is as fragile as a spider’s web. ¹⁵They rely on this thread of a web, but it can’t hold them. They cling to it anyway, but it cannot hold them. ¹⁶Evil men multiply like watered seedlings in the garden. ¹⁷They wrap their roots around stones and hold on to every inch of soil. ¹⁸But once they are pulled up, people forget they were ever there. ¹⁹Out of the same soil, other plants will grow which bring joy to the heart.

²⁰“Surely God does not turn against a blameless man or bless the works of those who do evil. ²¹If you will confess your sins and ask for forgiveness, He will make you laugh and shout with joy again. ²²He will bring disgrace on your enemies, and the homes of those who hate you will be no more.”

Job Desires a Mediator

9 Job said, ²“Yes, I know that some of what you say is true. But you don’t get my point. How can a mortal man be righteous before God? ³How can anyone out-argue God? Man couldn’t answer God’s questions one time in a thousand. ⁴God’s wisdom is profound, and His power is beyond what man can measure. Who could resist God and come out unscathed? ⁵He can shake mountains or flatten them, and no one knows how He

does it. ⁶He moves the insides of the earth and makes buildings tremble. ⁷He speaks to the sun and it stops shining. He speaks to the stars and they hide themselves. ⁸He alone spread the heavens and walks on ocean waves. ⁹God made the stars in the sky, including Big Bear, Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations in the south. ¹⁰He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, and there is no end to His miracles. ¹¹Yet when He passes by, I can’t even see Him; when He comes near, I can’t detect Him. ¹²If He takes back what He’s given, who can stop Him? Who will say, ‘What do you think you’re doing?’

¹³“When God shows His displeasure, even the strongest cower at His feet. ¹⁴Who can argue with Him and expect to win? How much less can I reason with Him? ¹⁵Even if I were totally righteous, I could not answer Him; all I could do is plead for mercy, as to a judge. ¹⁶Even if I had called and He had answered, I would hardly believe that He had given me a hearing. ¹⁷He can send storms to batter and bruise me if He wishes, and who can stop Him? He doesn’t owe an explanation to me or to anyone else. ¹⁸He doesn’t even let me catch my breath, but allows my life to be filled with trouble. ¹⁹When it comes to strength, no one is mightier than He; when it comes to justice, who will sit in judgment on Him? ²⁰Even if I tried, my own words would condemn me. Even if all my actions were flawless, my own nature would disqualify me.

²¹“As far as I know, I have never rebelled against God. But even so, I no longer care to live. ²²Nothing really matters anymore. Whether a person is innocent or guilty, we all die anyway. God is the only one who keeps on living. ²³When tragedy strikes and death hovers over the innocent, where is God? ²⁴When a country is taken over by evil men, where is God? When the judges of the land ignore the rights of the people, who can stop such injustices? But where is He?

²⁵“My days pass swifter than a runner

in a race; they fly by without any joy. ²⁶Time skims along like racing sailboats and passes as quickly as eagles swooping down on their prey. ²⁷If I tell myself, 'Forget your complaints and smile,' I'm only putting on a front. ²⁸I still dread what lies ahead and wonder what will happen to me next. In one sense, it doesn't matter whether I'm innocent or not. ²⁹If I am guilty of rebellion against God as you say, why should I struggle to stay alive? What's the use? ³⁰And since I am guilty in your eyes, there is no way I can be clean in your sight, even if I washed with the strongest soap and purified my hands. ³¹In your minds, God has allowed this to come upon me because of my wickedness. You would throw me into the slime pit of sin so that even my clothes would not protect me. ³²God is not a human being that I can take to court where we could settle the matter publicly. ³³If only there were someone who could arbitrate between us, to lay his hands on both our shoulders and decide our case. ³⁴If only there were someone who could stop God from doing all this to me, to take away this fear from me of what might happen next. ³⁵Then I would feel free to speak up and say what's on my heart, but as it stands now, what's the use?"

Job Pleads With God

10 "I hate my own life. That's why I'm speaking my complaints and exposing the bitterness of my soul. ²God, please don't condemn me for talking this way; just tell me what charges you have against me. ³Is it right for you to treat the work of your own hands the way I've been treated while doing nothing about wickedness everywhere else? ⁴You have more than human eyes; you don't see things as men do. Nothing is hidden from your sight. ⁵You don't lack experience because of living only a few years as we do. ⁶Then why are you testing me as if you don't know me—are you probing for some hidden sin in me? ⁷You know that

I'm not guilty of rebellion and that no one can pull me away from your hand. ⁸Your hands shaped and made me. Are you now going to turn against me and destroy me? ⁹You molded me like clay. Will you now crush me like dirt?

¹⁰"You gave my father strength to beget me, and I grew in my mother's womb as cheese is formed from milk. ¹¹You knit together the bones and sinews of my body, and covered them with muscles and skin. ¹²You gave me life and loved me; with constant care you watched over me. ¹³Now I'm beginning to think that you did all this because in your heart you had other plans for me. ¹⁴Or maybe you were watching to see if I would sin and turn against you so you could have an excuse to test my loyalty. ¹⁵If I turn against you, I'm in trouble, and if I stick by you, I still get tested, no matter how loyal I am. I am full of shame and drowning in affliction. ¹⁶If I hold my head high and walk with confidence, you seem to stalk me like a lion and use your awful power against me. ¹⁷You bring witnesses against me, and your displeasure comes against me like the waves of the sea.

¹⁸"Why did you bring me out of the womb? I wish I had died before anyone had seen me. ¹⁹If only I had never been born or had been carried straight from the womb to the grave. ²⁰Isn't my life almost over? Isn't it about to end? Just leave me alone! Let me have peace these last few moments. ²¹Soon I'll leave this life and never come back. I'll go to a place of darkness and into the shadow of death, ²²into the deepest night of darkness where the light of day never breaks through."

Zophar: Job Is Wrong

11 Zophar replied dogmatically, ²"Is anyone going to answer all this nonsense? Does talking so much make a man right? ³Do you think, Job, that all your talking will leave us speechless? Can you question God and not be rebuked? ⁴You claim that your understanding of God is true and that your life has been

perfect. ⁵How I wish God would speak and answer you! How I wish He would open His lips against you! ⁶He would tell you the secret thoughts of your heart, for there's more than one way of looking at things and some things are too deep for humans to know. God is most likely punishing you much less than you deserve.

⁷Can you penetrate God's thoughts by asking? Can you by study understand the mysteries of God? ⁸The heavens can't understand God, so how can you? The grave can't hide people from God, He knows all about them. But what do you know? ⁹God's greatness and power encompasses more than the earth; it embraces all the oceans of this world and all the water vapors in space. ¹⁰If God captured and imprisoned you and set up court to try you, who could stop Him? ¹¹He knows when men are deceitful; He sees hidden evil and takes note of it. ¹²A conceited, empty-headed man can no more become wise than a wild donkey will be born as tame as man.

¹³"If you would give your whole heart and soul to God and hold back nothing, ¹⁴if you would put away your sin and refuse to harbor wickedness in your home, ¹⁵then you could face your situation with courage and hope. ¹⁶You would forget all your troubles and recall them only as water that has passed by. ¹⁷Your life would be brighter than noonday, and all the darkness you've had would pass away. ¹⁸You would feel secure again because there would be hope. You would look around you and be unafraid because God would be there to protect you. Your soul would be at peace. ¹⁹At night you would lie down, and no one would harm you or make you afraid. In fact, many would come to you for counsel. ²⁰But it is just the opposite for the wicked who look in despair for a way to escape. Their only hope is to die quickly."

Job Answers Zophar

12 Job answered, ²"Doubtless you are the people who know every-

thing, and when you die, wisdom will vanish. ³But I have a mind as well as you and am no less capable of thinking. Who doesn't know all these things that you have just told me? ⁴It appears that even my friends laugh because I claim to be innocent of rebellion against God and because God no longer seems to answer my prayers. ⁵When men are prosperous and comfortable they tend to look down on the unfortunate who can't stand up and face life as they do. ⁶But even godless men and thieves also prosper. Does that mean God is with them? They thank their idols for whatever gain they have gotten, even though their very lives came from the God of heaven.

⁷"Look at the animals, and they will teach you; look at the birds, and they will tell you; ⁸or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; go to the fish of the sea, and they will tell you what you need to know. ⁹All nature knows that the Lord made all things and that He is still in control. ¹⁰The life of every living thing is in His hand, as is the breath of every creature. ¹¹Just as the mouth tastes food, so the ear tests words. ¹²Old men have wisdom and insight and their long life gives them understanding.

¹³"But God not only has wisdom, insight and understanding; He also has power to do as He wishes. ¹⁴When God decides to tear down, who can rebuild? Who can release the man whom God decides to imprison? ¹⁵If He holds back the rains there is drought, and when He turns them loose, floods come and cover the earth. ¹⁶He is powerful, and victory is His. Those who deceive and those who allow themselves to be deceived are known by God.

¹⁷"He takes away the wisdom of counselors and makes judges look like fools. ¹⁸He removes shackles and sets free those imprisoned by kings; He dresses kings in prison clothes. ¹⁹He strips priests of their pride and overthrows men long established. ²⁰He silences the lips of trusted advisors and takes away the understanding of elders. ²¹He humbles princes and puts

an end to the rule of the mighty. ²²He reveals things hard to understand and brings dark things into light. ²³He makes nations great and destroys them; He makes them large and disperses them. ²⁴He deprives the leaders of earth of their reason, and they wander around confused and lost. ²⁵They grope around as if they were in the dark and stagger like drunk men."

13 "Yes, my eyes have seen what you have seen, and my ears have heard what you have heard. ²What you know, I also know; I know every bit as much as you. ³But my dispute is not with you; it is with God. I want to reason with Him. ⁴All you're doing is smearing my name with lies. You're like physicians who don't know how to help people. ⁵If you would only stop talking, that would be the wisest thing you could do. ⁶Listen while I argue my case; hear the plea of my lips.

⁷"Will you judge others, thinking you're speaking for God? Can you speak on God's behalf by telling lies? ⁸Are you going to be partial toward God, defending Him and arguing His case on the basis of what you know? ⁹What would happen if God examined you? How would your case turn out? Could you present your case before God as you do before men? ¹⁰He would surely detect any bias or prejudice. Instantly He would know if you unfairly took one person's side. ¹¹Wouldn't His splendor frighten you? Wouldn't His majesty and power silence your defense? ¹²Your advice is as useless as ashes, and your defense is as weak as clay.

¹³"Be quiet long enough for me to argue my case with God directly, then let happen to me what may. ¹⁴Why do I put myself on the line like this and place myself in jeopardy? ¹⁵Though He take my life, I would still trust Him. I am not afraid to state my case in His presence. ¹⁶In the end it may all turn out for my good, for a hypocrite would not dare to come before Him. ¹⁷Listen to what I have to say, and

open your ears to my speech. ¹⁸I'm ready to state my case before God because I know I'll be vindicated."

Job's Prayer

¹⁹"O God, please listen to me. Only if you say I've been a hypocrite and lived a lie will I be silent and ready to die.

²⁰But grant me two things before I present my case to you. ²¹Please stop all these things that are happening to me and help me not to be afraid of you. ²²God, do you want to speak first, then let me answer, or, do you want me to speak first and then you answer? ²³I'll have to decide since I can't hear your response. How many times have I deliberately sinned against you? Please show me my offense and my sin. ²⁴Why are you hiding yourself from me? Do you think I'm your enemy? ²⁵Why would you chase after a dry leaf blown by the wind? Why would you crush a dry straw and attack it so bitterly? ²⁶Are you withdrawing yourself because of the foolish sins of my youth? Is that what you're holding against me? ²⁷It's like being bound in chains when I'm already too sick to move. You watch me so closely, I feel as if you're examining my very footprints. ²⁸I'm crumbling inside like rotten wood and feel like a moth-eaten coat about to fall apart."

14 "Man is born of a human mother and has a short life span with endless troubles. ²He springs up as a flower in the summer sun but soon withers and dies. He appears and then fades away like a fleeting shadow. ³O God, will you be bothered to consider such a short-lived creature? Will you take time to hear my case? ⁴Who can bring something pure out of something impure? No man can make himself pure, no matter how long he lives. ⁵In one way, it's good that the length of man's life is generally fixed and the number of months he should live is limited. ⁶If all this is so, O Lord, why don't you just leave man alone and let him enjoy his

short, hard life the best he can?

⁷“There is more hope for a tree. If it’s cut down, it will sprout again; its root system is not dead. ⁸Its roots may grow old, and if it’s cut down, its stump will begin to rot while still in the ground, ⁹but if there’s a scent of water, it will sprout again like a young plant. ¹⁰But when a man dies and is laid in the ground, he has breathed his last, and that’s it. He has no root in himself. ¹¹As water evaporates from the sea or as a river bed becomes parched and dry, ¹²so when someone dies, he will not rise again until the heavens are rolled together as a scroll and God raises him in the judgment. ¹³Lord, hide me in the grave until this world is over; just don’t forget me when that time comes. ¹⁴If a man dies, can he come back to life again? I’ll gladly wait in the grave until the day of my renewal when this world ends. ¹⁵O Lord, when you call me from the grave to be with you, I will answer you. The day will come when you will restore the creatures your hands have made. ¹⁶Then I will be perfect, and you will not need to watch over me or keep a record of my sins. ¹⁷My sins will have been washed away, sealed in a bag and tossed into the depths of the sea. The record of wrongs I have done will be covered.

¹⁸“Mountains sometimes crumble and rugged cliffs are moved out of their places. ¹⁹Water wears away solid rock and torrents carry tons of soil into the sea. Nothing is certain in this life, for even man’s hope is in your hands. ²⁰O Lord, you have power to take away man’s life and when you do, he is gone. His facial expression suddenly changes and he is carried out for burial. ²¹If his sons are successful and honored, he doesn’t know it. If they are disgraced, he can’t see it. ²²His body has had its pain, and his soul has had its mourning.”

Eliphaz: Job Lacks Wisdom

15 Again Eliphaz spoke up and said, ²“Empty words! No man with any wisdom would talk the way you talk. He

would certainly not fill his arguments with hot air. ³He would not argue with useless words nor make speeches that have no value. ⁴If everyone listened to you, no one would be in awe of God or feel the need to pray to Him. ⁵Your sins are telling you what your mouth should say. You’re very clever in using words. ⁶Your own mouth condemns you, so I don’t need to say a thing. Your own words testify against you.

⁷“You talk as if you were the first man ever born. Were you there when God created the hills? ⁸Did you listen in on God’s council? Does wisdom belong to you alone? ⁹What do you know that we don’t? What wisdom and insight do you have that we don’t? ¹⁰The gray-haired and the aged men are on our side, men born even before your father. ¹¹Do God’s consolations mean nothing to you? We have brought them to you in quiet tones and gentle words. ¹²Why is your heart not listening, and why are your eyes flashing with impatience? ¹³How dare you vent your anger at God and denounce Him with your lips?

¹⁴“Can anyone be so pure as to speak against God as you’re doing? Can any human be so righteous as to sit in judgment on God? ¹⁵If God could not trust angels, if some of them did not remain true, ¹⁶how much less can He depend on man, who is born sinful and takes to sin like a thirsty wanderer takes to water! ¹⁷Listen to me Job, and I’ll explain something to you. Let me tell you what I have seen, ¹⁸what wise men have taught me that they learned from their fathers. ¹⁹This goes back to the time when our ancestors possessed the land, before any foreigners came here to lead them away from God.

²⁰“A wicked man is miserable all his days, and he who controls others is himself in torment all his life. ²¹Terrifying sounds echo in his ears at night, and robbers attack him when he thinks he’s secure. ²²He loses all hope of escaping from the sword because he’s a marked man.

²³He walks the streets like a man whose body the vultures are ready to eat. He knows the day will come when someone will get him. ²⁴Distress and anguish fill his days with terror, and he sees them as an army ready to attack. ²⁵This is the fate of the man who shakes his fist at God and vaunts himself against the Almighty. ²⁶He defiantly challenges God like a warrior holding a heavy shield.

²⁷“Though his face looks strong and his sides bulge with fat, he will not succeed. ²⁸He will take possession of empty towns and claim as his own the houses of those who have fled, but war will come again and destroy everything he has. ²⁹He will not remain rich; nothing he owns will last, his possessions will not be spread out but will vanish like a breath of air. ³⁰He will not escape the darkness. He will be like a tree whose branches are burned by fire. The breath of God will carry him away. ³¹If he deceives himself by trusting in his evil schemes, then evil will be his reward. ³²He will be paid in full and will perish forever; never again will his branch be green. ³³He will be like a vine stripped of its unripened grapes; he will be like a dying olive tree that sheds its blossoms. ³⁴The godless will not perpetuate themselves, and fire will consume all those who built their expensive houses by bribery. ³⁵Such people conceive evil and give birth to trouble. They are wombs of deceit.”

Job Answers Eliphaz

16 Job replied, ²“I have heard many such arguments before. You are all miserable comforters. ³Are you going to keep on giving these long-winded speeches? When did you become the authority on everything? ⁴I could give the same speeches you do if you were in my place. I could talk endlessly and shake my head at your condition. ⁵But instead, I would try to encourage you and comfort you with hope to bring you some relief.

⁶“Nothing I can say now relieves my pain, and even if I stop talking, the pain is

still there. ⁷O God, you have worn me out. You have let my children be killed, and my wife has turned against me. ⁸You have bound me as if I were your enemy. I’m gaunt and wrinkled, and people take that as proof of my guilt. ⁹I feel as if you have torn me limb from limb, as if you snarl and glare at me as an enemy with hate and disdain. ¹⁰People pass by and sneer. They slap me in the face and unite in ridiculing me. ¹¹O God, I feel like you have abandoned me to evil men and thrown me into the clutches of the wicked. ¹²All seemed well between us before, but suddenly you took me by the neck and pushed my face into the dirt. ¹³Now you’re using me as a target for your arrows. Without pity, your arrows have pierced me, and my blood is spilling out onto the ground. ¹⁴Again and again you rush at me like a warrior gone mad. ¹⁵I sit with nothing on but sackcloth, which is now stuck to my skin. My strength is gone and my head is bowed in the dust. ¹⁶My face is red from so much crying, and shadows of death circle my eyes. ¹⁷In spite of this, I know I have not done anything violent or cruel, and my prayers are innocent and sincere.

¹⁸“O earth, don’t cover my body until the wrongs done to me have been acknowledged and the misunderstandings cleared up. ¹⁹I know my witness is in heaven; the Holy One is my Advocate, ready to testify in my behalf. ²⁰He is my Intercessor and knows the tears I’ve shed. ²¹He pleads my case with God as a man pleads for his friend. ²²Only a few more days, at most a year, before I go on the journey of no return.”

Job Asks God to Relieve His Suffering

17 “My spirit is broken, my days are cut short. I don’t have long to live. There is nothing left for me but the grave. ²All I see every day is the hostility of mockers coming by to stare and jeer at me.

³“O God, I’m being totally honest with you. What else can I say? No one down here who knows me will speak for me. ⁴It

seems as if you have closed their minds. They won't defend me as friends should, but denounce me as if I were their enemy. ⁵Those who denounce their friends for money sow a harvest of evil in the minds of their children. ⁶O God, you have made me the conversation piece for everyone. I'm known as the man in whose face people like to spit. ⁷My eyesight is failing because of much grief, and my whole body is but a shadow of its former self.

⁸"Honest men are shocked at what they see; the innocent are aroused against those who have done wrong. ⁹Nevertheless, the man who knows he has done right will not change and those with clean hands will grow in strength. ¹⁰Even if you repeat your criticisms, you will only show how little you really know. ¹¹My days have passed, my plans have failed, my hope for healing is gone and so is my desire to live. ¹²Some try to change the reality of my night and turn it into day. They say that light is near when I know that darkness is closing in on me. ¹³If my immediate future is death, if in a few short months I'll make my bed in darkness, ¹⁴if I will soon be saying to the grave, 'You are my father,' and to the worms eating me, 'You are my mother and sisters,' ¹⁵where is my hope? Is there anyone who can see that things will turn around for me or anyone who can give me hope? ¹⁶Hope will go down to the pit with me, and we will sleep together in the dust of the earth."

Bildad: The Wicked Are the Ones Punished

18 Bildad replied, ²"Job, will these speeches of yours ever end? Be reasonable so we can communicate with each other. ³Why do you treat us as cattle, as if we were stupid? ⁴You're tearing yourself apart with all this pent-up anger. What do you hope to accomplish? Should the order of things on earth be turned upside down just to meet your wishes?

⁵"Yes, a wicked man's life will eventu-

ally be snuffed out and its flame will never burn again. ⁶The light within him will become dark and will disappear from the earth. ⁷His youthful steps are firm but soon he gets old and stumbles. He falls victim to his own devices and reaps the consequences of his sins. ⁸He stumbles into his own net of sin and is caught. ⁹He walks into his own trap and can't get out; it holds him tight. ¹⁰A noose is hidden from his sight, and he steps right into the trap. ¹¹Terror stalks him wherever he goes, and fear dogs his every step. ¹²His strength disappears and disaster waits to overtake him. ¹³Disease eats away at his limbs; death waits to devour him. ¹⁴He is dragged away from the safety of his house and marched off to meet the king of death.

¹⁵"He no longer lives in his house, and burning ashes are scattered on top of his grave. ¹⁶His roots dry up from below and his branches wither from above. ¹⁷Soon no one remembers him any more, and his fame both at home and abroad is gone. ¹⁸He is taken out of the land of the living and driven from light into permanent darkness. ¹⁹He shall have no offspring among the people to perpetuate his name; there will be no survivors where he once lived. ²⁰Men from the west are shocked at his fate, and men from the east are seized with horror at his going. ²¹Such is the future of an evil man; such are the prospects of one who does not know God."

Job Answers Bildad

19 Job answered, ²"How long will you men torment me and aggravate me with words? ³Time after time you have insulted me and shown no shame for your attacks. ⁴If it is true that I have sinned and gone astray, it's my concern alone. What business is it of yours? ⁵You seem to be using my humiliation to make yourselves look good. ⁶God has wronged me in treating me like this. I'm caught in a net. I'm trapped!

⁷"Though I cry for justice, I get no re-

sponse. Though I call for help, there is no answer. ⁸He has blocked the way so that I cannot pass. He has covered my path with darkness so that I cannot see where I'm going. ⁹He has stripped me of my honor and humiliated me. He has taken away everything I own. ¹⁰He has battered me from every side until I'm beaten to a pulp. He has uprooted my hope like a tree and left me to wither and die. ¹¹God is angry with me. He has treated me as an enemy. ¹²He has sent His armies to attack me and they have dug in and surrounded me; there's no way to escape.

¹³"He has turned my brothers into my enemies; my own flesh has forsaken me. ¹⁴My relatives have abandoned me, and my close friends have turned against me. ¹⁵Those who were guests in my house have forgotten me, and my servants act as if they had never known me. ¹⁶Even my personal servant doesn't come when I call. I beg him to come but he acts as if he's deaf. ¹⁷My own family can't stand the sight or smell of me. ¹⁸Even the children at play scorn me and make faces when I appear. ¹⁹All my friends detest me; those I love turn away with disgust. ²⁰I am nothing but skin and bones. I've escaped death only by the skin of my teeth. ²¹Have pity on me, friends, have pity. The finger of God has touched me; He has chosen me for destruction. ²²Why are you after me as God seems to be? Will you never get enough of my flesh?

²³"How I wish someone would record my words and write them in a book! ²⁴I wish they were carved in stone and recorded forever. ²⁵I know I have a Redeemer who lives and will defend me. In the end He will come to earth and take me home. ²⁶Even after I die and my skin has been eaten by worms, I know I will rise again and see God in my own flesh. ²⁷I will see Him with my own eyes, not just hear someone else tell me about Him. How my heart longs for that day! ²⁸You men continue to hound me as if the root of all these troubles lies within me. ²⁹You need to be careful, because if

you are wrong and I'm found to be innocent, you will bring punishment on yourselves. Remember, a day of judgment is coming for everyone."

Zophar's Sermon

20 Zophar, the Naamathite, replied, ²"Job, you really upset me, and I can't wait to answer. ³I hear a rebuke that dishonors me; I feel insulted and moved to speak. ⁴Surely you know how it has been from time immemorial, ever since man was created on earth. ⁵The happiness of the wicked is short-lived, and their joy is only momentary. ⁶He might grow to be great until his pride reaches into the sky and his head touches the clouds, ⁷but he will be blown away like rotting refuse and those who knew him will ask what happened. ⁸Like a dream he is gone, no more to be found, vanished like a vision in the night. ⁹Those who lived with him will never see him again; he will disappear from his very home. ¹⁰His children will be required to return what he stole from the poor; even the wealth he earned will be removed from his hands. ¹¹His body, once young and strong, now lies in the dust.

¹²"Evil was sweet in his mouth, and he kept enjoying its flavor. ¹³He could not let it go and kept tasting it with his tongue. ¹⁴But it turned sour in his stomach and became as poison from a deadly snake. ¹⁵Before he dies he will spit out his riches; God will make him vomit them up. ¹⁶The evil man is constantly sipping such poison, and it will kill him as surely as the bite of a poisonous snake. ¹⁷He will not live to see the River of Life or the land of cream and honey. ¹⁸He will have to give up everything he worked so hard for and will not enjoy the proceeds of his business ¹⁹because he oppressed the poor and left them destitute. He seized houses that he did not build.

²⁰"He has no rest from his craving; even his treasures cannot save him. ²¹His prosperity will not last; he can take nothing with him. ²²In the midst of plenty,

misery suddenly will overtake him and the full force of his standing with God will finally hit home. ²³Just when his stomach is full, God's fierce anger will touch him and will rain down its fury on him. ²⁴If he tries to escape from the iron sword, a bronze-tipped arrow will shoot him down. ²⁵The arrow hits him and comes out of his body; he pulls out its shiny point dripping with blood. Terror grips his heart. ²⁶Everything he has saved is gone in a moment as if a fire had consumed it before his very eyes. He knows this is the end. ²⁷Heaven will expose his guilt, the earth will testify against him. ²⁸In the day of judgment his support will be gone as if washed away by a turbulent flood. ²⁹This is the fate of wicked men, the heritage appointed them by God."

Job's Answer to Zophar

21 Job responded, ²"Listen now to what I'm saying; that's all the comfort I'm asking from you. ³Be patient and hear me out; then if you want to keep on mocking me, go ahead. ⁴My argument is not with you; if it were, I would be more patient. But my argument is with God, and I have reason to be impatient with Him. ⁵Look at me! Isn't this enough to make you put your hand over your mouth and stare in shocked silence? ⁶When I think of what has happened to me, I am terrified. I tremble just thinking about what else might happen.

⁷"Why do some wicked men live on and continue to increase in power as they grow older? Why does God let that happen with some and not with others? ⁸They see their children prosper and watch their children's children grow up and succeed. ⁹God does not step in and bring disaster on them; their homes are safe, and their families free from fear. ¹⁰Their cattle breed successfully; their cows don't miscarry. ¹¹They have lots of children, and the little ones play as care-free as lambs in the field. ¹²Their children sing and dance to the music of

tambourines and harps; they rejoice at the sound of the flutes. ¹³They spend their whole lives in prosperity and die in peace, suddenly and without pain. ¹⁴Yet these are the people who tell God to leave them alone. They have no desire to know His ways. ¹⁵They see no need to serve Him, to worship the Almighty. They see no reason to pray to Him. ¹⁶I know they don't succeed because of their own goodness and strength, so I stand aloof from their counsel.

¹⁷"How many of the wicked end up as you say they do? How many are caught in disaster and have to face calamity? How often has God suddenly stepped in and taken away their possessions? ¹⁸How many are blown away like straw in the wind or like dust carried away in the midst of a storm? ¹⁹You say that God punishes children for the sins of their father. God does no such thing. Only in the Judgment will the wicked fully reap what they have sown. ²⁰How I wish the wicked were made to taste the consequences of their sins now, to realize that there is a God in heaven to whom they are accountable. ²¹Does a wicked man really care about what effect his sinning has on his children? He goes on enjoying life until the day he dies. ²²Can man teach God knowledge? He is the one who judges kings. ²³Some men remain healthy until the day they die, completely secure and living at ease. ²⁴Their bodies are well nourished and their bones are strong and filled with marrow. ²⁵Other men die in bitterness of soul, having had no happiness at all. ²⁶But all alike die and are buried, whether they've been happy or sad; they lie side by side in the dust, and worms crawl over them both.

²⁷"I know what you're thinking and what you're waiting to say. Your imagination is working overtime trying to think of all the wrong things I might have done. ²⁸You're itching to ask, 'Where are the houses and monuments of these men you say were so wicked and prosperous?' ²⁹Have you ever talked to those

who travel the world? Haven't you listened to their reports? ³⁰They will tell you how evil men everywhere live in luxury and are spared the days of calamity. They seem to suffer no punishment. ³¹Who will stand up against them and denounce their conduct? Who repays wicked kings and rulers for what they have done? ³²Such a man is carried to his grave with public mourning, and an honor guard is set up to watch over his tomb. ³³Thousands join in the funeral procession, and the dust of the earth is gently placed over his body. ³⁴How can you console me with your nonsensical deductions? Every answer you give is based on false theories."

Eliphaz Accuses Job of Wickedness

22 For a third time Eliphaz spoke up, ²"Can a man, even the wisest man, contribute to God's knowledge and be of benefit to Him? ³What pleasure does it give God if you were able to vindicate yourself? What gain is it to Him if you're righteous? ⁴He rebukes you because He cares about you; it's certainly not because He feels threatened by you. ⁵He rebukes you because you have sinned, because of all the evil you've done that no one knew about but you. ⁶He saw you charge high interest on loans you made to your brothers. He saw you strip people of everything they had when they owed you money. ⁷He saw you refusing to feed the hungry or to give a cup of water to a weary traveler. ⁸He noticed how you used your influence to accumulate land, and how you made it look quite respectable. ⁹He saw you send widows away empty-handed and how you took advantage of the fatherless. ¹⁰But now your world has collapsed, and you're terrified of what might happen next. God wouldn't be punishing you for nothing. ¹¹Things look so dark that you cannot see. You realize you're sinking and are grasping at anything to save yourself.

¹²"Doesn't God live above the stars in the highest heavens? He sees everything

going on down here. ¹³And yet you ask, 'What does God know?' Do you think He judges people out of ignorance? ¹⁴Do you think that distance or darkness keeps Him from seeing you as He goes back and forth throughout the universe? ¹⁵How much longer will you justify what you have done as other evil men have? ¹⁶These kinds of men were destroyed by the flood because God could no longer do anything for them. ¹⁷They said, 'Leave us alone!' and thought He couldn't stop them. ¹⁸Yet it was God who had prospered them, giving them the good things in life. Why they turned against Him, I'll never know. ¹⁹Good men will be glad when the wicked are finally punished, and the innocent will laugh with relief, saying, ²⁰'Our enemies are destroyed, and fire consumes their ill-gotten gain.'

²¹"Job, make peace with God. Get better acquainted with Him and you'll find that He will bless you as never before. ²²Accept the lessons He's trying to teach you, and lay up His words in your heart. ²³If you return to God with all your heart, the Almighty will restore everything you've lost. If you remove all wickedness from your house, ²⁴and if you make your gold secondary, even the gold of Ophir that you've stored, ²⁵then the Almighty will have first place in your life, and He will be your gold and your choicest silver. ²⁶Surely then the Almighty will be the joy of your life and you will lift up your face to God. ²⁷He will hear your prayers and answer them. If you keep the vows you made to Him, He will honor you. ²⁸You will succeed in all you do, and light will illuminate your path. ²⁹When men are humbled by misfortune and you help them and pray for them, God will save them. ³⁰He will even bless those who are not innocent because of your goodness and interest in them."

Job's Answer to Eliphaz

23 Job answered, ²"My complaint is still bitter. Why did God allow all this? He seems to be against me in spite

of my groaning. ³If only I knew where to find Him, and how to go where He is. ⁴I would state my case before Him and fill my mouth with arguments. ⁵I want to know His answers, and I would carefully consider what He had to say. ⁶Would the Almighty use His strength to oppose me? No, He would graciously listen to everything I say. ⁷In His presence a man can present his case, and after I presented my case, He would declare me innocent of all your charges.

⁸“But if I look for Him in the east, He is not there; if I look in the west, I cannot find Him. ⁹When He is at work in the north, I still can’t see Him; when it seems He is in the south, I can’t even catch a glimpse of Him. ¹⁰Yet He knows where I am, and when He has finished testing me, my integrity will come out as gold. ¹¹I have carefully followed the road He chose for me and have never strayed to the right or to the left. ¹²I have always tried to keep His commandments and have treasured His word more than my daily bread.

¹³“He stands above every human being. Who can oppose Him? He does as He wishes, and who can stop Him? ¹⁴He does what He wants; what can I say? He has His plans for me, and there is nothing I can do to change them. ¹⁵That’s why I’m so terrified at what might happen next. When I think of everything that has happened, it frightens me. ¹⁶The Almighty has made my heart faint and has terrified me. ¹⁷Yet I’m not afraid to speak up nor am I silenced by the darkness that lies ahead of me.”

Job Upholds God’s Mercy

24 “Why does the Almighty not step in to execute judgment and bring justice? Must those who love Him keep looking for that day forever? ²Men move property lines to get more land. They steal cattle and pasture them. ³They take the donkey of an orphan and a widow’s only cow to satisfy a debt. ⁴They bully the needy and force the poor off their

own land. ⁵So the poor must search for food like wild donkeys; their children must eat what others have rejected. ⁶They have to work in fields they don’t own and harvest grapes in vineyards of the wicked. ⁷They don’t have enough clothes to wear, and at night they sleep in the cold with nothing to cover them. ⁸They are drenched by mountain rains and huddle underneath overhanging rocks for shelter. ⁹The wicked make slaves of fatherless children and take the poor man’s infant as payment for his debts. ¹⁰The poor walk around half-naked for lack of clothing and harvest wheat for others while going hungry. ¹¹They press olives for oil and squeeze grapes for wine while suffering thirst. ¹²In the cities also, the hungry and starving cry out for help, but God does nothing and seems to charge no one with wrongdoing.

¹³“There are men who rebel against the light of God’s law and don’t want to know His ways. ¹⁴In the morning the hired killer rises up and kills a poor working man, and at night he steals from the rich. ¹⁵The adulterer waits for twilight; he thinks no one will see him if he covers his face. ¹⁶At night the wicked break into houses, but during the day they hide to avoid being seen. They want nothing to do with light. ¹⁷These kinds of people crave darkness, and make friends with the terror of the night.

¹⁸“But they will be swept away like foam on the surface of the water. Their portion will be under God’s curse. Their vineyards will waste away because no one will work them. ¹⁹As snow melts and disappears in the heat, so sinners die and vanish from the land of the living. ²⁰The womb forgets them and worms feed on them. Evil men are not long remembered, but are cut down and forgotten like a fallen tree.

²¹“They show no kindness to widows and take advantage of women who can’t have children. ²²It’s only because of God’s mercy that the wicked live and are successful. But they have no assurance

of eternal life. ²³He may let them live in security now, but His eyes are on their ways. ²⁴For a little while the wicked are exalted, but soon they are gone. Like all others, they are cut off like ears of corn from the stalk. ²⁵Can anyone deny that this is so? Can anyone prove that my words are untrue and mean nothing?"

Bildad: Man Can't Be Righteous

25 Bildad spoke for a third time, ²"Power and dominion belong to God, and awe is man's proper response. Order and peace are the laws of heaven. ³Can anyone count His army of angels? Is there any place in the universe where His light does not shine? ⁴How can a man be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure in His presence? ⁵If the moon has no brightness in His presence and the stars are as nothing in His eyes, ⁶how much less is man, who is but a maggot, or the children of men who are only worms compared to the Almighty!"

Job's Answer to Bildad

26 Job answered, ²"What a big help you are to me—sick and weak as I am! What have you said to give me hope or to strengthen my feeble faith? ³What advice have you given me, since according to you I lack wisdom? What great insight have you displayed that would lift my spirits? ⁴Who inspired you to talk like this? Whose spirit is coming out of your mouth? ⁵Can the dead praise God? Can those buried beneath the waters give themselves life?

⁶"Death is stripped of its power before the Mighty One, and the graves of the dead are not closed to Him. ⁷He stretched out the sky across the heavens and hung the earth upon nothing. ⁸He fills the clouds with water and keeps them from bursting under the load. ⁹He covers the face of the moon with clouds. ¹⁰He draws a circle on the surface of the ocean's horizon and marks the boundaries of the light and darkness for each day. ¹¹The mountains of the earth shake;

they stand aghast at His rebuke. ¹²By His power He calms the sea, and with His skill He smites the storm. ¹³By the breath of His mouth He clears the sky, and with His hand He pierces the flying serpent. ¹⁴These are but a small part of all His works. We hear only whispers of His greatness and see only shadows of what He has done. Who can know how great God is or understand the magnitude of His thunderous power?"

Job Insists He's Been Faithful to God

27 Job continued, ²"As surely as God lives, who refuses to give me justice and who has made me taste bitterness of soul, ³as long as I live and the breath of life fills my lungs, ⁴I will not speak wickedly, and my tongue will utter no deceit. ⁵I will never admit to having turned against God as you have charged. I will insist on my faithfulness to Him until the day I die. ⁶I will maintain my integrity and never let go. My conscience does not accuse me.

⁷"May all my enemies who doubt my honesty be seen as wicked and unjust. ⁸What hope is there for godless men when God is ready to take back their lives? ⁹Does He give in to their pleas and let them live on? ¹⁰They should have thought about God ahead of time; they should have delighted in knowing Him and prayed to Him before this. ¹¹Let me tell you what I know about the power of God, the way of the Almighty that I'm acquainted with. ¹²You have seen much of this yourselves, so what I'm about to tell you is not just a meaningless theory."

Zophar Interrupts Job

¹³Zophar interrupted Job, saying, "This is the fate of a wicked man, the reward a ruthless man receives from the Almighty: ¹⁴However many sons he has, some will be killed in the war, others murdered on the streets. The day will come when his descendants will not have enough to eat. ¹⁵Those who survive will die from disease, and their widows will not weep.

Even his own widow will be glad when he is gone. ¹⁶Though he heaps up silver and gold and has an abundance of clothes, ¹⁷others more righteous will wear his clothes and honest men will divide his silver and gold. ¹⁸The house he builds is as lasting as a spider's web and secure as the hut of a vineyard watchman. ¹⁹At night he goes to bed rich, but in the morning he awakens to find his wealth gone. ²⁰Terror overwhelms him like a sudden flood, and a storm snatches him away in the night. ²¹The east wind carries him off and he is gone; it sweeps him away. ²²It comes at the wicked without mercy, and evil doers will not be able to escape. ²³The Almighty claps His hands against them and hisses from his place in heaven, and they are gone."

Job Continues

28 Job replied, "Silver is dug from mines, and gold needs to be refined. ²Iron is taken from the earth, and copper is smelted from ore. ³Men explore the deepest darkness; they search in the farthest recesses of the earth for precious metals. ⁴Far from where humans live or from where people usually travel, men dig shafts in mines and work in loneliness, swinging and swaying from ropes. ⁵Food grows from the earth, but underneath, the earth is burning with fire. ⁶Precious stones like sapphires come from rocks, and gold is in the dust of the earth.

⁷"No birds of prey see the paths within the mines, and no vultures circle the bodies of men who die there. ⁸Wild animals do not go there, nor do lions venture into its darkness.

⁹"Men attack the hardest rocks; they dig into mountains searching for treasure. ¹⁰They tunnel through the hardest rock looking for precious stones. ¹¹They dig to where the rivers begin bringing hidden treasures to light.

¹²"But where can man find wisdom? Where can understanding be uncovered? ¹³Wisdom is not found in the depths of the earth nor in the hearts of men. It can-

not be found anywhere on earth. ¹⁴The depths of the seas and oceans say that wisdom is not found with them. ¹⁵Wisdom cannot be bought with the finest gold or weighed out for the best silver. ¹⁶It cannot be bought with the gold of Ophir nor with the onyx or sapphire. ¹⁷It is worth much more than gold, neither can it be bought with the most costly jewels. ¹⁸Pearls and jasper are not even worth mentioning, nor can rubies match the price of wisdom. ¹⁹The finest topaz and the purest gold can't be compared to the value of wisdom.

²⁰"Where then does wisdom come from? Where is the home of understanding? ²¹Wisdom is hidden from every living thing, even from eagles soaring in the sky. ²²Death and destruction admit to hearing a rumor about such a thing as wisdom, but they know nothing about it.

²³"God is the only one who understands the way to wisdom, and He alone knows where it lives. ²⁴God sees everything under the sun and views the ends of the earth without difficulty. ²⁵When God gave the wind its power and determined the size of the sea; ²⁶when He decided where the rain should fall and set limits on the path of the thunderstorm; ²⁷it was then, in the very beginning, that He looked at wisdom and appraised it. He tested its value and approved it. ²⁸And He said to man, "To reverence and respect the Lord is wisdom, and to turn from evil is understanding."

Job's Defense

29 Job continued, ²"How I long for the past, for the days gone by when God watched over me. ³He was with me then and gave me light to walk in darkness. ⁴Those were the days when I was energetic and prosperous; God was my close friend and protected me. ⁵The Almighty was with me then, and I was surrounded by all my children. ⁶My herds furnished rivers of cream and streams of oil poured from my olive trees. ⁷When I went to the meeting of the

city elders and took my seat in the public square, ⁸the younger men stepped aside when they saw me coming, and the older men stood to show respect. ⁹The city fathers would cease talking and cover their mouths with their hands. ¹⁰Princes hushed their voices and everyone held his tongue. ¹¹Whoever saw me or heard me spoke well of me and the good things I had done, ¹²because I helped the poor and the orphans who had no one to help them.

¹³Men who were dying blessed me, and widows praised me for making their hearts sing. ¹⁴I always tried to do what was right and to be fair in whatever I did; these were the rich robes, the jewels and silver and gold I sought. ¹⁵I tried to be eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. ¹⁶I was a father to the needy and took up the cause of strangers who were treated unjustly. ¹⁷I broke the power of cruel men and snatched victims from their grasp. ¹⁸I expected to live a long life and die in my own bed, my days being as numerous as grains of sand in a man's hand. ¹⁹I thought my life would be like a tree whose roots always have water and whose branches are covered each night with dew. ²⁰I assumed that my reputation would remain and that my strength would never fail.

²¹When I gave advice, men listened expectantly and waited in line for my counsel. ²²After I had spoken, they would say no more. My words fell on them with the gentleness of dew. ²³They longed for my counsel as the dry earth longs for showers; they drank in my words as gardens drink in the spring rains. ²⁴When I nodded and smiled, they could scarcely believe it. My presence gave them courage. ²⁵Sometimes I helped them make administrative decisions. Other times I was like a king to them, keeping order among the troops. And still other times I was their shepherd, giving them comfort in times of despair."

30 "But now, men younger than I make fun of me, men whose fathers are so irresponsible I wouldn't trust them to take care of my sheep dogs. ²Their sons are just like them. They have no desire to work and are too lazy to help. ³They're haggard and hungry, but would rather roam the country to look for food and sleep in wild and desolate places. ⁴They live on leaves from bushes and eat roots from the broom plant. ⁵People chase them from their neighborhoods like thieves. ⁶They live in dry river beds among rocks and in holes in the ground. ⁷During the day they wander together like dogs, and at night they sleep together in the underbrush. ⁸They are a nameless bunch of riffraff and were driven out of the land.

⁹"Now they make fun of me with songs. I'm nothing but a joke to them. ¹⁰They detest me and come to see me just to spit in my face. ¹¹Because God has allowed me to be afflicted and to become weak and helpless, they turn on me without restraint. ¹²They come at me like a mob, threatening me with stones. They would love to jostle me in a crowd and trip me to make me fall. ¹³They break into my house and enjoy destroying what I have; no one tries to stop them. ¹⁴They come at me as an army through a breach in the wall. ¹⁵I'm overwhelmed with terror. They come at me relentlessly. My dignity is gone like a puff of smoke and safety has vanished like a cloud.

¹⁶"And now my life is ebbing away. Days of suffering have taken their toll. ¹⁷At night my bones ache; my gnawing pain never stops. ¹⁸Disease has encased me like a garment; it binds my neck like a tight collar. ¹⁹God has thrown me into the mud until I feel like dirt. ²⁰I cry out to Him for help, but He doesn't answer; when I stand up to confront Him, He pays no attention. ²¹I say, 'God, you are treating me cruelly; you have turned on me ruthlessly without mercy. ²²You toss me in the wind and let the storm carry me away until I disappear. ²³I know you're

taking me down the road to death, to the place waiting for everyone. ²⁴Why do you keep hammering away at a broken man who can do nothing but beg for mercy? ²⁵Haven't I wept with people in trouble? Have I not grieved for the poor?"

²⁶"I hoped for happiness, but evil came. I looked for light, and darkness overshadowed me. ²⁷The nausea never stops; day after day I have suffered. ²⁸I mourn without comfort and stand up in public to plead for help. ²⁹My voice is as lonely as the cry of a wolf or the hooting of an owl. ³⁰My body burns with constant fever; my skin is turning black and peeling off. ³¹My harp has turned to mourning and my flute to the sound of weeping."

31 "I will hold to the covenant I made with my eyes. Why should I sin against God by looking with desire at a young woman? ²The Almighty sees everything I do. If I lived wickedly, what should I expect from Him? ³The wicked eventually come to ruin; punishment will be the doom of those who do wrong. ⁴God knows everything I do and think. He sees every step I take.

⁵"I have never walked in the path of wickedness nor purposefully lived deceitfully. ⁶Let God weigh my heart with honest scales, and He will know that I am innocent. ⁷If I have turned from trying to do what's right, if I have been attracted to evil, if my hands have been defiled by acts of violence, ⁸then let my crops be uprooted and destroyed, and may others eat what I have sown.

⁹"I have not desired another man's wife; I have never waited outside her door. ¹⁰If I have, then let my wife be innocent if she cooks another man's food and sleeps in another man's bed. ¹¹Adultery is shameful and wicked and punishable by the courts. ¹²Such passion is like a fire that consumes everything in its way, burning up a whole harvest.

¹³"If I have treated my employees unfairly when they complained against me,

¹⁴how could I face God? What would I say when my case came before Him?

¹⁵The same God who shaped me in the womb shaped them also. Didn't the Almighty form each of us within our mother's womb?

¹⁶"I have never denied the wishes of the poor, nor let the widows live in despair. ¹⁷I did not keep everything to myself, but shared my food with orphans. ¹⁸I kept an eye on the fatherless and helped the widow. ¹⁹Whenever I have seen anyone in rags or too poor to have enough clothing, ²⁰I have gladly given him clothes made of wool from my sheep. ²¹If I have taken advantage of the fatherless, using my influence in court to win my case, ²²then let my arms be torn from my shoulders; let them be broken off at the joint. ²³I respect God too much to do such things, and His splendor and power is a welcome restraint on me.

²⁴"If I put my daily trust in gold, or made hoarding silver the top priority in my life, ²⁵if I let myself become proud because of my wealth, or gloried in my fortune, such pride needs to be called to account. ²⁶If I have ever worshiped the sun, or given glory to the moon, ²⁷or if my hand offered them a kiss of homage for what they supposedly had done for me, ²⁸I would have been disloyal to God and would deserve to be judged.

²⁹"I have never been glad when my enemies suffered, or pleased when they met with disaster. ³⁰I have never allowed myself to sin by cursing my enemies or praying that God would smite them. ³¹Those who work for me have never said, 'There are people who are hungry and Job has not fed them.' ³²I have invited strangers into my home to keep them from spending the night on the street. My doors have always been open to the weary traveler. ³³I have never tried to conceal my sins by hiding guilt in my heart. ³⁴I was never so afraid of people as to give in to group pressure and have never been frightened into silence by powerful families. ³⁵Will no one listen to

what I'm saying? I am ready to sign my defense and swear that every word I have said is true. Let the Almighty contradict me! Let my accusers put their indictment in writing!³⁶ I would not cover up their accusations, but make them public. I would pin them on my shoulder and wear them on my head so everyone could read them. I would hide nothing.³⁷ God knows every step I've taken. I would approach Him like a prince.

³⁸"If my land cries out against me, or the freshly plowed furrows complain about me,³⁹ if the harvest says that I have not paid my laborers or that I have broken the spirit of the farmers who leased from me,⁴⁰ then let the land grow weeds instead of wheat and barley." With this Job ended his defense.

Job's Friends Stop and Elihu Speaks Up

32 So Job's three friends stopped answering him, because Job seemed convinced in his own eyes that he was right and innocent.² But a passerby named Elihu, the son of Barakel the Buzite of the family of Ram, had stopped and listened to all this. He became angry with Job for justifying himself and blaming God.³ He was also very angry with Job's three friends because they had found no way to really answer Job, and yet had condemned him.⁴ Elihu had waited all this time before speaking to Job, because he was younger than the rest.⁵ But after they had finished and he saw that the three men had nothing more to say, his anger was aroused.

⁶He spoke with insight, saying, "I am young in years and you are older. That's why I was afraid to speak up and tell you what I know.⁷ I thought that older men should speak first and those advanced in years would teach wisdom.⁸ But it is the Spirit of the Almighty God who gives men wisdom, regardless of age.⁹ Growing old does not of itself make one wise, nor do only the aged know what's right.¹⁰ So now listen to me. I, too, will tell you what I know.¹¹ I waited while you spoke and

listened patiently to what you had to say, even while you were searching for the right words.¹² I paid close attention to what each of you were saying, but not one of you has proven Job wrong nor have you answered his arguments.¹³ How then can you claim to have wisdom? You say, 'We have failed. God will have to answer Job and show him that he's wrong.'¹⁴ I want you to notice that Job was not speaking to me, but to you. I am not going to prove him wrong for you, but will speak to him as I see fit.

¹⁵"Job, your three friends have failed you; they haven't really answered your questions.¹⁶ Do you want me to just wait quietly while they sit there with nothing further to say?¹⁷ No. I'm not going to do that. I will speak up and let you know what I think.¹⁸ I could hardly wait until they finished giving their answers. I'm filled to overflowing just waiting to talk, and I am compelled to speak,¹⁹ like bottled-up wine, ready to burst its wineskins.²⁰ I can't stand it any longer; I must open my mouth and find relief.²¹ I will show no partiality; I will not take sides, and I do not intend to flatter anyone.²² If I were skilled in flattery, my Maker would have a right to take me away."

Elihu Challenges Job

33 "So now listen to me, Job, and pay attention to what I have to say.² I'm ready to speak what's on my mind; my words are on the tip of my tongue.³ What I'm going to say comes in all sincerity from the bottom of my heart, and what I'm going to tell you is the truth.⁴ As sure as the Almighty made me and the Spirit of God has given me life, I'm going to be honest with you.⁵ Answer me, if you can; listen and prepare yourself to confront me when I'm finished.⁶ You and I are the same in God's sight; we have both been made from the same clay.⁷ You have no reason to tense up over what I'm going to say. My hand will not be heavy on you, because I respect you.

⁸"This is what I heard you say; these

are the precise words of your argument against your three friends: ⁹I am not guilty and have done no wrong. I am pure and without sin. I am innocent and free from guilt. ¹⁰Yet God has found fault with me and treats me as an enemy. ¹¹He binds my feet in chains and watches every move I make.'

¹²"I tell you, Job, you are wrong. God is greater than man and knows more about you than you know about yourself. ¹³Why do you accuse God of not hearing you or answering your prayers? Why do you say that God does not have to answer to anyone for His actions? ¹⁴God does speak, one way or another; He does answer prayer, but men don't listen, so they don't understand. ¹⁵God sometimes speaks to men through visions and dreams at night when they sleep. ¹⁶He might whisper in their ears to warn them of their ways, and they awaken startled and frightened. ¹⁷He does this because He wants to keep them from pride and turn them from their wrongdoing. ¹⁸He wants to preserve their souls and keep them from eternal death.

¹⁹"Sometimes God tries to arouse people and draw them from their sins by allowing sickness and pain to fill their bodies. ²⁰When this happens, man loses his appetite, and even the choicest food is repulsive. ²¹His body wastes away to almost nothing, and soon all his bones are visible. ²²His soul draws near to the pit, and he begins to hear voices of the messengers of death. ²³Maybe an angel will come to his rescue, one of thousands of God's messengers who are constantly trying to tell a man what is right. ²⁴Maybe God will be merciful to him and order death to retreat because He has found a ransom for him, and he will be spared from going down to the pit. ²⁵Then he will recover and his flesh will be renewed as a child's; his body will become young and strong again. ²⁶He will pray to God and God will listen to him. He will sense God's presence and shout for joy. He will be humble and thankful because God has

set him right again. ²⁷He will testify to his fellow men and say, 'I have sinned. I have not done what is right, yet God has been merciful to me and showed me how wrong I was. He did not give me what I deserved. ²⁸He redeemed my soul. He kept me from going down to the pit, and I'm alive to enjoy life again.'

²⁹"God is willing to do all this for man two or three times or more, and you are no exception. ³⁰He saves man from the pit of death and restores to him the joy of living. ³¹Job, are you paying attention to what I'm saying? Don't answer me yet; just listen until I'm finished. ³²But if you have something to say, and you can't wait to say it, let me hear it. ³³If not, then hear me out. Listen, because I want to give you some insight into your problem."

Elihu Upholds God's Justice

34 Elihu continued, ²"Listen to me, all of you. I know you are men of wisdom and learning, but I have something to say too. ³The ear tests words like the tongue samples food. ⁴Let's look at Job's problem to see if there's another option and if we can't agree on a solution. ⁵Job claims he's innocent and that God has taken away his right to be heard. ⁶He says he's done no wrong, yet you accuse him of lying. He claims that though he's guiltless, the arrow of the Almighty has incurably wounded him. ⁷Have you ever seen such an arrogant man as Job? He drinks up scorn like water and accuses God of being unfair. ⁸His attitude toward God shows that he's been keeping company with the wicked. ⁹He's saying that it doesn't pay to serve God, that there's no profit in doing God's will.

¹⁰"Listen to me, men of learning and wisdom. Is God ever unfair? Does the Almighty ever do wrong? ¹¹God is just. He always does right. He rewards people for the good they do and allows them to reap the consequences of their own misbehavior. ¹²It is unthinkable that the Almighty God would do wrong or treat anyone unjustly. ¹³Who put God in charge of this

world? Did He get His power from somebody else? ¹⁴If He decided to withdraw His Spirit and take back the breath of life, ¹⁵all mankind would die and everyone would turn back to dust.

¹⁶"If you have such great understanding, listen to what I have to say. ¹⁷Can anyone who is unfair govern? Then how can any of you condemn the just and Righteous One? ¹⁸He judges the behavior of kings and rulers and declares when they're worthless and wicked. ¹⁹God shows no partiality. He does not favor rulers over common people or the rich over the poor. They all live by His creative power. ²⁰A man may die suddenly in the middle of the night or he may unexpectedly pass away during the day. The strong are laid to rest without a moment's notice through no fault of their fellow man.

²¹"God's eyes are on the ways of men, and He sees every step they take. ²²There is no place where evil men can hide; no darkness can cover them from His sight. ²³God does not need to examine them more closely. There is no need for Him to judge them more carefully. ²⁴Without asking questions, God removes leaders and replaces them with others. ²⁵He knows all about them and He can overthrow them in one night. ²⁶He does this openly so all can see what happens when men are wicked. ²⁷He wants everyone to see what happens to those who turn from following Him and do not regard His ways. ²⁸God knows the cause of the cry of the poor and the pleadings of the needy come before Him. ²⁹If the Almighty did nothing, who could blame Him? If He hid His face from evil, who could condemn Him? He rules over men and nations alike. ³⁰He keeps oppressors from totally ruling the world and the godless from totally exploiting the people.

³¹"Job, have you ever admitted to God you were guilty, confessed your sins to Him and said, 'I am guilty and will offend no more'? ³²Have you ever asked God to

show you the wrongs you can't see? If He did so, are you willing to change your ways? ³³Should God then reward you on your terms, on what you say you did and didn't do? Would you call this repentance? Tell us what you think; the time is yours. Just remember that you can't have it both ways. You can't set the terms and still call it repentance. ³⁴Men of understanding and wisdom agree with me. ³⁵They say Job speaks from ignorance and that what you say does not make sense. ³⁶Job, your words need to be tested so you can see that you are speaking as the wicked do. You think the Almighty must come to terms with you instead of the other way around. ³⁷You're adding rebellion to your sins: clapping your hands in derision and continuing to complain against God."

Elihu Condemns Job's Self-righteousness

35 Elihu paused only briefly, then said, ²"Job, do you think what you are saying is right? You say that God will declare you innocent. ³Yet you keep asking, 'What good is it not to sin and what gain is there in being innocent?' ⁴I want to respond to what you said and to answer your three friends. I also have something to say, and I want all of you to listen. ⁵Look up at the sky! See how high the clouds are? Yet, God is above them! ⁶If you sin, how can that possibly harm God way up there? Even if you sin many times, what does that do to Him? ⁷If you are righteous, what are you doing for Him or giving to Him? If you are good, what is He receiving from you—anything? There is nothing you can add to God. ⁸Your wickedness affects only your fellowman; he is the one who suffers because of you. And the good you do helps only your neighbor—none of these things affect God.

⁹"When men are in trouble, they cry out for help; they plead for relief and for someone stronger to come and help them. ¹⁰Why don't they turn to God their Maker? They know He is the only One

who can strengthen their hearts and make them sing again. ¹¹They forget that God is the source of their intelligence, and that He is the One who makes them wiser than the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. ¹²Men cry for help, but God doesn't answer them because of their pride and arrogance. They boast of their wisdom and are satisfied with their righteousness. ¹³God does not respond to their pleas of self-interest; the Mighty One pays no attention to their empty words. ¹⁴Why should He make an exception and listen to you when you say you do not see Him? You say that you're waiting for Him to hear your case. ¹⁵Don't get the idea that God does nothing or that He takes no notice of wickedness. God will act, but in His own time and way. He will not be forced into action by anyone. ¹⁶So when you open your mouth, Job, your words are meaningless. It's clear you don't know what you're talking about."

Elihu Points Out the Goodness of God

36 Elihu continued, ²"Be patient and listen to me a little longer because I want to say something more in God's behalf. ³I will give you some examples from a broad spectrum of knowledge to show you that my Maker is just. ⁴Nothing I'm going to say to you is fabricated; the one talking to you is no fool.

⁵God is mighty, but He despises no one. He is mighty, but He is also firm and kind in His purpose. ⁶He does not let the wicked live on forever. He sees to it that the faithful are given their rights. ⁷He does not take His eyes off the righteous. He plans to enthrone them as kings and exalt them forever. ⁸If men are bound in chains, or if they are suffering, ⁹He uses the occasion to make them understand that they have sinned by being arrogant and proud. ¹⁰He opens their ears to listen to His warnings, which are given to help them repent and change their ways. ¹¹If they listen and obey, they will live out their lives in contentment and pros-

perity. ¹²But if they refuse to listen and obey, they will perish by the sword and die without further enlightenment.

¹³"The godless in heart harbor anger even after the Almighty corrects them; they don't cry out for help. ¹⁴They are worn out by their sinning and die before their time, like male prostitutes who practice their sexual rituals at fertility temples. ¹⁵The Almighty reaches men through suffering better than any other way and speaks to sinners through their afflictions. ¹⁶He is wooing you to Himself, Job, and through your distress He is trying to help you see yourself as you really are. He wants to create a right spirit in you and bring you back to the comfort of your own house and to a table filled with the choicest foods.

¹⁷"But now you are under judgment due the wicked. You are reaping the consequences of justice that you deserve. ¹⁸Be careful not to believe that riches can save you. Don't think that you can bribe the Almighty to restore your health. ¹⁹All the physical strength and money in the world cannot help get you out of trouble. ²⁰Don't wish to die or for the night of death to overtake you. The time will come for you to die, just as it does to people everywhere. ²¹Be careful not to return to doing evil, which you seem to want more than listening to God who sent the affliction to help you. ²²Just remember how great and good the Almighty is. There is no teacher like Him. ²³No one can tell God how to do things better or tell Him that what He is doing is wrong.

Elihu Speaks of the Power of God

²⁴"Righteous men are so overwhelmed by His works that they break out in song. If you were righteous, you, too, would be praising the Lord. ²⁵Everyone can see His great works if they want to. Righteous men stand in awe at what they see Him do. ²⁶How great God is! He is beyond our understanding. We can't even count the number of His years, much less imagine the power He has. ²⁷He takes salty water

from the sea and distills it into raindrops. ²⁸He uses clouds to transport moisture for thousands of miles over the earth, and they release their showers on people everywhere. ²⁹Who can know for sure how He orders the clouds and when He decides to display His power through the thunder? ³⁰He lights up the sky with flashes of lightning and penetrates the depths of the sea with its brightness. ³¹With this same power He governs nations and provides enough food for everyone. ³²He seizes the lightning with His own hands and directs it towards its mark. ³³His thunders announce the approaching storm so that even the cattle know when it's coming."

37 "The distant storm that I now hear makes my own heart beat wildly. ²Just listen to the voice of the Almighty, to the roar of thunder that comes from His mouth. ³He unleashes lightning and sends it across the sky from one end of the earth to the other. ⁴After that, the thunder of His mighty voice is heard; when the majestic echo resounds, He holds back nothing. ⁵God's voice thunders in marvelous ways. At His command, amazing things happen that we can't understand. ⁶He speaks to the snow and it covers the earth; He speaks to the rain and it drenches the dry ground. ⁷He fills all men with fear by His power and stops their work with snow or rain, showing them who He is and what He can do. ⁸The animals take cover and go to their dens. ⁹He calls the tempest out of its storage and directs the cold to be carried by the driving winds. ¹⁰By His breath He freezes the waters and covers them with ice. ¹¹He loads the clouds with moisture and flashes His lightnings from the midst of them. ¹²At His instruction, clouds swirl around the earth and do whatever He tells them to do. ¹³He uses storms to punish people or to water the earth and show men His love.

¹⁴"Listen to me, Job. Stop and think

about the wonderful things that God does. ¹⁵Do you know how He controls everything? How He can simply give a command and make lightning flash? ¹⁶Do you know how He balances the fluffy clouds to hold such weights of water? This is the work of God's amazing power and perfect knowledge. ¹⁷Can you change the weather to make yourself more comfortable in the sweltering heat while the land lies quiet under the hot winds? ¹⁸Can you help God stretch out the sky into a mirror of polished bronze? ¹⁹Tell us from your wisdom what we should say to God? You may know what to say, but our understanding has reached its limit. ²⁰I'm not ready to question God and what He does or does not do. Do you think I want to be swallowed up and disappear?

²¹"No one can look directly at the sun at its height when the sky has been swept clean of clouds. ²²When God comes from the north in golden splendor, when He comes in awesome majesty, who can look at Him and live? ²³The glory of Almighty God is so exalted that we can't come near Him, yet He is just and righteous and never punishes unduly. ²⁴No wonder everyone holds Him in awe, for He is fair and impartial no matter how wise a person claims to be."

God Questions Job

38 Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm and said, ²"Who is this who speaks without knowledge, who makes my purposes unclear? ³Brace yourself like a man. I want you to answer my questions.

⁴"Where were you when I created the world? If you know the answer, tell me. ⁵Who stretched the measuring line over the globe and decided how large it should be? Surely you know! ⁶What foundation does the earth rest on? Who laid its cornerstone ⁷while the morning stars sang together and the heavenly host shouted for joy?

⁸"How were the ocean boundaries determined, and how were the waters held

back when they burst forth from the womb of the earth? ⁹Where were you when I made clouds to cover the earth and used them to wrap the earth in darkness, ¹⁰when I established boundaries for the seas, setting its doors and gates in place? ¹¹Did you hear when I said to those proud waves: 'This far you may come and no farther?' Did you see them obey me and recede?

¹²"Have you ever shown the dawn its place or given orders to the morning? ¹³Have you ever told daybreak to take hold of the edge of the earth and shake the wicked out of their hiding places? ¹⁴Dawn shapes the appearance of the earth like clay pressed by a seal. Daylight makes the hills and valleys stand out like folds in a garment. ¹⁵It restrains the violence of the wicked and breaks their oppressive hold on others.

¹⁶"Have you ever visited the springs of the seas or walked into the deepest ocean valleys? ¹⁷Has anyone opened to you the gates of death or shown you its shadowy secrets? ¹⁸Do you have any idea how big the universe is? If you know the answers to these questions, I want to hear them. ¹⁹Do you know where the source of light is? Do you know where darkness makes its home? ²⁰Can you tell the light how far to go or keep the darkness in its place? ²¹Do you know all this because you were with me then or because you have accumulated so much wisdom with your years?

²²"Have you ever visited the storehouses of snow or seen the storerooms of hail ²³which I keep for times of trouble, for days of war and battle? ²⁴Can you walk to the place where lightning originates, or to where the east winds are sent over the earth?

²⁵"Who makes a path for thunderstorms and directs the downpour of rain ²⁶to water the desert where no one lives? ²⁷Who supplies the wilderness and makes valleys sprout with grass?

²⁸"Does the rain have a human father? Who started the process originally? Who

forms the dewdrops? ²⁹Does the frost that forms in outer space have a human mother? Where does winter ice that covers parts of the earth originate? ³⁰Who makes the waters on earth as hard as stone and freezes the face of the sea?

³¹"Can you keep the stars in the cluster of the Pleiades going the same direction? Can you loosen the cords that hold Orion in place? ³²Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons? Can you guide the Big Bear and its cubs across the night sky? ³³Do you know the laws that govern the universe? Can you manage and control the affairs of nations?

³⁴"Can you by shouting command the clouds to drench you with rain and cool you when you're hot? ³⁵Can you tell the lightning which way to go? Does it report to you and say, 'Here I am, at your service?' ³⁶Who puts wisdom in the innermost parts of man or gives understanding and insight to a man's mind? ³⁷Who can count the clouds? Who can tell them to pour out their load of rain ³⁸on those parts of the earth which are dry or where the soil is turning to dust?

³⁹"Do you go hunting for food to keep the lioness and her cubs alive? Can you satisfy the appetite of hungry young lions ⁴⁰as they wait for prey in their dens or crouch in the bushes to watch the attack? ⁴¹Who feeds the ravens when they fly about looking for food and their young when they cry to God to be fed?"

39 "Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Are you there when the doe bears her fawn? ²Do you know how many months along each one is in her pregnancy? Or when each is ready to give birth? ³They crouch down to bring their young into the world, and their labor pains are over. ⁴Their young thrive in the mountains. They leave their place of birth and go out to be on their own.

⁵"Who gave the wild donkeys their love of freedom? Who unleashed their spirits and made them want to roam? ⁶I gave

them the wastelands as their home and the salt flats as their habitat. ⁷They laugh at the commotion in the crowded cities and never hear the shout of human masters. ⁸They wander through the hills looking for anything green they can eat.

⁹“Will a wild bull consent to serve you? Is he willing to spend the night in your stable? ¹⁰Can you hold one of them with a rope and make him plow for you? Will he let you put a harness on him and till your fields for you? ¹¹Can you count on using his great strength to help you? Will he do your heavy work for you? ¹²Can you trust him to help you bring in your grain and then thresh it for you?”

¹³“Do you know why the ostrich flaps her wings when she does not fly? Her wings can’t compare with those of a stork. ¹⁴She lays her eggs on the ground to let them keep warm in the heat of the sun. ¹⁵She doesn’t stop to think that a foot might crush them; she seems unconcerned that a wild animal might walk on them. ¹⁶She treats her young harshly as if they were not hers; she doesn’t seem to care if they survive or how they’ll be raised. ¹⁷I did not endow her with wisdom or give her a share of good sense like some other animals. ¹⁸Yet when she spreads her feathers and runs, she can laugh at any horse and rider.

¹⁹“Did you make the horse strong and clothe him with a flowing mane? ²⁰Did you make him capable of jumping like a locust and frightening people with his proud snorting? ²¹He rejoices in his strength, he paws the ground and charges forward unafraid. ²²He doesn’t know the meaning of fear and laughs at the danger of sword and battle. ²³The weapons of his rider rattle at his side; and the lance and spear glitter in the sun. ²⁴When the trumpet sounds, he trembles with excitement; he cannot stand still, pawing the ground at his eagerness to go. ²⁵At the blast of the trumpet he snorts; he catches the scent of battle from afar and hears the commands and shouts of men in battle.

²⁶“Did you teach the hawk how to fly or when to spread its wings toward the south? ²⁷Does the eagle soar at your request or build its nest where you tell it to? ²⁸It lives high in the mountains and remains there through the night. The rocky peaks are its stronghold. ²⁹From its high points it looks for food; it can spot something close or far away. ³⁰Its young feast on blood; wherever something is dead that’s where they’ll be.”

40 The Lord said to Job, ²“How long will you continue to contend with me and question my wisdom? What do you have to say for yourself?”

Job’s Response

³ Job answered, ⁴“I can see how small I am, Lord, and that I don’t know as much as I thought I did. What else can I say? I will put my hand over my mouth and keep silent. ⁵I spoke up once but didn’t have the right answer. I spoke up twice, but I will not do so again.”

God Continues

⁶Then the Lord spoke out of the storm, saying, ⁷“Prepare yourself like a man because I’m going to ask you more questions, and this time I want an answer. ⁸Are you discrediting my justice? Are you condemning me in order to make yourself look good? ⁹Are you as powerful as I am? Can your voice thunder throughout the universe?

¹⁰“If so, stand up in your glory and show me your majesty and power. ¹¹Go ahead. Unleash your power against transgression; look at the proud of the earth and humble them. ¹²Look at them and bring them low; throw down the wicked where they stand. ¹³Put an end to their violence by taking their breath away and let them die and be buried. ¹⁴Do this if you can, and I will be the first to admit that you don’t need me and that you can save yourself.

¹⁵“Take a look at the elephant. I cre-

ated him just as I created you. He eats grass like a cow, ¹⁶but notice what strength he has and what power there is in his body. ¹⁷His trunk is thick and strong and sways back and forth like a small cedar; his legs are like logs taken from trees. ¹⁸His bones are as strong as bronze and his legs like bars of iron.

¹⁹“He is one of the most amazing of all creatures and only his Creator can defeat him in a test of pure strength. ²⁰The hills provide him with food, and in spite of his strength, the wild animals can play safely in his presence. ²¹He lies down among the thorn bushes and wades through the reeds in the marshland. ²²He hides under the trees and finds shade among the willows. ²³He is not afraid of a raging river; he stands secure even though the swollen Jordan rushes against his mouth. ²⁴Can anyone look him in the eye by a water hole and put a ring in his nose to gently lead him away?”

41 “Can you pull in a crocodile with a fishhook or lead him along on a leash? ²Can you put a rope through his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook? ³Will he be humble and plead with you to let him go? Will he beg with gentle words for mercy? ⁴Will he make an agreement with you and promise to serve you forever? ⁵Can you make a pet of him like you would a bird or put a leash on him for your daughters to play with? ⁶Do fishermen bargain over him, cut him up and sell him for food? ⁷How easily can you catch him? Can you puncture his hide with darts or penetrate his head with fishing spears? ⁸Try to take hold of him with your bare hands and you’ll never forget the battle. You’ll never try it again. ⁹Any hope of overpowering him by sheer force is foolish; just the sight of him is enough to take away a man’s courage. ¹⁰No one dares to arouse him. Who can stand up against him? ¹¹Who can stand up against me and demand that I should repay him? Everything is mine.

¹²“Let me tell you more about the

strength of the great crocodile and describe to you his graceful form. ¹³Who can strip off his outer skin? Who can approach him with a bridle? ¹⁴Who can force his jaws open with their bare hands and look beyond those terrible teeth? ¹⁵His back is protected by rows of shields and is as hard as stone to the touch. ¹⁶Each layer is so tightly joined to the other that no air can pass between them. ¹⁷They are fastened so firmly together that no one can pull the layers apart. ¹⁸His eyes sparkle with light and when he snorts, they flash like the rays of dawn. ¹⁹Power seems to come from his mouth as from a burning furnace. ²⁰Smoke spews from his nostrils as from a boiling pot. ²¹His breath sets coals on fire and flames billow out of his mouth. ²²His neck is so powerful it strikes terror to those who see him. ²³The scales of his body are tightly knit; they are firmly attached and cannot be moved. ²⁴He is fearless and unyielding; his heart is as hard as stone. ²⁵When he raises himself up out of the water, the most courageous are afraid; terror grips their hearts when he comes thrashing beside them. ²⁶A sword does not stop him, nor does a spear frighten him. ²⁷An iron rod is to him a piece of straw; a bronze rod is a piece of rotten wood. ²⁸Arrows don’t make him run, and stones from a sling bounce off his back like pebbles thrown by a child. ²⁹Clubs don’t make a dent in his armor, and he laughs at the rattling of spears. ³⁰His under parts are so tough, he can drag himself across the ground on his belly and leave imprints in the mud. ³¹When he thrashes around, the water looks like a boiling pot of herbs. ³²As he pushes through the water he leaves a glistening white wake behind him. ³³No other creature is so fearless; none are his equal. ³⁴He looks down on all who are lofty; he is king over all that are proud.”

Job’s Repentance and Prosperity

42 Then Job answered the Lord, ²⁴“I know that you can do all things

and that no one can thwart your plans.

³You asked how I dare question your wisdom when I am without knowledge. I can see that in my ignorance I talked about things which I didn't really understand, things too wonderful for me to grasp.

⁴You said I should listen to you as you speak. You said you would question me and that I should answer you. ⁵Until now I knew only what others had told me about you, but now with my own ears I heard you tell about yourself. ⁶I hate myself. I'm ashamed of what I said. I ask for forgiveness and repent in sackcloth and ashes."

⁷Then the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am angry with what you and your two friends said to Job. You didn't speak the truth about me as my servant Job did. ⁸So now I want you to take seven bulls and seven rams and sacrifice them as a burnt offering for yourselves right here beside Job. I will ask him to pray for you and I will accept his prayer and forgive you. What you said about why people prosper was not right. You should have listened to my servant Job." ⁹So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the Lord told them,

and the Lord answered Job's prayer.

¹⁰After Job had prayed for his three friends, the Lord healed Job and prospered him and gave him twice as much as he had had before. ¹¹Then Job was welcomed back home by his family. Friends came and ate with him in his home. They spoke kindly to him and comforted him because of all the troubles he had had. Each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.

¹²The Lord blessed the last of Job's life even more than the first part. Job soon had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand pairs of oxen and one thousand donkeys, twice as many as before. ¹³Also, he had seven more sons and three more daughters. ¹⁴The first daughter was named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the youngest Keren Happuch. ¹⁵No women in all the land were as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father gave them a share of the inheritance along with their brothers. ¹⁶Job lived a hundred and forty years after the Lord healed him. He lived to see his grandchildren and their children down to the fourth generation. ¹⁷Then he died, having lived a long and purposeful life.

PSALMS

PSALM 1

True Happiness

¹Happy is the man who isn't influenced by the ungodly, who doesn't participate in the ways of evildoers and who doesn't scoff at God, ²but who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates daily on God's word. ³He will be like a tree planted by a stream, bearing fruit in season and keeping its leaves in times of drought. The good he does will last forever.

⁴The ungodly are not like that. They're like chaff which the wind blows away. ⁵The actions of the wicked will speak against them in the judgment, and they will not be numbered among those who love God.

⁶The Lord watches over His people, but the ungodly will be destroyed.

PSALM 2

God's Chosen King

¹Why are the nations so agitated? Why do they plot together against God's people? ²The kings of the earth are ready to fight. They refuse to acknowledge the sovereignty of God or pledge fidelity to His Anointed. ³They say, "Let us break free from the chains that bind us."

⁴But the Lord of heaven is amused at their feeble attempts to escape His sovereignty. ⁵He rebukes them by speaking; He frightens them by unleashing nature's power. ⁶He says, "I have appointed my own King! He will set up His throne in Jerusalem and rule the earth from Mount Zion."

⁷Let me tell you what the Lord has told me. He said to His Son, "You are my Son and I am your Father. ⁸I will give you the earth to rule. It will be your kingdom and your eternal inheritance. ⁹You will rule with a scepter of justice. You will break those who oppose you like pottery."

¹⁰Why can't kings be wise, listen to God's warnings and be merciful? ¹¹Why can't they joyously obey the Lord and honor Him? ¹²Let kings submit to the rule

of God's Son who has power to heal or destroy. Happy are those who go to Him for protection, knowing that He has their good at heart.

PSALM 3

A Morning Prayer

¹Lord, my enemies are increasing. My son wants to kill me to take the throne, and my people have rebelled against me. ²Many say, "God has abandoned him," and so far, it seems they are right.

³But, Lord, you are my shield and defense. I have gloried in you, and you have lifted my spirits and given me courage. ⁴I have cried to you for help and you have always come to my aid from your holy hill.

⁵I fall asleep knowing you care about me and awaken knowing you're still with me. ⁶So I will not fear ten thousand enemies on every side, determined to fight against me.

⁷You will come to my rescue and smite my enemies on the cheek. You will save me, no matter what my enemies say. ⁸Salvation and victory come only from you. Do forgive and bless your people.

PSALM 4

An Evening Prayer

¹Please listen to me and answer, O my righteous Lord. Relieve my distress, be merciful and hear my prayer as I speak to my people.

²How long will you leaders insult me and turn my honor into shame? How long will you enjoy slandering me and spreading falsehoods? ³The Lord counts as His those who are committed to doing right. He will answer my prayer when I call on Him.

⁴If you are angry, do not sin. Stand in awe of the Lord. Examine your heart when you lie down at night. ⁵Offer the sacrifice of obedience to God and trust Him.

⁶Many ask, "Who will show us anything good?" May the blessing of your presence

be seen, O Lord. ⁷You have given me more joy than an abundant harvest of grain or grapes could bring. ⁸At night I will sleep in peace because the Lord watches over me and keeps me safe.

PSALM 5

A Prayer for Protection

¹Listen to me, O Lord. Please consider my groaning. ²Listen to my cry for help, my God and King. Where else can I go? ³You hear my voice every morning. Before sunrise I lay my petitions before you and wait for an answer.

⁴You are not a God who finds crime and violence entertaining. Evil finds no place in your presence. ⁵Pride is offensive to you and you recoil at the sight of wickedness. ⁶You do not give the gift of eternal life to liars, to the violent or to those who are deceptive.

⁷Yet you love everyone, including me. I want to reverently worship you in your holy Temple and testify to your mercy. ⁸Lord, I have so many enemies and obstacles to face. Lead me in your way and give me strength to do right.

⁹I can't trust anyone or lean on others for help. Everyone flatters me and says what they think I want to hear. Following their advice is not wise. ¹⁰O God, you condemn dishonesty. Flatterers will suffer the consequences of what they say. Banish them because in their hearts they have turned against you.

¹¹Let everyone who trusts in you be glad and rejoice. Protect those who love you, and we will sing your praises forever. ¹²Lord, I know you bless those who love and obey you. Your love surrounds them like a shield.

PSALM 6

A Prayer for Help in Troubled Times

¹Lord, please don't be upset with me. Don't continue to discipline me for my sins. ²Be merciful, for I am exhausted. Please help and heal me, for I'm worn down to my bones. ³Even my soul is in agony. Lord, how long will it be until

you come and help me?

⁴Please come to my rescue. Be merciful to me because of your great love. ⁵When I die, I can't serve you. When I'm in the grave, how can I praise your goodness?

⁶I'm too tired to even ask you for help. I go to bed groaning, and during the night my pillow becomes soaked with tears. ⁷I cannot see because of so much crying. I'm aging faster than my enemies.

⁸I wish these wicked people would just leave me alone. The Lord knows my pain, and He will answer my prayer. ⁹Yes, He will hear my groaning and give me help and strength. ¹⁰My enemies will be ashamed of what they have done. They will be disgraced and will leave in shame.

PSALM 7

A Prayer for Justice

¹O Lord, my God, I put all my trust in you. Protect and save me from those who want to harm me. ²They come at me like hungry lions stalking a deer, determined to tear me to pieces, and there is no escape.

³If I have wronged anyone, if I have been wicked, ⁴if I have betrayed a trusting friend, or even if I have falsely accused an enemy, ⁵then let my foes pursue and capture me. Let them trample me in the dust and leave my body unburied.

⁶But, Lord, please take my part, for I haven't wronged anyone or been wicked. Defend me against my enemies and rescue me. Please see that justice is done. ⁷Bring the people together under your kingship, not mine, and rule over them. ⁸I know you judge righteously; consider my integrity, and vindicate me before my enemies. ⁹Lord, you know our hearts and minds. Stop the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure.

¹⁰God will defend and save the upright in heart. ¹¹He is a righteous Judge who will reward the righteous and punish the wicked. ¹²If the wicked do not change their ways, God will sharpen His sword and ready His bow and arrows. ¹³He will not stand idly by and let the wicked take

over the earth. His flaming arrows will hit their target, and the wicked will suffer the consequences of their deeds.

¹⁴They keep coming up with schemes to cause trouble, planning how to deceive others and achieve their own ends. ¹⁵They dig a pit for others but fall into it themselves. ¹⁶Their evil will return on their own heads. They'll be caught up and carried away by their own violence.

¹⁷Thank you, Lord, for always doing what is right and just. I will sing praises to you, the one true God of heaven and earth.

PSALM 8

God's Glory and Man's Worth

¹O Lord, our Lord, your excellence can be seen everywhere on earth. Your glory is written across the heavens. ²Children look up at the sky and praise you. The great expanse of the heavens reveals your mighty power and silences your enemies.

³When I consider the heavens and what you have done, the moon and stars that you made, I am awed. ⁴What is man that you concern yourself over him? Of what value is he that you continue to care for him? ⁵You made him a little lower than the angels, crowned him with royalty and honored him with some of your power.

⁶You trusted him by placing him in charge of everything you created, making him a steward of your possessions. ⁷Domestic animals such as sheep and cattle, and even wild animals, recognize man's superiority to them. ⁸The birds, fish and other creatures in the sea also respect man. ⁹O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth!

PSALM 9

Thanksgiving for God's Righteous Judgments

¹I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart. I will tell of the wonderful things you have done. ²I will be glad and rejoice because of you. I will sing praises to your name.

³My enemies turn and run when you

come to help me. They fall down at your presence and perish. ⁴You have heard my prayer. You are fair and just with everyone. ⁵You rebuke those who are evil and destroy the wicked. They will not be remembered ever again. ⁶Our enemies will reach their end, and no one will come to help them. Their cities and monuments will perish, and all the wickedness they have done will be forgotten.

⁷The Lord will be king and will rule with fairness and justice. ⁸He will judge the world in righteousness and rule the nations with equity. ⁹Even now the Lord is a refuge for the oppressed. He is a place of safety in times of trouble. ¹⁰Those who know the Lord will trust Him because He rejects no one who comes to Him for help.

¹¹So let's sing praises to the Lord who dwells with us in Zion. Tell everyone who listens what He has done for us. ¹²God doesn't forget the atrocities suffered by the poor. He hears their cries and will come and help them.

¹³O Lord, my enemies are on the attack. Have mercy on me, and rescue me from the jaws of death. ¹⁴I want to stand again before the people of Jerusalem and declare your praises, rejoicing because you have saved me.

¹⁵Wicked nations dig pits for others, only to fall in themselves. Their feet are caught in their own nets. ¹⁶Lord, you are known to be righteous and fair in your decisions; the wicked set their own trap by what they do.

¹⁷Their destiny is extinction, and so it is for all who turn against you. ¹⁸But the needy will not always be forgotten; the hopes of the afflicted will not perish.

¹⁹Lord, don't let the heathen prevail, but arise and pronounce judgment against them. ²⁰May they learn to fear you, Lord. Teach them that they are only human.

PSALM 10

Confidence in God's Triumph Over Evil

¹Lord, why are you so far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of difficulty?

²The wicked take advantage of the

poor and are proud of it. They devise schemes and set traps to catch the innocent. ³The wicked boast about what they want. They bless the greedy and despise the Lord.

⁴The wicked think they're so important that they don't need you. In their pride they give no consideration to you. ⁵The wicked always seem to prosper. Then they become more proud and have no intention of keeping your law. They sneer at anyone who opposes them. ⁶They say to themselves, "Nothing will happen to us. We've built a secure future for ourselves and we intend to enjoy life as long as we live."

⁷Yet their mouths are full of curses, lies and threats. They use their tongues only for evil. ⁸They hide near villages and watch for an opportunity to kill. They murder the innocent and abuse the helpless, then gloat over what they have done. ⁹They are like a lion waiting in the bush to pounce on a helpless victim. He catches his prey, drags it into the bush and devours it. ¹⁰Victims of the wicked don't have a chance. They are thrown down and crushed under the weight of their attacker. ¹¹The wicked think, "God doesn't do anything to stop us. He closes His eyes to what we do and looks the other way."

¹²O Lord, when will you punish the wicked? When will you remember the helpless? ¹³How can the wicked reason the way they do? How can they say, "God won't do anything to us because He doesn't care what we do?" ¹⁴But, Lord, I know you care. You see everything the wicked do, as well as how the poor are suffering. I know that you're willing to help them. The poor depend on you, Lord, because they believe you care. They know you're the only One who can save them. ¹⁵Stop the wicked from what they're doing. Call them to account for their wickedness, and let them taste some of the suffering they have brought on others.

¹⁶You are the rightful king, Lord, and will be so forever. One day the wicked

will perish from the land and be no more.

¹⁷In the meantime, listen to the cries of the helpless and the prayers of the afflicted. Give them the help and courage they need. ¹⁸Protect the fatherless and the oppressed; listen to their cry. Judge the wicked; only then will they stop terrorizing the poor and helpless.

PSALM 11

Confidence in the Lord

¹I put my confidence in the Lord.

Why do you say to me, "Run and hide in the mountains"?

²The wicked are bending their bows and placing their arrows, ready to shoot those who are upright in heart. ³What are the righteous to do when everything seems to fall apart?

⁴Look to the Lord who is in His holy temple. He is still on His heavenly throne. He looks and sees what is in the hearts of people everywhere. ⁵The Lord tests the faith of the righteous. He despises the arrogance of the wicked and their love of violence because of the pain and hurt it brings on others. ⁶Someday He will send down hot coals on the wicked just as He did on Sodom. A scorching wind will blow them away, and they will be no more.

⁷The Lord is righteous. He loves righteousness. Someday the righteous will see His face.

PSALM 12

A Prayer for Help Against Treachery

¹Help me, Lord. All the good men are gone. There's hardly an honest man left. ²I can't trust anyone anymore. Everyone lies to me or deceives me with flattery.

³O Lord, silence those flattering lips. Close those boastful mouths which say, ⁴"Our tongues will get us what we want. We can say anything we please. No one can tell us what to do."

⁵But God says, "Because the weak are oppressed and the needy groan, I will come in judgment and give them the place of safety for which they long." ⁶The words of the Lord can be trusted.

They're as genuine as silver that's been refined seven times. ⁷The Lord will protect us and keep us safe. His word can be trusted forever.

⁸Meanwhile, the wicked strut around as if they owned the world, because what is vile is now honored among men.

PSALM 13

Trust in God's Unfailing Mercy

¹How much longer, Lord, will you forget that I'm here? It seems like forever! How long will you turn your face from me?

²How long must I struggle with my thoughts about you? There's not a day when I have peace in my soul. How long will my enemies be honored above me? ³Consider my distress and answer me, Lord. I plead with you to encourage me, or I will surely die.

⁴And if I die now, my enemies will say, "We've finally gotten rid of him." They'll be happy and celebrate my passing.

⁵But I'll continue to trust in your unfailing mercy. My heart will rejoice in your salvation. ⁶I break out in song whenever I think of how good you have been to me.

PSALM 14

The Unbelieving Fool

¹Only fools say in their hearts, "There is no God!" They are evil and don't want God to hold them accountable for their sins. No human nature is trustworthy or good.

²God looks down from heaven on mankind to see if anyone understands goodness or desires to please Him. ³But everyone has followed their own inclinations, so no one is fit for heaven. No one has been good every day of his life, not even one person.

⁴The Lord asks, "Doesn't anyone know what is right? Why do men continue to sin when the consequences are so evident? Why don't they ask me to help them?"

⁵Many do not call on the Lord because they're afraid of Him—afraid because of their sins. But the Lord is with those who want to do right; they are welcome in His

presence. ⁶Evildoers take advantage of the poor, but the Lord will provide a refuge for them. ⁷Oh, that salvation would come to Israel! When the Lord rescues His people, then the people of Israel will be glad.

PSALM 15

The Character of Those Who Enter Heaven

¹Lord, who may enter your Sanctuary and live with you forever on your sacred hill?

²Those who are sincere in words and actions and, with your help, obey you, ³who do not lie, gossip or wrong others in any way, ⁴who despise wickedness but honor those who love you, ⁵who loan money without taking advantage of those in need nor accept bribes to testify against the innocent; whoever does these things will someday live with you forever.

PSALM 16

Secure in Hope

¹Protect me, O Lord, from my enemies, because I have made you my hiding place. ²From the depth of my heart I said to the Lord, "You are my God. Apart from you, I can do nothing good." ³How He values His devoted people! His greatest delight is to be with them.

⁴Those who turn to idols will bring trouble on themselves. I will not offer sacrifices to other gods nor even speak their names.

⁵Lord, you are all I need. You are my inheritance and my future. ⁶My lot has fallen in pleasant places. How good you have been to me! ⁷I praise you, Lord, for your guidance. Even at night I feel your leading.

⁸I have always kept you first in my life. Because you are by my side, I cannot be shaken. ⁹My heart is glad and my tongue rejoices. I am secure in hope. ¹⁰You will not give me up to death. You value me as your Son, and you will not let His body stay in the grave. ¹¹You have shown me

the pathway to life. In your presence is fullness of joy, and at your right hand are pleasures forever.

PSALM 17

Confidence in God

¹Hear, O Lord, my plea for justice. Listen to my cry for help. Accept my heartfelt prayer that comes from honest lips. ²Vindicate me, O Lord, because only you can see into the hearts of people. ³And you know my heart. Even during the night, you tested me. You found that I have no desire to be dishonest. ⁴As far as human effort is concerned, I will cling to your word and not walk in the enticing ways of the ungodly. ⁵Help me to follow where you lead so I will not slip and fall.

⁶I call on you, Lord, because I know you will answer me. Please listen to me and hear my prayer. ⁷Show me your wonderful love more tangibly. I know what you do for those who take refuge in you. ⁸Protect me as you protect your own eyes. Hide me under the shadow of your wings as a mother hen hides her little chicks.

⁹Protect me from the wicked who are after me and from my enemies who surround me. ¹⁰They have no pity, and when they speak, their mouths drip with arrogance. ¹¹They follow me everywhere, looking for an opportunity to discredit what I say. ¹²They are like lions in the bush, just waiting for a chance to catch me and tear me to pieces.

¹³O Lord, please rescue me. Confront them with your word which is more powerful than a sword. ¹⁴O Lord, save me from these people, from those whose only concern is this life, whose future life is not even in their thinking. They have plenty for themselves and give all their inheritance to their children. ¹⁵But I have placed my confidence in you. I know that I will live again and meet you face to face. What a glorious day that will be! Your presence will fully satisfy me.

PSALM 18

A Song of Victory

¹Lord, I love you. You are my strength, my defender and my Savior.

²The Lord is my rock, my fortress, my deliverer. He is the rock in whose shadow I take refuge. He is my shield and the strong horn of my defense. ³When I'm in trouble, I will cry to the Lord for help, and He will hear and rescue me from my enemies. The Lord is worthy to be praised.

⁴There were times in battle when death itself seemed to surround me. Wickedness was everywhere and made me fearful. ⁵Death coiled like a noose around me, and the grave was like a trapdoor, set to snap shut on its next victim.

⁶In my fear I called on the Lord. I cried out to my God for help. Far away in His Temple, He heard my voice and listened to my cry. ⁷Then the earth moved and the mountains shook. God acted in my behalf! ⁸Smoke issued from His nostrils, and flames poured from His mouth. ⁹He opened the sky and rode down on clouds of the storm to rescue me. ¹⁰He answered my prayer as quickly as if He had flown in on wings of the wind. ¹¹I knew He was there, but could not see Him because He was covered with thick clouds, hiding behind the dark storm. ¹²Hail and lightning were part of His response from behind the clouds.

¹³The Most High God spoke from heaven in claps of thunder with hailstones and lightening. ¹⁴Bolts of lightning were arrows from His quiver which scattered my enemies. ¹⁵The bottom of the oceans were laid bare and the heart of the earth uncovered. The Lord roared at my enemies, the breath of His nostrils blasting them. ¹⁶He reached down from heaven, took me, and pulled me out of the whirlpool of death. ¹⁷He rescued me from my enemies, from those foes who were too strong for me.

¹⁸They confronted me in battle, sure of victory, but the Lord rescued me. ¹⁹He surrounded me with stillness and deliv-

ered me because He loves me. ²⁰The Lord hears me because I try to do what is right. He blesses my innocence and honesty. ²¹I have followed after the law of the Lord and have never done such a wicked thing as to turn against my Maker. ²²I have tried to observe all His laws and have not turned against His commandments. ²³My heart is pure, and I have made every effort to keep from doing wrong. ²⁴The Lord blesses me because I try to do what is right. He knows my innocence.

²⁵Lord, you love everyone, but you are especially faithful to those who are loyal to you and good to those who respond to your love and grace. ²⁶You open the path to purity even wider to those who want to be pure, but in your wisdom you work differently with those who are wicked. ²⁷You deal tenderly with those who are humble, and lovingly humble those who are proud. ²⁸O Lord, you brighten my dark path. ²⁹With your help I can attack the enemy and scale their massive walls.

³⁰God's ways are flawless. His word is trustworthy. He is a shield to those who trust Him. ³¹Who is the Rock except our Lord? Who is the Lord besides our God? ³²God gives me strength and makes my paths safe to walk in. ³³He makes me as sure-footed as a deer and keeps me safe on the mountains. ³⁴He helps me when I train for battle so that when I pull the strongest bow, my aim is straight.

³⁵Lord, you have given me salvation. You have sustained me in battle. Your gentleness has made me great. ³⁶You have kept me from stumbling by clearing the path before me. ³⁷With your help I pursued my enemies and overtook them. I pressed the battle until victory was complete. ³⁸I defeated them so they were never strong enough to attack Israel again. ³⁹You gave me strength for the battle and subdued those who attacked me.

⁴⁰You made my enemies turn and run, and I was victorious over those who hated me. ⁴¹They cried to their gods, but their gods could not save them. Then

they called upon you, but you did not answer. ⁴²I made them bite the dust. I walked on them like mud in the streets. ⁴³You saved me from continuous attacks by my enemies and made me the head of nations. Even people who are not Israelites listen respectfully to me. ⁴⁴Foreigners bow before me and do whatever I ask. ⁴⁵The nations around us have lost heart. They come out of their fortresses to ask for peace.

⁴⁶The Lord truly lives! Praise be to the Rock of my defense. He is my Saviour. Let Him be exalted forever. ⁴⁷He gives me victory over my enemies. He subdues nations before me.

⁴⁸He saves me from my enemies and rescues me from violent men. He exalts me above my foes. ⁴⁹I will thank you, Lord, when I meet the representatives of other nations, singing your praises in their presence. ⁵⁰You have given the king of Israel great victories and shown mercy to the one you have chosen to rule, to your son David and his descendants.

PSALM 19

God's Revelation in Nature

¹The heavens declare God's glory and the skies reveal His handiwork. ²Day after day they speak to us, and night after night they reveal God's wisdom. ³They do not have to speak with words or sounds, ⁴yet their voice is heard everywhere, and their words reach the ends of the earth. In these same heavens God made a home for the sun. ⁵In the morning it comes out like a happy bridegroom or an athlete ready to run a race. ⁶It arches from one end of the sky to the other, and nothing can hide from its heat.

⁷The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The testimony of the Lord is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple. ⁸The statutes of the Lord are right, and those who follow them are happy. The commandments of the Lord are pure, enlightening the mind. ⁹Respect for the Lord is good; it will continue forever. The judgments of the Lord are fair

and altogether righteous. ¹⁰His laws are more precious than gold, more valuable than fine gold. They are sweeter than honey, even the drippings from the honeycomb. ¹¹By them I am warned, and when I follow them, I am richly rewarded.

¹²No one sees his own faults. Forgive me, Lord, for sinning ignorantly. ¹³Keep me from being stubborn and from willfully sinning against you. Only you can free me from the controlling power of sin and help me live an innocent life.

¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.

PSALM 20

A Prayer for the King

¹May the Lord answer you when you're in trouble. May the God of Jacob protect you always. ²May He send you help from His sanctuary above and strengthen you from His holy hill. ³May He remember your sacrifice for others and accept all the offerings you bring. ⁴May He give you the desire of your heart and fulfill your plans. ⁵Then we will rejoice in your salvation and celebrate your victories by praising the Lord. May He grant all your requests.

⁶I know that the Lord saves His anointed. He answers him from heaven showing the strength of His mighty hand. ⁷Those who trust in armaments will eventually fall, but we will trust in the name of our God. ⁸Others will be brought to their knees and fall, but we will rise and stand firm.

⁹O Lord, save me again as I go into battle. Answer us when we call on you.

PSALM 21

Praise for Victory

¹O Lord, your chosen king rejoices because of your strength. You have saved him and made him victorious. ²You have given him his heart's desire. You did not refuse his requests. ³You have blessed him greatly. You have

placed a golden crown on his head.

⁴He asked you for a long life and you have given it to him. Then you also have given him a life that will never end. ⁵His glory is great because of your salvation. You have also given him majesty and honor. ⁶Your blessings never end, but most of all, you've made him very happy by your presence. ⁷The king trusts in the Lord. Because of your constant mercy, he will always feel secure.

⁸You will find all your enemies. You will prevail over those who war against you. ⁹At the time of your appearing, your presence will be like a burning fire. Your enemies will be devoured by flames and consumed forever. ¹⁰Not one of your enemies will survive. They will have no descendants. ¹¹They may plot evil against you, but their wicked schemes will not succeed. ¹²Like a giant warrior, you will aim your arrows at them and they will turn their backs and run.

¹³We praise you, Lord, for your great strength. We sing and praise your power forever.

PSALM 22

Prayer and Praise of a Suffering Man

¹My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far away? Haven't you heard my groaning? ²O my God! I cry out by day, but you don't answer. And I cry at night but get no response.

³Yet, I know that you are the Holy One. You are the One whom Israel praises. ⁴Our fathers put their trust in you. They trusted, and you delivered them. ⁵They cried out to you and were saved. Whenever they trusted in you, they were not disappointed.

⁶But something is wrong. I don't even feel like a human being any more, but like a worm. I am scorned by those who meet me and despised by my own people. ⁷Everyone who sees me laughs. They stick out their tongues, shake their heads, and hurl insults, saying, ⁸"If you trust so much in the Lord, why doesn't He come and

save you? If the Lord likes you, why doesn't He rescue you?"

⁹O Lord, you are the One who brought me forth from the womb and taught me to trust you since early childhood. ¹⁰My mother entrusted me to your care before I was born. You have always been my God. ¹¹Don't distance yourself from me. Trouble has come upon me, and there is no one to help.

¹²I feel like I'm in a bull pen surrounded by the fierce bulls from Bashan. ¹³With open mouths, they seem as eager to charge me as hungry lions. ¹⁴My strength is gone, drained from my body as water from a broken jar. My heart has melted like wax, and my arms feel pulled from their sockets. ¹⁵My throat is as dry as the desert sands. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. I feel as if you've left me lying in the dust to die. ¹⁶Evil men have surrounded me like a pack of wild dogs. They have pierced my hands and feet. ¹⁷Every part of my body is exposed to public view. People come and stare at me. ¹⁸They have stripped me of my clothes and gambled to see who gets my cloak.

¹⁹O Lord, don't be so far away! You are my strength, so hurry to my rescue! ²⁰Save me from the sword of death. Deliver me from these mad dogs. ²¹Save me from these lions and from the horns of these wild bulls. I know you have heard me.

²²I will tell my people all about you. I will honor your name in the great assembly. ²³Praise Him, you servants of the Lord! Honor Him, you descendants of Jacob! Worship Him, all you people of Israel! ²⁴He has not despised the suffering of the afflicted One. He has not turned His face away but has listened to His cry for help.

²⁵Before the great assembly I will praise you for what you have done. In the presence of those who worship you, I will do what I promised. ²⁶The time will come when the poor will eat until they are satisfied. Those who come to the Lord for help will find it. They will praise Him for-

ever. ²⁷The time will come when every nation on earth will turn to Him. People from everywhere will worship Him.

²⁸The kingship of the world belongs to the Lord God of Israel. He will eventually rule all nations. ²⁹The rich will bow down to Him, and every living person will worship Him. ³⁰People yet unborn will honor Him. Men everywhere will speak to each other about Him. ³¹They will proclaim His righteousness. Even future generations will say, "The Lord God is the One who has saved us! He has done it!"

PSALM 23

The Lord Our Shepherd

¹The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need. ²He lets me lie down in green meadows. He leads me beside quiet waters. ³He restores the strength of my soul. He guides me along paths of righteousness.

⁴Even when I walk through a valley of frightful shadows facing death, I will fear no evil, because you are with me. Your rod and staff comfort me. ⁵You spread out a banquet for me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with drops of oil. My heart overflows with gratitude.

⁶Your goodness and mercy will be with me every day of my life, and I will live with the Lord in His house forever.

PSALM 24

The King of Glory

¹The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live here. ²He formed dry land in the middle of the waters and established it on the depths of the seas.

³Who then has a right to walk up the Lord's hill and stand in His Holy Place? ⁴Those who are innocent and pure in heart. Those who neither worship gods of their own making nor falsely swear to something untrue. ⁵They will receive a blessing from the Lord. He will declare them innocent and they will stand justified. ⁶They've been promised they will see the God of Jacob, for they long to be like Him.

⁷Lift up your heads, O you gates! Be lifted up, you everlasting doors! The King of Glory is coming in! ⁸Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty; the Lord, mighty in battle.

⁹Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift them up, you everlasting doors! The King of Glory is coming in! ¹⁰Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of Glory!

PSALM 25

A Prayer for Guidance and Mercy

¹To you, O Lord, I lift up my prayers. ²In you, my God, do I trust. Don't let me be disgraced nor let my enemies triumph over me. ³Don't let those who place their hope in you be put to shame. Let those be shamed who deal treacherously without any reason.

⁴Teach me your ways, O Lord. Show me the way you want me to go. ⁵Guide me into your truth and help me apply it to my life, for my only hope is in you. ⁶Remember your kindness and love which you have shown us in days gone by. ⁷Forgive the sins of my youth as well as my present rebellious ways. Remember me according to your mercy, for you are a good and loving God.

⁸The Lord is upright and good. He teaches sinners the way they should go. ⁹He guides the humble in what is right and helps them do His will. ¹⁰With mercy and truth He leads those who are committed to keeping His covenant, obeying His commandment and listening to His testimonies. ¹¹For the sake of your name, Lord, forgive my sin, for my guilt is great.

¹²Who will learn from the Lord? Those who follow the path He has chosen for them. ¹³They will enjoy God's goodness, and their descendants will inherit the earth. ¹⁴The Lord confides in those who respect Him and shares His covenant with them. ¹⁵I looked to the Lord for help, and He came and rescued me from danger.

¹⁶Turn to me, Lord, and show mercy, for I am alone and weak. ¹⁷My troubles are multiplying. Please free me from my

problems. ¹⁸Consider my distress and pain and forgive me for my sins. ¹⁹Look at all the enemies I have. See how much they hate me. ²⁰Keep my soul, Lord, and deliver me. Don't let me be disgraced, because I trust you. Please take care of me.

²¹May my integrity and honesty protect me because my hope is in you. ²²O Lord, save your people Israel from all their troubles.

PSALM 26

A Prayer of a Good Man

¹Vindicate me, Lord, for I have tried to do what's right and have put my total trust in you. ²Examine me, O Lord, and test my heart and mind. ³Your loving kindness is my guide, and I try always to walk in your truth.

⁴I do not spend time with liars nor consort with those who hide their sins. ⁵I hate being with evildoers and refuse to sit with them. ⁶Lord, I wash my hands before you, declaring my innocence, and join the worshipers assembling around your altar. ⁷I will sing aloud your praises and tell everyone what wonderful things you have done.

⁸I love to come to your Sanctuary to worship because your presence is there. ⁹Don't number me with those who openly sin, or judge me as a bloodthirsty man. ¹⁰Their hands are full of wicked schemes; they pervert justice for money.

¹¹As for me, I want to please you. So be merciful to me, Lord, and save me. ¹²I know that I stand on solid ground. In front of the whole congregation I will praise you.

PSALM 27

A Song of Faith

¹The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid? ²When my enemies advance to overpower me saying slanderous things, they will stumble and fall. ³Though a whole army surrounds me, my heart will not be afraid. Though

every nation declares war on us, even then I will trust God.

⁴The one thing I ask of the Lord, the thing I look for, is to remain close to Him my entire life, to see the beauty of His character and to talk with Him in His Temple. ⁵In the day of trouble, He will shelter me. He will hide me under His tent or set me high on a rock above my enemies. ⁶Then I can hold my head up in the presence of my enemies. I will go to His Tabernacle and offer sacrifices with shouts of joy. I will sing songs of thanksgiving to my God.

⁷Hear me, O Lord, when I cry out to you for help. Be kind and answer my prayer. ⁸When you say, "Seek the Lord," I answer, "Your face, O Lord, I will seek." ⁹Don't hide your face from me, Lord. Don't turn away in anger from your servant, for you have always been my help. O Lord, my God, don't forsake me now. ¹⁰Even if my father and mother abandoned me, the Lord would love and care for me.

¹¹Teach me what to do, O Lord. Lead me on a safe path, for my enemies are trying to kill me. ¹²Don't give me over to them. False witnesses have lied about me. They breathe out cruelty.

¹³I am confident of surviving the battle to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. ¹⁴Trust in the Lord and take courage. Wait for Him and He will strengthen your heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord!

PSALM 28

The Joy of Answered Prayer

¹I will cry out to you, O Lord, my Rock. Please don't turn a deaf ear to me. If you remain silent, I might as well die. ²Please hear me when I cry for help, when I lift up my hands in prayer toward your Temple.

³Don't take my life with those who do evil, Lord. Don't associate me with those who speak cordially to their neighbors but have hatred in their hearts. ⁴May they reap the consequences of their evil thoughts and deeds and taste the results

of their own wickedness. ⁵Since they show no regard for God's creative power and what He has done, they will be destroyed and will never live again.

⁶I will praise the Lord because He has heard my prayer for help. ⁷The Lord is my strength and shield. With my whole heart I trust Him and I know He will help me. My heart is glad and I will praise Him with songs of praise.

⁸The Lord loves His people and protects them. He defends His chosen king and saves him from his enemies. ⁹Save all your people, Lord, and bless those who are yours. Be their Shepherd and care for them.

PSALM 29

God's Voice in the Thunderstorm

¹Give to the Lord, you mighty ones, acknowledgment of His glory and strength. ²Praise His glorious name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

³The voice of the Lord echoes over the oceans; His glory thunders across the waters. ⁴The voice of the Lord is all-powerful and full of majesty. ⁵His voice can snap the cedars, even the huge cedars of Lebanon. ⁶He makes the mountains of Lebanon jump like a calf and Mount Hermon shake itself like a young bull. ⁷The voice of the Lord makes lightning flash. ⁸His voice makes the deserts quiver, even the Desert of Kadesh. ⁹It shakes the mighty oaks and strips the leaves of the forest from their trees. In His Temple the people shout, "Glory!"

¹⁰The Lord commands the flood and it listens. He rules over all and sits enthroned as King forever. ¹¹May the Lord strengthen His people and bless them with peace.

PSALM 30

Thanksgiving for Answered Prayer

¹I praise you, Lord, because you have saved me. You have kept my enemies from laughing at me. ²I cried to you for help, O Lord my God, and you healed me. ³I was almost dead, yet you snatched me

from the grave and restored my life.

⁴Sing to the Lord, you saints of His! Praise His holy name! Remember what He has done for you and give thanks! ⁵His displeasure lasts only a moment, but His goodness lasts a lifetime. Tears may come for a night, but gladness bursts forth with the morning.

⁶When all was going well, I said, "How can I fail?" ⁷Then I realized that you were the One who gave me strength to stand as a mountain, but when you turned the other way, I was afraid. ⁸I called on you, Lord, and pleaded for mercy. ⁹"What good will it do for me to die? What will you gain?" I said. "Will my dust praise you or tell of your goodness?"

¹⁰"So hear me, Lord, and be merciful to me for your name's sake. O Lord, please help me!" ¹¹And He did hear! He turned my grief into joy. He took away my sorrow and surrounded me with gladness. ¹²I will praise you for what you have done and will not be silent. You are my God, and I will thank you forever.

PSALM 31

The Lord a Fortress in Times of Trouble

¹O Lord, I look to you for protection. Don't let me be disgraced. You are just and righteous, so deliver me. ²Listen to my plea and come to my rescue. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress in whom I can hide. ³Since you are my Rock and my Fortress, for your name's sake, lead and guide me as you have promised. ⁴Keep me from falling into the trap Satan has set for me and be my refuge. ⁵Into your hands I commit my life and my spirit. Save me, O Lord, for you are faithful.

⁶I hate it when people succumb to idolatry and stubbornly cling to their idols. But I will cling to you, O Lord. ⁷I will rejoice in your love. You have seen my affliction and the anguish of my heart. ⁸You did not let my enemies capture me but brought me safely home, back to the spacious places in Israel.

⁹Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I'm distressed. My eyes are weary from so

much crying. I am completely exhausted.

¹⁰My energy is gone because of grief, and my life is shortened because of pain. I am so weak from all my troubles that even my bones are wasting away. ¹¹My enemies scorn me, my neighbors treat me with contempt, and my friends pretend they don't see me. ¹²Everyone acts as if I don't exist. They treat me like a broken piece of pottery. ¹³Yes, I have heard about my enemies' plans, their conspiracies and plots to take my life.

¹⁴But I trust in you, O Lord. You will always be my God. ¹⁵My life is in your hands. Deliver me from my enemies and those who plot against me. ¹⁶Look on your servant with kindness and save me because of your unfailing love. ¹⁷I'm calling on you, Lord; don't let me be disgraced. Let the wicked be disgraced by their wickedness and be silent in their graves. ¹⁸May their lying lips no longer move because they have spoken so arrogantly against the righteous.

¹⁹How abundant are the good things which you give to those who love you! People know how gracious you are to those who honor you and how you protect those who trust you. ²⁰You hide them by your presence from the plots of their enemies. You protect them from the accusations and insults of those who hate them.

²¹Praise be to the Lord for His love is wonderful! He protected and saved me when I was trapped in a besieged city. ²²I was afraid that the Lord was not listening to me or hearing my cries for help, but He came to my rescue.

²³Love the Lord, all you His people! The Lord preserves the faithful, but He allows the proud to reap the consequences of their wickedness. ²⁴So be courageous for the Lord and He will strengthen you; take heart, all of you who place your hope in Him.

PSALM 32

The Joy of Forgiveness

¹Happy is the man whose sins are forgiven and whose faults are covered.

²Happy is the man whose wrongs the Lord does not hold against him and who is accepted as if he had never sinned.

³When I refused to admit my sin, I seemed to grow sick; all day long my heart groaned inside of me. ⁴Day and night I was under conviction, and my strength slipped away as if it were a hot summer day. ⁵Then I confessed my sin and righted what was wrong. I said, "I will acknowledge my sins and transgressions to the Lord and ask Him for forgiveness." And you forgave me and took away my load of guilt.

⁶Everyone should pray to you in times of need; while there's still time, so when troubles rush in like a flood, it will not overwhelm them. ⁷You are my hiding place, O Lord. You will protect me from trouble; you will put a song in my heart as I sing of your deliverance.

⁸You said, "I will teach you the way that you should go; I will keep my eye on you and guide you along safe paths." ⁹Lord, help us not to act like a bucking horse or a stubborn mule which has to be controlled by a bit and bridle to make it stay in the way. ¹⁰The wicked bring suffering on themselves because of their stubbornness, but those who trust in the Lord are surrounded by His constant love.

¹¹So rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you who obey him. The Lord loves you! Shout to the Lord for joy!

PSALM 33

The Lord of Creation and History

¹Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous, because it is fitting that we should praise Him. ²Play songs of thanksgiving to God on the harp. Sing to Him accompanied by stringed instruments. ³Sing new songs; play skillfully on the strings and shout for joy!

⁴The words of the Lord are dependable; He is faithful in all that He does. ⁵The Lord loves what is right and just. The earth is full of His constant care. ⁶By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the stars by the breath of

His mouth. ⁷He collects the ocean waters as we collect water in a bottle and stores them in gigantic reservoirs.

⁸Let all the earth honor the Lord and let all people stand in awe of Him. ⁹The Lord spoke, and creation took place. He commanded, and the world came into being. ¹⁰The Lord spoils the plans of nations and thwarts the plans of people. ¹¹But no one can spoil His plans; they remain unchanged. The purpose of His heart is always the same.

¹²Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He chooses as His very own. ¹³The Lord looks down from heaven and observes the doings of men. ¹⁴From where He is, He sees us all and tenderly watches over His own. ¹⁵He who created us sees everything we do.

¹⁶No ruler is saved by the size of his army. No warrior escapes by his own skill or strength. ¹⁷No matter how many horses, chariots or weapons of war man depends on, they cannot save him.

¹⁸The Lord's eye is on those who honor Him, who place their hope in His love and trust themselves to His care. ¹⁹He delivers us from death and keeps us alive in times of hunger. ²⁰In hope we wait on the Lord; He is our help and our shield. ²¹In Him our hearts rejoice and in His holy name we trust. ²²O Lord, may your unfailing love rest upon us as we continue to place our hope in you.

PSALM 34

Praising God's Goodness

¹I will thank the Lord at all times; I will never stop praising Him. ²I will boast about what He has done. The humble and afflicted will hear and be glad. ³Come and glorify the Lord with me. Come and let us exalt His name together.

⁴I prayed to the Lord, and He answered me. He delivered me from all my fears. ⁵Those who go to Him for help are happy; they never have to cover their faces in shame. ⁶The poor man writing this cried for help; the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. ⁷The angels of

the Lord camp around those who reverence Him, and deliver them.

⁸Taste and find out for yourself how good God is. Happy is the man who takes refuge in the Lord. ⁹Respect the Lord, all you His people, for those who respect Him will have everything they need. ¹⁰Even lions grow hungry and weak, but those who listen to the Lord will lack nothing good.

¹¹Come, my young friends, and listen to me. I will teach you how to respect the Lord. ¹²Would you like to enjoy life and be happy? Do you want to live long and see many good days? ¹³Then keep your tongue from speaking falsehood and your lips from telling lies. ¹⁴Turn away from evil and do what is good. Put your whole heart into being kind and peaceful.

¹⁵The Lord watches over the righteous, and He listens to their cries. ¹⁶But He will not overlook the behavior of those who do evil. They will die and soon be forgotten. ¹⁷The righteous call to the Lord and He listens. He delivers them out of all their troubles.

¹⁸The Lord is especially close to the brokenhearted. He saves those whose spirits have been crushed. ¹⁹A righteous man may suffer and have many troubles, but the Lord saves him out of them all. ²⁰The Lord will preserve him forever. Not one of his bones will be broken.

²¹Wickedness will kill the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be held guilty. ²²The Lord will save His people. Those who flee to Him for safety will not be condemned.

PSALM 35

A Prayer for Help

¹Lord, wage battle with those who fight against me. Set yourself against those who contend with me. ²Take up your shield and armor and come to my rescue. ³Draw your bow and lift your war ax against those who are pursuing me. Tell me that you will save me.

⁴May the plans of those who plot my ruin not succeed; may they be disgraced

and turn back in dismay. ⁵May they be as straw scattered by the wind as the angel of the Lord drives them away. ⁶Let their way back be dark and slippery as the angel of the Lord pursues them. ⁷For without reason they set a trap for me and dug a deep hole for me to fall into. ⁸May they be ensnared in their own trap and fall into their own pit unexpectedly.

⁹Then I will delight in your salvation. ¹⁰My whole being will say, "Who is like you, O Lord? You rescue the weak from those who are strong, and the poor and needy from those who oppress them."

¹¹Evil men accused me of things I know nothing about. ¹²They repay me evil for good until my soul sinks in despair. ¹³Yet when they were sick, I visited them. I put on sackcloth and fasted and prayed for their recovery. ¹⁴I cared about them as I would care about my friends and brothers. And when they got worse, I hurt for them as I would hurt over my own mother.

¹⁵But when I stumbled, they were glad. They got together and laughed. They treated me as a stranger and attacked me when I was down. ¹⁶These same people ridiculed my faith. They mocked and sneered at me.

¹⁷How much longer, O Lord, will you look on? Please rescue me from these men and their verbal blasts; save me from these hungry lions. ¹⁸Then I will thank you in the great assembly and praise you in front of all the people.

¹⁹Don't let these people gloat over me. Don't let them hate me for no reason and maliciously wink at each other without a cause. ²⁰They don't speak in a friendly tone and deceitfully talk against peace-loving people. ²¹They accuse me of things I never did and unashamedly say, "O yes, we saw him do it!" ²²But you know what I did and didn't do, Lord. So don't be silent! Speak up for me! Don't leave me alone.

²³Arise, Lord, come to my defense and plead my case. ²⁴You are righteous and just, O Lord. Please declare me innocent.

Don't let my enemies gloat over me. ²⁵Don't allow them to say, "Wonderful! We have what we wanted. He is now under suspicion." ²⁶May those who gloat over my suffering and distress be shown to be wrong. May they contradict themselves when they speak against me. May they forever be put to shame.

²⁷Let those who want me vindicated be able to shout for joy and praise your name. May they sing of your goodness and love, "O Lord, our God, how great you are! Our God delights in mercy and the well-being of His servants!" ²⁸My tongue, too, will sing of your righteousness and your justice, and I will praise you all day long for what you have done.

PSALM 36

Man's Wickedness and God's Goodness

¹Sin appeals to the hearts of the wicked because they do not acknowledge God. ²They flatter themselves that they are not doing anything that anyone sees as wrong or sinful. ³Their words are evil and deceitful; they no longer behave wisely or do good. ⁴Even while lying in bed they're plotting evil plans for the next day. They have no intention of stopping what they're doing.

⁵Yet your love for us, O Lord, is as high as the heavens and your faithfulness extends to the universe. ⁶Your righteousness towers up like the mountains, and your justice is as deep as the oceans. You provide for the needs of man and beast. ⁷How priceless is your eternal love, O God! Everyone finds security in the shadow of your wings. ⁸We feast on the abundance of your house, and you provide us drink from the table of your goodness.

⁹You are the source of all life. As we walk in your light we can see truth. ¹⁰Continue your loving kindness to those who know you, and bring salvation to those who are committed to doing right. ¹¹Don't let the proud attack me; don't let their verbal abuse drive me away. ¹²May the plans made against

me by evildoers fail and never be carried out.

PSALM 37

The Reward of the Righteous and the Wicked

¹Don't fret yourself over the wicked. Don't envy those who do wrong. ²They will disappear as grass after mowing. They will wither as green plants in a drought. ³Trust in the Lord and do good. Live a life of faithfulness, secure in His love.

⁴Trust in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will watch over you. ⁶He will make your righteousness as the rays of a new dawn and the justness of your cause as bright as the noonday sun.

⁷Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him to do things in His own time. Don't fret when wicked men prosper and succeed in their evil ways.

⁸Refrain from anger; don't get upset over things, because these reactions only bring on more trouble. ⁹Evil men will eventually be cut off, and only those who trust in the Lord will live on the earth. ¹⁰In God's timing, it won't be long before the wicked disappear; even if you look for them, you'll not find them. ¹¹But the meek, those who listen to the Lord, will inherit the earth and enjoy God's peace forever.

¹²Wicked men continue to plot against the righteous and glare at them with hatred. ¹³But the Lord laughs at the wicked because He knows that what they're doing won't last. ¹⁴The wicked draw their swords and bend their bows to wage war against the righteous. They are ready to kill even the weak and helpless. ¹⁵But their own swords will be turned against them, and their bows will snap in two.

¹⁶It's better to have little with God's approval than to have much and continue in wickedness. ¹⁷The Lord will take away the wealth of the wicked, but He will add to what the good man has.

¹⁸The Lord will take care of those who

obey Him and the land will be theirs forever. ¹⁹They will not be disheartened in times of disaster, and they will enjoy abundance in times of famine. ²⁰But the wicked will perish as a field of dry grass set on fire. They will turn into smoke and vanish. ²¹The wicked borrow money with no intention of paying it back, but the righteous give with generosity. ²²Those whose actions the Lord approves will inherit the land, but those whose actions the Lord does not approve will disappear.

²³The Lord guides those who depend on Him and gives them the help they need. ²⁴If those who depend on Him do stumble, they will not fall, because the Lord will hold their hands.

²⁵I once was young and now I'm old, but I have never seen the Lord abandon a righteous man so that his children had to beg for food. ²⁶A good man gives freely to others, and his children are a blessing to everyone.

²⁷Turn away from evil and do good, and you will receive eternal life. ²⁸The Lord loves justice; He will not abandon His faithful people. They will be preserved and live forever. But the wicked and their children will be cut off.

²⁹Those who accept God's forgiveness and do right will inherit the earth and live forever. ³⁰A good man's words are full of wisdom and his decisions are fair. ³¹The word of God is in his heart to guide him and he does not depart from it.

³²The wicked watch the righteous to find some flaw in their lives; they try to find a reason to kill them. ³³But the Lord will not abandon His people into the hands of the wicked, nor will He let them be condemned. He promises to rid the earth of injustice and evil.

³⁴Put your hope in the Lord and be guided by His commandments. He will give you the land, and you will see the destruction of the wicked. ³⁵I have seen wicked men wielding great power, who look down on everyone like the great cedars of Lebanon. ³⁶I have seen them eventually pass off the scene of action,

and when I looked to see if anyone wanted to remember them, I found no one. ³⁷But people love to remember good men, and they look to the righteous for guidance. A peace-loving man will not be forgotten. ³⁸Wicked men will be destroyed, and those who follow them will be no more.

³⁹The Lord saves the righteous. He is their refuge in the time of trouble. ⁴⁰He delivers them and saves them because they trust in Him.

PSALM 38

Prayer When Rebuked

¹O Lord, don't discipline me when I'm so painfully aware that I have hurt you. ²Your rebuke pierces more surely than an arrow; your discipline hurts more than a father's hand. ³My defense is gone; there's no fight left in me. I realize how wicked I am. ⁴I'm drowning in my own sinful nature. It's a burden tied to my back that I can't escape. ⁵At times I feel as if I'm covered with open wounds and festering sores. How foolish can I be to continue sinning! ⁶I am utterly discouraged, depressed from morning till night. ⁷The pain in my back never eases. My whole body aches. ⁸I am exhausted and my spirit is crushed. All I do is groan because of my troubles.

⁹O Lord, how I long for you! You are the only One who understands my sighs. ¹⁰My heart is pounding, all strength is gone, and my eyes have lost their sparkle. ¹¹Friends and neighbors avoid me. Even my family keep their distance as if I had leprosy.

¹²Those who want to kill me lay traps for me. They openly talk about getting rid of me. Every day someone else is plotting deception. ¹³The only way I survive is to act like a deaf mute who neither hears nor speaks. ¹⁴When people talk, I don't listen because I don't know how to answer them. ¹⁵But I trust you, Lord, because I know you care about me, and you understand what I'm telling you. ¹⁶Don't let my enemies celebrate my distress or brag

how much better they are when I slip.

¹⁷I can't hold on much longer. My whole body aches from the pressure I'm under. ¹⁸But I'm even more troubled about my wickedness and I am sorry for my sin. ¹⁹My enemies are healthy and strong, and they hate me without reason. ²⁰They pay back evil for good and oppose me because I try to do right.

²¹So don't leave me, Lord. Please don't abandon me. ²²Help me and come to my rescue, O Lord, my Savior!

PSALM 39

The Shortness of Life

¹I said, "I will submit to the Lord and be careful what I do and say. I will say nothing that the wicked can use against me." ²So I kept quiet and said nothing, not even commenting on anything good, but my anguish over the wicked only increased. ³Soon I became very angry. As I thought about the situation, the fires of revenge increased.

Then I said, ⁴"Lord, how much longer do I have to live? When will you let me die? ⁵Life is so short anyway; it doesn't matter whether I die now or later. In your sight, a lifetime is nothing, and even at its longest, man's life is like a wind that passes by and is gone. ⁶Man's life is no more than a passing shadow on the landscape. He hurries about doing this and that, but before long, he passes off the scene of action. He accumulates wealth and doesn't even know who will spend it. ⁷Lord, without you, what hope do I have? I put full confidence in you.

⁸Please save me from my sins, and don't let fools make fun of me. ⁹I'll keep quiet and not complain about my circumstances. You could have prevented these things from happening, but I will trust your wisdom.

¹⁰But please don't let this situation continue much longer. It's crushing the life out of me, and I'm about to die. ¹¹I know you discipline your children because you love them; I also know that you can destroy whatever a man loves as

easily as I can kill a moth. Every man is but a breath to you.

¹²O Lord, hear my prayer. Listen to my cry and notice my tears. Please come and help me! I'm a stranger and a pilgrim in this land of sin, just as my fathers were. ¹³Please look the other way and stop disciplining me so I can rejoice again before I die."

PSALM 40

Praise and Prayer for Mercy

¹I waited patiently for the Lord to help me; He listened to me and heard my cry. ²He pulled me out of a deadly pit, out of the quicksand of sin. He set me safely on the Rock of His salvation, and restored my security. ³He put a new song in my heart, a song of praise to our God. May all who notice also learn to trust in the Lord. ⁴Happy are those who trust in the Lord, who do not admire the proud or believe their lies.

⁵Lord, you have done many wonderful things for me. There is no God like you. Your kindnesses to all of us have been so numerous that I couldn't count them.

⁶When the Messiah comes, He will say, "O God, you don't long for sacrifices and offerings, because they cannot take away sin. You have opened my ears and I am listening. ⁷I will become your sacrifice and offer up the body you have given me. Here I am. I have come to do what is written in the book about me. ⁸I delight in doing your will, O God, and your law is written on my heart."

⁹You know what I have told the people, Lord, about the good news of salvation. I will never stop telling it. ¹⁰I have not kept the good news to myself, but have spoken to them about your faithfulness and love at every opportunity.

¹¹Lord, don't withhold your mercy from me. May your love and truth always protect me. ¹²I am surrounded by unnumbered evils. My sins have caught up with me until I cannot envision your grace. They are more numerous than the hairs on my head, and my courage is almost gone.

¹³Please save me, Lord. Hurry to help me before I give way. ¹⁴May those who want to kill me be turned back in shame and confusion. Let them be humbled by troubles of their own. ¹⁵May those who make fun of me, saying, "Aha! Aha!" be shamed into silence when they see you come to my rescue.

¹⁶May all who look to you be joyful and glad. May those who are grateful for salvation always say, "How great is the Lord!" ¹⁷I am weak and poor, O Lord, but I know you have not forgotten me. You are my help and Savior. Please don't delay, O my God.

PSALM 41

The Prayer of a Sick Man

¹Happy is he who helps the poor, for the Lord will deliver him when he is in trouble. ²The Lord will protect him and preserve his life, and others will recognize that God is with him. He will not be abandoned to the power of his enemies. ³The Lord will sustain him when he is sick and heal all of his illnesses.

⁴I know I have sinned against you, Lord. But please be merciful to me. Forgive and heal me. ⁵My enemies speak hatefully of me, saying, "When will he die so we can forget about him?" ⁶Those who visit me are insincere. They gather all the bad news about my condition and gleefully spread it abroad. ⁷All my enemies whisper about me. They put the worst possible construction on my condition. ⁸They say, "The disease he has is because of his secret sins. Now that he is bedfast, it won't be long until he dies."

⁹Even my closest friend in whom I confided, who has eaten at my house many times, has turned against me. ¹⁰You, Lord, are the only one I can trust. Be merciful and heal me so they will know that my sickness is not due to some secret sin. ¹¹This will stop their gloating and rejoicing over my impending death. Then they will know that you are my friend and are truly pleased with me. ¹²I know you will help me because I try to do

what is right. Please keep me close to you forever.

¹³Praise to the Lord, the God of Israel! Praise be to Him both now and forever! Amen and amen.

PSALM 42

Yearning for God

¹As a deer longs for cool streams of water, so I long for you, O God. ²In my inmost desires I thirst for you, Lord, the living God of Israel. I yearn for the time when I can meet you and be with you forever. ³Tears have been my only food day and night. My enemies continually say, "Where is your God?"

⁴My heart breaks when I remember how I used to lead the people to the House of God, singing and shouting glad praise to you all the way. What a spiritual feast! ⁵Why am I so sad? Why so sick at heart? O Lord, I will put my trust in you and praise you no matter how much I hurt. You are my only Savior and my God. ⁶My strength is gone; all I can do is cling to you. Whether I am across Jordan, on mighty Mount Hermon or in the quiet hills near Mount Mizar, I'm still sad. ⁷Waves of sorrow engulf me; I feel like I'm being pounded by a huge waterfall. The billows are sweeping me away.

⁸I know you are with me, Lord. By day I see evidence of your presence, and at night your love fills the air like a song. My prayers come from the heart of a confused child. ⁹Every night my prayer is the same: "O Lord, my Rock, have you forgotten my need? Why do I mourn because of my oppressive enemies?"

¹⁰I feel a stabbing pain when my enemies taunt, "Where is your God now?" ¹¹Why am I so discouraged? Why do I take these insults personally? I must trust God. He has not forsaken me. I will trust and praise Him, no matter how I feel. He is my health and life, my Savior and my God!

PSALM 43

A Prayer for Deliverance

¹Vindicate me, O Lord. Argue my case

against the ungodly and those who are not committed to you. Deliver me from the snares of deceitful and lying men. ²You are my refuge. But it seems as if you've abandoned me. Why must I be oppressed by the abuse of my enemies?

³Please shed some light on this and make the truth plain to me. Take me to your holy mountain, into your heavenly Sanctuary and your loving presence. ⁴I will go to the House of my God because He is the source of my happiness and joy. I will go and sing songs to Him. I will praise Him with my harp, singing, "My God, how great you are!"

⁵Why then am I still so distressed? What is causing this depression? I will trust in the Lord and not in my feelings. I will praise His name, for He is my Savior and my God!

PSALM 44

A Prayer for Protection

¹We have listened to what our fathers said about you, O Lord, about what you did in their day and in the days of their fathers. ²You drove out other nations and brought our ancestors into this land. You destroyed other nations because of their sins, and made your people grow strong. ³It was not by the power of their own swords that they conquered the land, nor was it because of their own strength. It was your presence and power that gave them victory because you loved them so much.

⁴You are my King and my God! You are the Commander of Israel's armies. ⁵By your power we overcome our enemies and through your name we walk on our attackers. ⁶I cannot trust my sword or my bow to save me. ⁷You have given us the victory and put our enemies to shame. ⁸So we will boast about you and what you have done. We will praise you and thank you forever.

⁹But now it seems that you have rejected us and allowed defeat. You no longer go out with our armies to give us victory. ¹⁰We've retreated before our en-

emies; they overran our camps and plundered our goods. ¹¹You've allowed our men to be killed like sheep and scattered us among the nations.

¹²We were sold for a pittance and you have gained nothing, as if we were worthless. ¹³We were disgraced before our neighbors, and they mock and scorn us. ¹⁴Surrounding nations consider us a joke, and they shake their heads and laugh. ¹⁵Every day I've been disgraced, dishonored and shamed in the eyes of my enemies. ¹⁶Even at home taunters sneer and insult me because of our defeat.

¹⁷I can't understand why this happened to us. We haven't forgotten you, nor broken your covenant. ¹⁸We've not been disloyal, nor strayed from your path. ¹⁹But you let our armies be crushed in the darkness and left us to be hunted down like wild animals. ²⁰If we had stopped worshipping you or asked some idols to protect us, ²¹you would have known about it because you know everything. ²²Was it for your glory that so many of our men died? Does it honor you when others see us as sheep to be slaughtered?

²³Lord! Please wake up! Don't keep ignoring us! ²⁴Why are you hiding from us? Why do you ignore the pain and suffering of your people? ²⁵We feel as if we've been thrown to the ground and our faces pushed into the mud. ²⁶Please arise and come to our rescue. Because of your great love, save us.

PSALM 45

A Song for a Royal Wedding

¹My heart is stirred with a noble theme as I compose this song for the wedding of my son, the future king. My tongue is like the pen of a skillful writer. ²First, I will sing about my heavenly King.

You, my Lord, are more excellent than any man. Your lips have been anointed with grace. God has blessed you and declared you to be King forever. ³Buckle on your sword, O Mighty One. Show us your majesty and glory. ⁴Ride on to victory for the sake of truth and justice. Let your

strong right arm show us what mighty deeds you can do. ⁵We know your arrows are sharp and that they can pierce the armor of our enemies. You make nations tremble and bow at your feet. ⁶We know that your throne, O God, will last forever and your scepter is one of love and justice. ⁷You love righteousness and hate wickedness. That's why God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of joy to be our King.

⁸My son, your robes are fragrant with perfume for your wedding. Out of your ivory palace comes music to make us glad. ⁹Daughters of kings are among the ladies of your court, but at your right hand is your royal bride dressed in finest linen embroidered with the choicest gold.

¹⁰Listen to me, you people who make up the royal wedding party. Let the bride forget her family ties. She now belongs to the future king. ¹¹The king is in love with his bride. He is not only her king but also her husband. ¹²Women from everywhere come with their gifts, even the wealthy come to seek the favor of their future king. ¹³O how glorious you look standing in the palace! What a lovely gown you wear, made of the finest linen embroidered with gold! ¹⁴There you are, the bride of a future king, being led to the one who loves you, followed by your bridesmaids. ¹⁵You are radiant with joy and gladness as you enter the palace of your king. ¹⁶And you, my son, will have sons of your own. They will share your throne and serve as princes throughout the land.

¹⁷As long as I live I will sing the praises of my heavenly King and perpetuate His memory throughout all generations. People from all nations will come and praise Him forever.

PSALM 46

God Is Our Refuge and Strength

¹God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. ²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth shakes and the mountains slide into the sea,

³though oceans roar and their waves foam, or the mountains sway in the bottom of the sea.

⁴There is a quiet stream called the River of Life that makes us glad. It begins at the heavenly Sanctuary and flows through the Holy City of God, the place where God Himself lives. ⁵God is also with us in our city and does not intend for Jerusalem to be destroyed. Even if we die, He will be with us until the resurrection morning. ⁶When God speaks, nations crumble and the earth itself melts.

⁷The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. ⁸Look at what the Lord has done! He has caused amazing events to happen on earth. ⁹He will stop all wars. He will halt the flying arrow, break the strongest spear and set on fire the weapons of mass destruction. ¹⁰Fighting will stop everywhere. He will say, "Be still and know that I am God. My name will be exalted among nations, and I will assume my place as King."

¹¹The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge.

PSALM 47

Praise to God, Our Mighty King

¹Clap your hands, everyone! Shout for joy! Sing to the Lord in triumph! ²How awesome is the Lord Most High! He is the great King over all the earth! ³He gave us victory over our attackers. He put our enemies under our feet. ⁴He gave us our inheritance and chose Israel as His prized possession.

⁵As the Lord ascends His throne, accompany Him with shouts of joy and the sound of trumpets. ⁶Sing praises to our God. Come and sing praises. Sing praises to our mighty King! ⁷He is King over all the earth. Sing a psalm of praise to the glory of His name! ⁸He sits on His sacred throne and rules over the nations. ⁹One day kings and princes from everywhere will join the descendants of Abraham in worshiping the Lord. There will be new heavens and a new earth; everyone will love Him, and God will be exalted forever.

PSALM 48

Zion, the City of God

¹Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. Praise Him in His city; praise Him on His holy mountain. ²Mount Zion is beautifully situated and a joy to behold. It is His mountain and a fit place for such a great King as our God.

³Within her citadels the presence of God is our sure defense. ⁴Our enemies joined forces to attack Mount Zion, ⁵but when they saw her height, they stood amazed. They turned and fled in terror. ⁶Fear overcame them when they sensed the presence of our God. Sudden pain gripped them, like the anguish of a woman in labor. ⁷You, O God, have scattered them as a mighty storm scatters ships at sea. ⁸We have heard what you have done in the past and now we have seen it with our own eyes. Surely this is the city of the Lord of Hosts. He will protect us, for He establishes it forever.

⁹Lord, we come to your Temple to meditate on your unfailing love. ¹⁰Your fame extends to the ends of the earth, and you are known for the victories you give us. ¹¹Mount Zion rejoices, and the villages of Israel are glad for your righteous judgments. ¹²Come, you pilgrims, take a good look at Mount Zion; walk around her and count her towers. ¹³Notice her walls, examine her fortifications and visit her palaces so you can tell your children what you have seen.

¹⁴This city belongs to our God, and we will be His people forever.

PSALM 49

The Foolishness of Trusting in Riches

¹Listen, everyone! Everyone who lives on the earth, listen to what I have to say. ²This is an invitation to great and small, to rich and poor. ³I will speak from experience and share with you what I have learned. ⁴I will write out my proverb and explain its meaning as I play on my harp: ⁵Why should I fear when troubles come or when crafty and wicked men are all around me? ⁶What is it that those who

boast of riches and wealth cannot buy? ⁷No one can use money to redeem himself from death or pay God the price for his life. ⁸Life is sacred and costly; it is a gift from God, and no payment is enough to buy it. ⁹No one on this earth lives forever. Everyone faces death and the grave.

¹⁰The wise and the foolish alike die and leave their wealth to their descendants. ¹¹The grave is their home. They are lowered into a narrow plot of ground, even though they owned many acres. ¹²A man's greatness cannot keep him from dying. In this sense, he is like any animal. ¹³Death is the fate of those who trust in themselves; it is the end of those who have been successful in life.

¹⁴Those who trust in riches will die like sheep. Death will be their shepherd. Those who trust in riches will make their home with the dead forever. ¹⁵But God will rescue the righteous from the grave; He will save us from the power of death.

¹⁶Don't be awed by the rich and famous, with their beautiful homes. ¹⁷When they die, they will take nothing with them. ¹⁸Even a man who flatters himself on his success in life and is praised for what he has accomplished ¹⁹will die and be buried like those before him. ²⁰A man's success and greatness cannot keep him from death. His life will end, just like animals that perish.

PSALM 50

God the Righteous Judge Will Come

¹The Lord, the mighty God, will summon the whole world from east to west when He comes.

²His presence will shine from Zion, from Jerusalem, a city perfect in beauty. ³Our God will come and will not be silent. He will come surrounded by fire, flashes of light and manifestations of power. ⁴He will call on heaven and earth as witnesses to His judgment and vindication of His people. ⁵He will say, "Gather my faithful people to me, everyone who has accepted the covenant of my sacrifice." ⁶Then those in heaven will bring in the

verdict that God is just and altogether righteous. He is judge of the earth.

⁷To us He says, "Listen, my people, and hear what I have to say. I will testify against you, O Israel. I am your God. ⁸I must rebuke you because you have put your hope in the sacrifices and burnt offerings you bring to me. ⁹Do I really need bulls from your farms and goats from your herds?"

¹⁰All the animals in the forest are mine, as are the cattle on a thousand hills. ¹¹I own every bird that flies over the mountains and every creature that walks the earth. ¹²If I were hungry, I would not need to ask you for help because the whole world and everything in it is mine. ¹³Do you think I live by eating the flesh of bulls or by drinking the blood of goats? ¹⁴What is more important is your gratitude and obedience. These are the sacrifices that count; these are what you need to pledge to bring to my altar. ¹⁵Call on me in the time of trouble. I will deliver you, and you will be an honor to my name."

¹⁶To the wicked He says, "Why do you keep reciting my law and talking about my covenant? ¹⁷You dislike instruction and turn your back on my words. ¹⁸You join with thieves and adulterers and enjoy listening to their adventures. ¹⁹You talk about wickedness and tell lies to your own advantage. ²⁰You accuse your brothers and find fault with members of your own family. ²¹You have been doing all this and I haven't rebuked you. So you got the idea that I approve and that I am no different from you. But you are mistaken. I will make it plain so you will know the kind of God I am.

²²"Listen to me. I could destroy you, but I will not use my power to force you to be good. If you turn your backs on me, who else will save you? ²³I help those who listen to me, who are thankful and willing to change their lives, even at a sacrifice. I will show them my salvation."

PSALM 51

A Prayer for Mercy and Forgiveness

¹Have mercy on me, O God, according

to your loving kindness. According to your abundant mercy, blot out my sins.

²Wash away my guilt completely and make me clean again. ³I know my sins; I am all too conscious of what I have done. ⁴When I committed adultery, I sinned against you, and you were the only One who knew about it. You are justified in declaring me guilty and have every right to condemn me. ⁵From the day my mother conceived me, my nature has inclined toward evil. ⁶You want me to have purity and wisdom deep in my heart. Teach me your ways.

⁷Sprinkle me with hyssop dipped in blood, and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. ⁸Let joy and gladness bubble up from within me. Let the bones you crushed rejoice and sing. ⁹Turn away from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new, right spirit within me. ¹¹Don't ask me to leave your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and grant me a willing heart to obey you.

¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. ¹⁴Let me live, O God, and forgive my murderous crime, O God of my salvation! Then I will shout your praise, telling others of your mercy and righteousness. ¹⁵O Lord, help me speak your words, for I want to tell others of your goodness.

¹⁶If I knew you needed animal sacrifices to forgive me, I would gladly bring them. But that is not why you forgive sins. ¹⁷The sacrifice you want is a humble and teachable spirit and a broken and contrite heart. This is what's important to you.

¹⁸O God, don't let Zion suffer because of my sins. Bless your people and cause Jerusalem to prosper in spite of me. ¹⁹Only after I have humbly confessed my sins will you be pleased with animal sacrifices, with calves and young bulls offered as burnt offerings.

PSALM 52***The Reward of the Wicked and the Righteous***

¹Why do you who are mighty boast of your strength? Why do you brag about your wicked deeds? You are a disgrace to God whose righteousness never changes. ²You're always making plans to take advantage of others and destroy them. Your tongues are as sharp as razors, and you tell lies without blinking an eye. ³You love wrong more than right. You would rather speak a lie than speak the truth. ⁴You love to destroy people with hurtful words, O deceitful tongue.

⁵The God who loves you will have no choice but to let you suffer the consequences of your sins. When you pass the point of no return, He will remove you from the land of the living. ⁶The righteous will see it and fear. They will say, ⁷"That's what happens to a man who doesn't depend on God. All he cared about was money. He boasted of his shrewdness and grew bold by deceiving others."

⁸But I'm like a young olive tree growing in the house of God. By His grace I will always trust in His steadfast love. ⁹I will continue to thank you, Lord, for what you have done for me. My hope is in you, Lord, and I will forever praise you in the presence of your people.

PSALM 53***The Folly of the Fool***

¹Only a fool says to himself, "There is no God." He has done detestable things and doesn't want to feel guilty. He has no intention of doing good.

²But the God of heaven is looking for those who are wise, who look to Him for help. ³It seems that everyone would rather do evil. No one does what is right. ⁴Don't these people know that there is a God? Surely they can't be that ignorant. God says, "Just look at these people and notice what they're doing! They devour my people as hungry men eat bread. The fact that there is a God is the farthest thing from their minds."

⁵But if you could see the future, you would see that those who thought there was nothing to fear will be struck with terror. The God they thought didn't exist will put them to shame. The scattered bodies of the ungodly will lie unburied. ⁶I pray that God will bring victory to Israel. How happy the people will be when He brings peace to their land!

PSALM 54***A Prayer for Deliverance***

¹Save me, O God, for your name's sake. Vindicate me by your might. ²Please hear me, O Lord, and listen to my prayer. ³Insolent men want to capture me so they can play ruthless games before killing me. They care nothing about our God.

⁴But, Lord, you are my helper. You are the only One who can save my life. ⁵May these wicked attackers taste the evil fruit of their own intentions. O God of Israel, in your faithfulness to us, please destroy them.

⁶I will bring a sacrificial offering to you, O Lord. I will praise you and thank you because I know that you are good. ⁷You have delivered me from every trouble and helped me triumph over my attackers. I have seen the armies of my enemies defeated.

PSALM 55***A Prayer About the Treachery of Friends***

¹Hear my prayer, O Lord; don't turn away from me! ²Please listen and answer me; I'm exhausted from worry and disheartened by what I see and hear.

³My spirit is totally discouraged by the success of our enemies, by the aggressiveness of the wicked; yet they accuse me of wickedness and hate the sight of me. ⁴I am scared to death when I think of the horrible ways they torture their prisoners. ⁵I'm terrified of what will happen when they conquer us; just thinking about it makes my whole body shake.

⁶How I wish I had the wings of a dove and could fly away and rest. ⁷I would escape from here and make my home in the

desert. ⁸I would quickly find safety from the raging wind and storm.

⁹O Lord, confuse our enemies' plans. Do something about the violence and crime in our cities. ¹⁰Day and night the wicked prowl along the city walls. Crime and robberies are rampant within. ¹¹Oppression and fraud are present in the market place.

¹²Our own people are abusive, even to me, their king. I could take it from an enemy or a stranger because I could go home and get away from it all, ¹³but these verbal attacks come from my own colleagues, my friends and even from my own family. ¹⁴Many times we worshiped together and joyfully shared our common love for God. I can't understand what has happened.

¹⁵Sometimes I wish they would just go away or die before their time. I can see the evil that has found a welcome place in their homes and in their hearts. ¹⁶So I'm calling on you, Lord. You will help me and save me. ¹⁷Morning, noon and night I will cry out to you, and I know you will hear me.

¹⁸I know you will give me victory and bring me back safely from the war, even though we're outnumbered. ¹⁹You are still on your throne, and you will humble them. These men are hardened to your law and have no fear of God in their hearts.

²⁰Here at home one of my own family has turned against me. He has not only broken his covenant with me but has even become hateful. ²¹His tongue is as slippery as butter, but war is in his heart. His words flow as smooth as oil, but his hand is constantly on his sword.

²²Cast your burden on the Lord and He will sustain you. He will not forget those who try to do right. He will never allow the righteous to be moved. ²³Lord, I know that you will not take the side of evil. Murderers usually don't live long. Someday all the wicked will be gone. I will put my trust in you.

PSALM 56

A Prayer for Relief

¹Be gracious to me, O God, because I'm being constantly pressured by enemies from all sides. ²Every day they think of new ways to oppose me. They are proud to fight against me. ³Whenever I'm afraid, I will trust you. ⁴I'll feed on your holy word and praise you. Then my fears will subside. After all, what can humans do to me? They cannot touch my soul.

⁵No matter what I say, people twist my words. They're out to do me evil. ⁶They watch every move I make, waiting for the chance to destroy me. ⁷O Lord, don't let them get away with it. In fairness, stop these people from spying on me. Punish them, O God. ⁸You know how troubled I am because you have collected all my tears in a bottle. You have a written record of them. ⁹When I call on you, my enemies will turn back from doing evil against me. I know this because you are on my side.

¹⁰O God, I take you at your word and praise you for keeping it. ¹¹I trust you and try not to be afraid, because I know that no one can harm me when you are with me. ¹²I have vowed to serve you, and I am thankful for what you have done for me. ¹³You have rescued me from death and kept me in your path. While I am alive, I will walk in the light from your throne.

PSALM 57

A Prayer for Safety

¹Be merciful to me, O Lord; be merciful. I come to you for safety; in the shadow of your wings I will find refuge until the raging storms have passed. ²I cry out to the Most High God, who fulfills His purpose in me. ³He sends help from heaven to save me. He will shame those who would reproach me. I know He loves me and is steadfast in His faithfulness.

⁴Sometimes I feel surrounded by hungry lions whose teeth are spears and arrows and whose tongues are double-sided swords. ⁵You are exalted, O Lord, above the heavens, and your glory is seen

throughout the earth. ⁶My enemies spread a net to catch me, and I was overcome with fear and stress. They dug a pit in my path but they fell into it themselves.

⁷Thank you, Lord, for helping me. My confidence in you is strengthened. My faith is fixed. I will sing your praises and give thanks. ⁸Awake, harp and lyre; awake! Let's welcome the morning by praising the Lord.

⁹Lord, I will praise you among the nations. I will thank you in the public forum. ¹⁰Your lovingkindness is as big as the sky, and your faithfulness as broad as the heavens. ¹¹May you be exalted above the heavens, O Lord, and may your glory fill the earth.

PSALM 58

A Prayer for Judgment Against Wickedness

¹You who are rulers, are you ruling equitably? You who are judges, are you judging fairly? ²Not really. In your heart you're thinking of what benefit you can get from the case you're hearing. You overlook violence or even use it if it serves your purposes.

³Wickedness is part of man's nature from the time he is born. His inclinations are toward self when he comes from his mother's womb. He can tell lies and do wrong from birth. ⁴Man has been bitten by the serpent, and his body is full of the poison of sin. In turn, he bites and poisons others; his instincts are as deaf to reason as snakes who can't hear. ⁵A snake charmer can't reason with his cobra when it rears its head to strike; no magician can make it go contrary to its nature.

⁶O Lord, break the sharp teeth of these unjust men before they hurt someone else. Close the fangs of these lions, O Lord! ⁷Let their strength drain away like water lest they hurt more people. May their arrows break when they bend the bow. ⁸Let them be like snails that leave a slimy trail, only to disappear in the mud. Let them be as a stillborn child who never sees the sun. ⁹Before a pot feels the fire

built from thorns, green or dry, they will be blown away as chaff by the wind.

¹⁰The righteous will be glad that evil is ended. They will walk on grass where once the blood of the wicked lay.

¹¹Then God's people will say, "There is a God who judges the world and rewards the righteous."

PSALM 59

A Prayer for Protection Against Enemies

¹O God, save me from my enemies. Protect me from those who lift up their hands against me.

²Deliver me from these evil men who kill and shed blood. ³Look, they are waiting in ambush for me; fierce men are hunting me down. For what? I have done no wrong nor committed any terrible sin.

⁴Lord, I know of no fault or unwillingness to talk on my part, yet they are getting ready to attack me. Look at my plight, O Lord, and come and help me! ⁵O Lord, God of Israel, come and see for yourself what's going on. Punish the nations. Don't let those who plot evil get by with this. ⁶Every evening they come and prowl the streets of the city like dogs.

⁷Listen to their bellowing threats. They snarl about what they plan to do. They think no one knows that they plan to strike and topple me. ⁸Lord, you can smile about all this secrecy because you know their plans.

⁹I have confidence in you, Lord, in your power and strength. You are my only refuge, my only hope. ¹⁰I know you love me and that you will come to my rescue as you have in the past. My God will let me triumph over my enemies. ¹¹I'm not asking you to wipe them out, Lord, because those loyal to me would forget that you had done it. Just weaken them with your power, then we will know that you overcame them, O Lord, our shield.

¹²If they continue their treachery and deception, let them be caught in their own trap and suffer the consequences of attacking a peaceful people. If they continue their cursing and lying, ¹³put an

end to these wicked people, consume them until they no longer exist so the nations will know that the God of the earth rules over Jacob. ¹⁴There they are again, Lord, prowling through the streets of the city, barking out threats and snarling like dogs. ¹⁵They scavenge for food and howl if they don't get what they want.

¹⁶In spite of their threats I will sing of your mercy and power. Early in the morning I will sing aloud of your kindness and care. You have been my fortress in times of trouble and my security in times of peace. ¹⁷O God, you are my strength and my source of courage; I will praise you, for you are my defense and my God who loves and cares for me.

PSALM 60

A Prayer for Victory

¹O Lord, you have allowed us to be defeated. You have rejected our plea for victory. If you are displeased with us, restore us to your grace and help us do better. ²You have made our land tremble. You have shaken the earth and torn it open. Stop its shaking, for it is tottering on disaster. ³Your people have suffered hardships. We're confused and stagger as if we were drunk.

⁴There is a banner of truth about you that must be raised. It must be unfurled for our enemies to see. ⁵Help us do this, Lord. Answer our prayers and give us victory so others will know that we are your people.

⁶Then God spoke from His Sanctuary, saying, "I will parcel out Shechem and divide the Valley of Succoth. ⁷Gilead is mine, as is Manasseh. Ephraim is my helmet and Judah my royal scepter. ⁸I will wash my hands in Moab and leave my sandal print in Edom. Did the Philistines think they could subjugate me or that their gods were stronger?"

⁹Now that God has spoken, take me to the fortified cities of my enemies. I will counterattack and not be afraid. Who will join me to fight against Edom? ¹⁰God did not go out with us before, and we were de-

feated, but now He has promised to trample down our enemies. ¹¹Lord, we know you will defeat and scatter them because you keep your promises. The help of man is worthless.

¹²But with God on our side, we will triumph valiantly; He will defeat our enemies under His feet.

PSALM 61

Assurance of God's Protection

¹Hear my cry, O my God! Listen to my plea! ²I'm far from home and discouraged. Lead me to a place of safety, to the Rock that is higher than I. ³You have always been a shelter for me; you have been a fortified tower of safety. ⁴I long to live with you and stay in your Sanctuary tent forever. I long to find shelter and comfort under your wings. ⁵You know my promise, Lord, to serve you all the days of my life. You have given me a heritage among your people, among those who reverence your name.

⁶Preserve my life, O Lord, the life of the one whom you have chosen to be king. Let him live many more years. May his life bless many more generations. ⁷May he rule as in your presence. Protect him with your constant love and faithfulness. ⁸Then I will sing praises to your name every day and will keep my promises.

PSALM 62

Trusting God in Adversity

¹I wait patiently for God, the source of my strength. Only He can save me. ²The Lord is my Rock, my Salvation and my sure Defense. My belief in His promises will not be shaken.

³How much longer will you evildoers go after this old man, this tottering fence, this leaning wall? Are you determined to crush him? ⁴Some are determined to topple him from his throne. They enjoy spreading rumors and lies. With their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse.

⁵O my soul, find rest in God. Your hope comes only from Him. ⁶He alone is

my Rock, my Fortress and my Defense. I will not be moved from trusting Him.

⁷My salvation and honor depend on God alone. He is my Rock and my sure Defense. ⁸Trust in Him, my people; pour out your hearts to Him because He alone is our refuge. ⁹Strong men who claim to support us are bluffing; refined men who claim to support us are lying. Weigh them on a scale against God and they're nothing. In a time of crisis they're lighter than a breath of air.

¹⁰Don't trust in your ability to defraud others or feel secure in your dishonesty. Even if riches increase, don't depend on them to achieve your end. ¹¹If there is one thing I know about God, it is that all power belongs to Him. ¹²A second thing I know about God is that He is loving, kind and fair. He will reward each person according to what he has done.

PSALM 63

Longing to Be in God's Presence

¹O Lord, you are my God. I seek you. My soul longs to be in your presence. My whole being thirsts for you as a desert without water. ²I have felt your presence while in the Sanctuary. I have seen your power and glory work on people's hearts and change them. ³To experience your loving kindness and care is better than anything life can offer; my lips will praise you. ⁴I will give thanks to you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands in prayer. ⁵My deliverance has been like feasting in your presence. My lips are eager to joyfully sing your praises.

⁶When I go to bed, I think of you; when I awake in the night, my thoughts turn to you. ⁷You have helped me along life's path. I feel as secure in your presence as if I were under your wings. ⁸I want to stay close by your side because you support me with your right hand. ⁹Those who want to destroy me will not succeed. They will die and return to dust. ¹⁰They will perish in battle and their bodies will be eaten by jackals. ¹¹Because God has given us the victory, the king will rejoice. All who put

their trust in God will see His glory, while the mouths of liars will be stopped.

PSALM 64

A Prayer Against Secret Plots

¹Hear me, O my God, as I pray. I am afraid; please protect me from my dreadful enemy. ²Protect me from the secret plots of the wicked and from the schemes of evil men. ³Their tongues are as sharp as swords. They aim stinging words like deadly weapons. ⁴They never ask if a person is innocent, but ambush him by fearlessly shooting their bitter words at him. ⁵They meet together secretly to devise snares to catch him. They say, "No one will know what we're doing." ⁶They diligently search out every weakness of their foe. Then they say, "We have devised a perfect snare!" How cruel and deceptive is the mind of man!

⁷God knows, and He will use His arrows to shoot down their plans, and they are the ones who will be wounded. ⁸He will turn their own words against them, and their devious schemes will fail. Everyone will see what these men had planned and will shake their heads in scorn. ⁹Then people will stand in awe of God. They will tell what He has done and will think about His wonderful deeds. ¹⁰All the righteous will be glad and take refuge in Him. They will praise Him for His protection and care.

PSALM 65

Thanksgiving to God for Answered Prayer

¹O God, we will praise you in Zion and keep the promises we made to you. ²You have answered our prayers, so others too will come to you for help. ³When we were overwhelmed by our sins; you forgave us. ⁴Happy are the people you choose to bring into the city to live near your Sanctuary. We are filled with blessings from your house, your holy Temple. ⁵You have answered our prayers and given us victory. You have done dreadful things in righteousness to save us from

our enemies. You are the hope of all people on land and sea.

⁶You are the One who made the mountains by your own power and the strength of your word. ⁷You can still the storms at sea and calm the boisterous waves; you can also calm the hearts of your people. ⁸Near and far people stand in awe of what you have done. When evening fades and morning dawns, your wonders call for songs of praise. ⁹You care for the land by sending rain. You make the soil rich and fertile. You fill the streams with water and provide the earth with crops. ¹⁰You water the hills and the freshly plowed furrows. You soften the earth with showers and make young plants grow. ¹¹You crown our year with bountiful provisions; you load our wagons until they overflow. ¹²Pastures are painted with living green and the hills are covered with joy. ¹³Our fields are abundant with sheep, the valleys are clothed with corn, and the air is resonant with joyful sounds.

PSALM 66

Praise God for His Wondrous Deeds

¹Make a joyful noise, all you lands. ²Sing to the glory of His name; offer Him sounds of praise.

³Say to Him in song, "How wonderful are your works! Your power is so great that your enemies fear and tremble. ⁴All the earth will worship you. The people will praise your name." ⁵Come, see what God has done; let me tell you what amazing deeds He has done for His children. ⁶He changed the sea into dry land so our forefathers could cross on foot. And how they rejoiced over what He had done for them!

⁷He rules forever by His power and keeps His eye on all nations and peoples. The rebellious should not think they can rise up against Him.

⁸Come, my people, let us praise our God. Lift up your voice in praise for everyone to hear. ⁹He has preserved our lives and protected our nation. He kept our feet from slipping.

¹⁰You have tested us, O Lord, as men test silver in the fire. ¹¹You let us be caught in a trap that put many burdens on our backs. ¹²You let our enemies trample us into the dust. We went through fire and flood, but finally you gave us the victory and a land of plenty.

¹³I will go to your house with burnt offerings to thank you for what you have done and to keep the promise I made to you. ¹⁴I will do what I promised when I was in trouble. ¹⁵I will offer special sacrifices of rams, young bulls and goats.

¹⁶Come, my people, all you who respect our God; I will tell you what the Lord has done for me. ¹⁷I cried to Him for help and praised Him with songs. ¹⁸If I had cherished sin in my heart, God would not have heard me, nor would He have honored my request. ¹⁹But He not only heard, He answered my prayer and granted my request.

²⁰I praise God and thank Him for hearing and answering my prayer. He has lifted my burden and has not withheld His love from me.

PSALM 67

Invoking God's Blessing

¹May God be merciful to us and bless us and make His face shine on us, ²so that the whole world will know the kind of God you are and what you can do to help them. ³Let our people praise you, O God. Let everyone praise your name.

⁴Let us be glad and rejoice because our God judges all people fairly, and guides the nations of the earth. ⁵May everyone praise you, O God. May all nations praise you. ⁶Once again the land has produced its harvest, and God—that is, our God—has blessed us abundantly. ⁷God will continue to bless us, and everyone to the ends of the earth will respect Him.

PSALM 68

God's Goodness to Israel

¹God speaks, and His enemies scatter. He acts, and those who hate Him run.

²As smoke is blown away by the wind, so His enemies disappear. As wax melts in the heat, so the courage of the wicked melts in His presence.

³But those who do right rejoice in His presence. They are jubilant with joy. ⁴Sing to the Lord. Sing praises to His name. Extol Him who rides on the clouds. He is the Lord. Rejoice in His presence!

⁵He is a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows. ⁶He gives the lonely a home and leads the prisoners to prosperity. But rebels will live in an arid land, imprisoned in a life of sin.

⁷O God, when you led our people out of Egypt and marched across the desert with them, ⁸the earth shook, the heavens thundered and the mountains moved at your presence. You are our God, the God of our fathers and the God of Israel. ⁹You caused rain to fall on the parched ground. You made your presence known when our ancestors were weary. ¹⁰You gave them a place to settle and provided for their needs.

¹¹The Lord spoke, and victories were won. Many witnesses spread the news. ¹²Kings and armies fled in haste and our families divided the spoil. ¹³Silver and gold were there for the taking; we slept peacefully among the campfires. ¹⁴God used His mighty arm to scatter the kings and their armies. Their bodies lie like snow on nearby Mount Zalmon.

¹⁵Look at the distant mountains of Bashan. How majestic and rugged they are! ¹⁶But they look with envy on Mount Sinai, the mountain where God appeared. Yes, the Lord will dwell with His people forever. ¹⁷The chariots of God are made up of millions of angels. Lord, you came to Mount Sinai and told us to build you a Sanctuary. ¹⁸When you went back to heaven, it was like a victory parade for a glorious king, attended by soldiers and followed by captives. Then you gave gifts to men to help even the most rebellious among us.

¹⁹Praise be to the Lord, our Saviour, who daily carries our burdens. ²⁰Our

God is a God who saves. He rescues men from death. ²¹Surely the Lord will crush the armies of our enemies and shatter the hairy heads of those who continue to rejoice in sinning. ²²The Lord promised, "I will bring you back from the battle of Bashan victorious," and He did. Before that He had said, "I will enable you to walk through the Red Sea," and He did. ²³He promised that we would walk on ground soaked by the blood of our enemies and that dogs would lick the blood off their bodies. It has happened.

²⁴O God, we watched your victory parade when the priests carried the Ark of your presence into the Sanctuary. ²⁵There were singers in front, followed by musicians and girls beating their tambourines for joy. ²⁶Let us praise our mighty God in all our meetings. Praise the Lord, all you descendants of Jacob. ²⁷There are the leaders of Benjamin, smallest of the tribes. Then there are the princes of Judah, largest of the tribes. There are the leaders of Zebulun and Naphtali, all praising God for what He has done. ²⁸Show us your power again, O God, the same power you used in our behalf in days gone by.

²⁹Then kings will bring gifts to your Sanctuary and our enemies will be eager to make peace. ³⁰Rebuke Egypt; she's like a wild animal. Rebuke the nations around us; they're like angry bulls charging into a herd of young calves. Make these nations acknowledge your power by bringing their silver tokens of peace to you. Scatter those people who love to make war on the innocent. ³¹Then ambassadors will come from Egypt with gifts of bronze, and the Ethiopians will stretch out their hands to you in prayer. ³²Yes, sing praises to God, all you nations. Sing praises to the Lord. ³³Sing praises to him who rides the skies. Listen to Him who thunders with a mighty voice.

³⁴Proclaim the mighty power of God! His majesty is seen over Israel and His power in the sky. ³⁵How awesome you are, O God, speaking from your heavenly

Sanctuary. You are the God of Israel. You give power and strength to your people. Praise be to our God!

PSALM 69

A Cry of Distress

¹Save me, O God! Troubles, like waters, are up to my neck. ²I'm in mud and sinking fast. No solid ground is under my feet. I'm in deep water with waves sweeping over my head and pushing me under. ³I'm exhausted from weeping. My throat is parched from crying for help. My eyesight fails, looking for my God. ⁴I have more enemies than the hairs on my head. They have no cause for hatred, but I was forced to give them what they falsely claim I stole.

⁵My sins, O Lord, are not hidden from you, and if I have been foolish and grasping, you know that too. ⁶Lord, please help me, so that those who love and trust you won't be disgraced because of me. O God, help me not to let down those who put their hope in you. O my God, the God of Israel, I need you! ⁷For your sake I am willing to endure scorn and ridicule and live with undeserved shame. ⁸My own brothers treat me like a stranger, an alien among my relatives.

⁹But my zeal for your house is eating me up. What hurts you, hurts me. ¹⁰When I give myself to fasting and prayer, my brothers scorn me. ¹¹When I change into the robe of penitence, they laugh and point their fingers at me. ¹²I'm the talk of the town and the subject of gossip at the city gate. Drunkards make up songs about me. ¹³But as for me, I will only concern myself with praying to you. I know you will answer in your own time. You will answer because you love me and because you are the God of my salvation.

¹⁴O Lord, save me from sinking into the mud. Deliver me from those who hate me and from the angry waters. ¹⁵Don't let the floods of despair sweep me off my feet. Don't let my enemies drown my faith in you or push me into the pit of discouragement. ¹⁶Out of the

goodness of your heart, please answer me, O Lord! In your mercy, turn to me and hear my plea! ¹⁷Don't hide your face from your servant. I'm in trouble. Hurry to help me. ¹⁸Come near, rescue and redeem me in the eyes of my enemies!

¹⁹You know how people insult me. You know how they shame and disgrace me, and you know who they are. ²⁰Insults have broken my heart, and I am sorely distressed. I thought someone would pity me, but no one seems to care; I thought some human comfort would come, but there was no one. ²¹When I hungered for food, they gave me poison, and when I thirsted, they gave me vinegar to drink.

²²May the celebration of their victories over me become a snare to them; may their sacrificial feasts become their own trap. ²³My heart cries out against my enemies. I just wish they were blind and crippled so they would lose courage and strength. ²⁴My heart cries out for your holy presence. Let them taste the consequences of their wickedness.

²⁵My heart cries out against the camps of my enemies. May no one live in them again. ²⁶These pagans and others like them jump on anyone who is down. They talk about the pain of those who love you, those you have disciplined. ²⁷You know all about my enemies. Charge them with crime after crime as they deserve and don't show them mercy. ²⁸Their names should be taken out of the Book of Life. How can they be listed with the righteous?

²⁹O God, I am in pain and distress over this. May your salvation lift me up. ³⁰I will praise you in song, O Lord. I will proclaim your greatness and magnify you through thanksgiving. ³¹This will please you more than sacrificing goats or young bulls on the altar. ³²When the poor see me praise you, they too will be glad to know that they don't need to sacrifice young bulls for you to love them. ³³O Lord, I know you listen to those in need. You don't forget those who have been imprisoned.

³⁴Praise God, all you people! Praise

Him, all you creatures on the land and in the sea! ³⁵He will save Jerusalem and defend the cities of Judah. His people will possess the land He has promised. ³⁶Our descendants will inherit the land, and those who love Him will live here.

PSALM 70

A Plea for Help

¹Save me, O Lord! Please hurry and come to help me! ²Let those who want to kill me be turned back. Let their armies be defeated and go home in disgrace. Let those who want to destroy me be put to shame. ³May those who make fun of me and plan my destruction be forced to turn back in dishonor. May those who laugh at me be made ashamed.

⁴But may those who love your salvation always say, "How great God is!" ⁵I am weak and needy, O Lord. Please come quickly to help me. You are my only help and my deliverer. O Lord, please don't delay.

PSALM 71

David's Trust in God

¹In you, Lord, do I put my trust; don't let me down. ²I take refuge in your righteousness. Please listen to me and save me. ³Continue to be my Rock, my place of safety. Command your angels to rescue me. You alone are my Rock and my Fortress. ⁴Deliver me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from those evil and cruel men.

⁵You have always been my hope, O Lord. I have trusted you since my youth. ⁶You've protected me since the day I was born and were with me even when I came out of my mother's womb. I will praise you forever. ⁷Many have been amazed at how you've protected me again and again. How you have stood by my side! ⁸I try to honor you every day in every way. My heart is filled with gratitude. All honor and praise is yours.

⁹Don't cast me away when I'm old; don't forget me when my strength is gone. ¹⁰My enemies are plotting against me. They're just waiting for a chance to kill me. ¹¹They

say, "God has left him, so let's go after him. After all, who's going to defend him?" ¹²O God, come to help me. Please hurry! ¹³May those who attack me be defeated and destroyed. May those who try to hurt me be confused and disgraced.

¹⁴I will always put my hope in you, O Lord. I will praise you more and more each day of my life. ¹⁵My lips will tell others about your righteousness. I will tell them about your salvation, even though it's more than I can comprehend. ¹⁶I will proclaim your mighty acts, O Lord. I will proclaim your righteousness, the only righteousness there is. ¹⁷Since I was young, you have taught me, Lord, and all my life I have told others about you and your wondrous works. ¹⁸Now that I'm old and gray, please don't leave me. Continue to be with me so I can tell of your power and might to several generations after me.

¹⁹Your power and righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens. You have done great things. No one is like you. ²⁰Though I have suffered and been through many troubles, you have restored my strength time and time again. You have often lifted my spirit from the depths of despair. ²¹You will make my influence for you greater than ever. You have comforted me once again.

²²I will praise you on my harp; I will praise your faithfulness. On my harp I will play hymns to you; you are the Holy One, the God of Israel. ²³I will shout for joy as I play for you. With my whole being I will sing because you have saved me. ²⁴I will speak all day long of your righteousness, because those who wanted to kill me have been defeated and disgraced.

PSALM 72

A Prayer for Solomon

¹This psalm is a prayer for my son Solomon, who at his coronation received a copy of God's law. Endow him, O Lord, with a sense of justice. Teach your royal son to judge righteously. ²Help him to rule and wisely govern both rich and

poor. ³May the mountains be filled with peace and the hills with righteousness. ⁴May he judge the poor fairly; may he be ready to help the needy and stop the oppressor. ⁵May he acknowledge you as the rightful ruler, and may his love for you be as enduring as the sun and the moon.

⁶May your presence in Israel be like a gentle rain on a newly mown field of hay, like showers watering a thirsty land. ⁷Then the righteous will flourish, and prosperity and peace will abound as long as there's a moon in the sky. ⁸Someday your kingdom will reach from sea to sea, from the Euphrates river westward until it covers the entire earth. ⁹All the people of the earth will come and bow down before you. Even your enemies will come and acknowledge your righteousness. ¹⁰The kings of Tarshish and the kings from the islands of the sea will bring you gifts. The kings of Arabia and Ethiopia will bring their offerings to you. ¹¹All kings will come and bow down before you, and people from all nations will serve you.

¹²You will deliver the needy because they cry for help, and you will heal the sick because they have no one to help them. ¹³You will have pity on the poor and weak and save the lives of the needy. ¹⁴You will put an end to violence and oppression, and there will be no more shedding of blood.

¹⁵Long live the king! May gold from the land of Sheba be laid at His feet. May people pray for Him continually. ¹⁶May there be an abundance of grain in the land and may the hills be covered with crops to harvest. May the populations of cities grow like grain in the field. ¹⁷The king's name will be on everyone's lips. His fame will cover the earth like the rays of the sun. He will bless all nations and they, in turn, will praise Him.

¹⁸Blessed be the Lord, the King and God of Israel, who alone can do all this. ¹⁹Blessed be His glorious name. May the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and amen.

²⁰This ends the prayer by David, son of Jesse.

PSALM 73

The Justice of God

¹God is surely good to the righteous, to all those who are pure in heart. ²As for me, my feet almost slipped; I nearly lost my hold on you, Lord. ³I was jealous of the arrogant and even of the wicked who seemed successful. ⁴They seemed to have no troubles in life; their bodies look healthy and strong.

⁵They don't seem to suffer difficulties like we do, nor are they plagued with problems that others have. ⁶They wear pride as a necklace and arrogance as a coat. ⁷Their hearts pour out evil and their minds are filled with wicked thoughts and schemes. ⁸They laugh at others and speak evil about everyone except their own. Proudly they lay plans to take advantage of others. ⁹They talk like they are experiencing heaven and act as if the world belongs to them.

¹⁰So people praise them and no one finds fault with them. ¹¹They say, "God doesn't know what we're doing; otherwise, He would stop us. Maybe there is no God." ¹²The wicked are always carefree. Their wealth increases, yet they always want more.

¹³So why should I wash my hands in innocence and keep myself pure? ¹⁴I struggle with these thoughts daily. From the time I wake, I can't rid my mind of such thinking. ¹⁵If I were to share these struggles with others, I would be letting you down. I need to talk to you about it and not pass it on to future generations. ¹⁶Again and again I have tried to think this through rationally, but it only gets more complex.

¹⁷This struggle lasted until I went to your Sanctuary. Then I realized what will happen to the wicked, and I got a different perspective. ¹⁸They are on slippery ground, and unless they change, they will fall to destruction. ¹⁹When the end comes, they will be gone in a moment, consumed

by their own sins. ²⁰They are like a bad dream that's gone in the morning. When you awake, you are glad it's gone.

²¹Why were my thoughts so bitter? Why was I so hurt? ²²I wasn't thinking right. I was stupid. ²³You are always with me and that's all that matters. You hold me by my right hand. ²⁴You will continue to guide me, and when my life is over, you will let me sleep and then come back to take me home. ²⁵Whom do I really have down here? Who understands me? No one but you. I want nothing more than you. ²⁶My mind and body may fail, but you are my strength. All I really need is you.

²⁷Those who go on without you will perish. Those who are unfaithful to you will have to suffer the consequences. ²⁸But as for me, how wonderful to be close to you and to feel you by my side. I have put my trust in you, and I will tell everyone what you have done for me.

PSALM 74

A Prayer for Deliverance

¹O God, why have you abandoned us like this? Are you displeased with us, your sheep? ²Remember how you brought us out of Egypt and redeemed us from slavery? Have you forgotten that we are your people and that Mount Zion is your home?

³Just look at these ruins! Our enemies have ravished these sacred grounds and destroyed everything in the Sanctuary. ⁴Your enemies have bragged of victory in your holy place; they have planted flags in your territory. ⁵They acted like woodsmen cutting down trees, hacking and smashing everything in sight with their axes. ⁶They broke up the beautifully carved wood with hatchets and hammers. ⁷They set your house on fire and burned it to the ground. They desecrated the very place where we worship you. ⁸They said, "We will utterly destroy them." They tried to crush our spirits by destroying all your holy places in the land.

⁹Now our sacred symbols are gone, none of your prophets are left, and no one

knows how long it will be before things return to normal. ¹⁰How much longer, O God, will you let your enemies laugh? How long are they to insult your name? ¹¹Why do you act as if your hands are tied? Why do you sit there and do nothing?

¹²You are our King and always have been. We have seen your hand of salvation again and again. ¹³By your power you divided the sea. You drowned the king and his army. ¹⁴You crushed the monstrous power of Egypt, giving the washed-up bodies of her troops to the creatures inhabiting the wilderness. ¹⁵You opened springs and streams for us in the desert and dried up the Jordan for us to cross. ¹⁶The day and night are yours. You made the sun, the moon and the stars. ¹⁷You fixed the boundaries of earth and made the seasons, summer and winter. ¹⁸But see, Lord, how your enemies laugh? These godless people despise your name.

¹⁹Don't hand us over to them! It would be like handing doves over to wild beasts. Don't forget the lives of your people! ²⁰Remember the agreement you made to protect us? In every dark corner there is violence. ²¹Don't let the downtrodden be disgraced; even the poor and needy will praise your name. ²²Rise up, O God, and defend your cause. Every day these godless people who occupy our land laugh at you. ²³Don't forget what our enemies say about you or the awful threats they make against you.

PSALM 75

God's Righteous Judgment

¹We give thanks to you, O Lord. We give thanks to you. The wonderful things you have done reveal how great you are.

²You have said, "I have set a time to judge the world and I will judge it with fairness. ³I will shake the earth and the people on it will fear, but I have it firmly in my hand. ⁴I will tell the proud to stop boasting, and the wicked to no longer use their power against my people. ⁵They

shall neither broadcast their wickedness nor speak their haughty words.”

⁶No man from the east, the west, the north, or the south can escape God’s judgment. ⁷God will judge everyone and decide who is guilty and who is innocent. ⁸The Lord holds the cup of death in His hand and pours its foaming wine over the world. The wicked will drain the dregs as a consequence of their sins. ⁹As for me, I will never stop speaking of the God of Jacob or cease praising Him for what He has done. ¹⁰He will break the power of the wicked, but the righteous will be exalted.

PSALM 76

The Victory of God

¹God is known in Judah and His name is honored in Israel. ²He makes His home in Jerusalem and lives on Mount Zion. ³Here is where He broke the swords of our enemies and crushed their weapons of war.

⁴How glorious you are, O Lord, more majestic than the mountains. ⁵Strong warriors were stripped of their booty and lie in their final sleep; not one man of war can lift his hand against us. ⁶At your rebuke, both riders and horses lay stunned. ⁷You are One to be feared. Who can stand against you when your judgment comes on the earth?

⁸You spoke and the earth was quiet, reverently listening to your voice. ⁹You came to judge, to save all the afflicted in the land. ¹⁰Even man’s rage brought glory to you, and those who survived your displeasure are restrained from doing more evil.

¹¹So let us give to the Lord what we have promised Him. Let all the nations bring gifts to Him who is worthy of our honor. ¹²He has humbled proud princes and arrogant rulers who have now learned to respect Him.

PSALM 77

The Memory of What God Has Done

¹I cried out loud to God. I cried for help,

and He heard me. ²In my day of trouble I searched for the Lord. All night long I stretched out my hand to Him, but found no comfort. ³When I thought of you, O God, I heaved a sigh of weariness. Even after meditation and prayer, I only felt depressed. ⁴I could not sleep. I was so troubled that I didn’t even feel like talking.

⁵I tried to think of days in the past when you were near. I thought of many years ago and what you did for people back then. ⁶I spent the night in deep thought, meditating and searching my soul. ⁷I asked myself, “Will the Lord reject us forever? Will He never be kind to us again? ⁸Has He stopped loving us? Are His promises no good anymore? ⁹Has He forgotten to be merciful? Has He become so angry that He has lost all compassion? ¹⁰I am grieved that He has changed.” Then I realized that I was depressed. ¹¹So I decided to think instead about times when the Lord was near and when He did great things for us. ¹²I thought about the works of His hands and recalled His mighty deeds.

¹³Your ways, O God, are holy, like the Sanctuary. No God is as great as you. ¹⁴You are the God of miracles and power. You have protected our people. ¹⁵You redeemed the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. ¹⁶The waters of the Red Sea saw you and were afraid. The depths of earth trembled. ¹⁷Clouds poured out your water, and the skies thundered your presence. Arrows of lightning flashed all around. ¹⁸Your voice of thunder was in the whirlwind. You lit up the sky, and the earth shook and trembled. ¹⁹You opened the Red Sea and led us through on dry land. Though your footprints were unseen, you were with us. ²⁰You led your people gently like a flock, with Moses and Aaron as shepherds.

PSALM 78

God’s Kindness to His People

¹My people, listen to my teachings and pay attention to what I have to say. ²I’m going to teach you by using parables to

explain the mysteries of the past.³ These are things our fathers told us; we have heard them and know them.⁴ We will not hide from our children the things we have received, but will tell the next generation about the Lord's glorious power, His great deeds and the wonderful things He has done.

⁵He wrote out His laws for His people Israel and gave His commandments to the descendants of Jacob; He told our fathers to pass them on to their children.⁶ This way the next generation can know them and, in turn, pass them on to their children.⁷ So all generations will learn to put their trust in God and not forget what He has done. They can know and keep His commandments.⁸ Hopefully they will not be like their ancestors who stubbornly rebelled against the Lord, who were disloyal and unthankful, refusing to turn their hearts toward Him.

⁹For instance, the children of Ephraim were armed and well equipped, but during the battle they turned and ran.¹⁰ They lacked courage because they were not living up to the covenant they had made with the Lord to keep His laws.¹¹ They forgot what He had done for them and the miracles they had seen Him do.¹² He had worked miracles in the sight of their fathers in the fields of Zoan in the land of Egypt.¹³ He divided the Red Sea and walked them through as the waters stood like walls.¹⁴ During the day a cloud cover protected them from the sun, and every night a pillar of fire kept them warm.¹⁵ He split open rocks in the desert to give them abundant water.¹⁶ He brought up streams from the desert sands and water flowed like rivers.¹⁷ But the people sinned even more and in the desert turned against the Most High.¹⁸ They deliberately put God to the test by demanding that He give them what their appetites craved.¹⁹ They challenged God, saying, "Can you give us food in the desert? We doubt it. Your promises are nothing but straws in the wind."²⁰ Yes, you gave us water to drink;

you brought streams of water out of the desert sands, but you can't feed all of us with meat and bread."

²¹When the Lord heard this, He was very displeased, and when He came in the midst of Jacob, the fire of His presence destroyed many who rebelled against Him.²² They had no faith in God nor did they trust in His deliverance.²³ Yet He commanded the skies to open and told the heavens to give them food.²⁴ He rained down manna and gave them bread from heaven.²⁵ The people ate the food provided by angels, and He gave them all they could eat.

²⁶Then He caused the east wind and the south wind to blow,²⁷ and flocks of quail flew in from the sea, more numerous than the people could count.²⁸ They fell like rain inside the camp all around their tents.²⁹ So the people ate and were satisfied. God had given them what they craved, what they thought He could not provide.³⁰ But before they had finished, while the meat was still in their mouths,³¹ the fire of God's presence appeared in the camp, and some of the strongest and best died before Him.³² In spite of this, the people kept on sinning. In spite of these miracles, they did not believe.

³³So He let them wander in the wilderness to end their days in futility and their years in fear.³⁴ But there were some who, when they saw how God dealt with their unbelief, returned to Him, and He graciously saved them.³⁵ They remembered that He was their Rock, their Redeemer, the One who protected them.³⁶ They obeyed Him with their words but not with their hearts.³⁷ They were dishonest with their Maker, and unfaithful to the covenant He had made with them.³⁸ Yet He was merciful and full of compassion, forgiving their sins and refusing to destroy them. He restrained Himself often from carrying out justice, and kept the fire of His presence from destroying them.³⁹ He knew that they were only human and their lives were like a breeze that passes and is gone.

⁴⁰It would be hard to count how many times they rebelled against Him during their desert wanderings and how often they hurt Him during their wilderness journey. ⁴¹Again and again they tested His patience and hurt the Holy One of Israel. ⁴²They forgot what He had done for them when He had delivered them from their enemies. ⁴³They forgot the miracles He had performed in the fields of Zoan in the land of Egypt. ⁴⁴He turned the rivers of Egypt into blood so the people could not drink from their own streams. ⁴⁵He sent swarms of flies into their houses and countless frogs that devoured them.

⁴⁶He brought in locusts to eat their crops and grasshoppers to destroy their gardens. ⁴⁷He destroyed their vineyards with hail and their fig trees with frost and sleet. ⁴⁸He destroyed their animals with hailstones and their cattle with lightning. ⁴⁹He showed the Egyptians His extreme displeasure, and His determination to set His people free. He sent angels to carry out His commands. ⁵⁰He walked through the land and did not spare them from disease and death. ⁵¹He took the lives of their firstborn, even the strongest descendants of Ham.

⁵²But His own people He led along gently and guided them through the wilderness like a flock of sheep. ⁵³He led them on safely so they were not afraid. But the army that pursued them drowned in the sea. ⁵⁴He brought them to the border of the Promised Land, to the country He had chosen to give them. ⁵⁵He drove out nations before them and divided the country among His people according to their tribes, helping them settle in the new land.

⁵⁶Yet they tested Him and hurt the Most High God by not listening to Him or obeying His commands. ⁵⁷They did the same thing their fathers had done. They were unthankful and disloyal. They were as unreliable as a faulty weapon taken to war. ⁵⁸They made idols and set them up in their mountain retreats. They hurt

Him by worshiping graven images and practicing the same filthy rites as their pagan neighbors.

⁵⁹When God saw this, He was pained in heart and turned from Israel. ⁶⁰When He could not stop them by persuasion, He forsook them. His presence was no longer seen in the Sanctuary. The cloud no longer rested over the Most Holy Place. ⁶¹He withdrew His protection and permitted His Ark to be captured and His own reputation to be tarnished. ⁶²He allowed His people to be defeated in war and in great anguish permitted them to be killed. ⁶³Their cities were set on fire and their villages burned. Their young men were killed, and their young women had no one to marry. ⁶⁴Even their priests and elders fell by the sword, and the pain of the people was so great that widows sat in shock without shedding a tear.

⁶⁵When the Lord in His wisdom saw it was time, He acted like a man suddenly aroused from sleep by a sense of danger. He acted like a soldier who hears the enemy coming, takes a drink, gives a battle cry and rushes into war. ⁶⁶He struck Israel's enemies where it hurt and put them to flight. He shamed Jacob's enemies before the nations. ⁶⁷He did not work through the household of Joseph to save His people as before, nor did He rely on the tribe of Ephraim.

⁶⁸But He worked in the land of Judah and set up His presence in Mount Zion. ⁶⁹He revisited His Sanctuary and laid plans for His Temple. He promised to be with His people forever. ⁷⁰He took His servant David, the shepherd boy, from tending the flock to shepherd His people. ⁷¹He took him from tending the ewes with young lambs, to caring for the descendants of Jacob. ⁷²So David fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and he skillfully guided them as their king.

PSALM 79

A Prayer for God's Mercy On Israel

¹O God, the heathen have invaded the country you gave us for an inheritance.

They have defiled your Holy Temple. They have turned Jerusalem into ruins. ²They have left the dead bodies of your people lying in the streets to rot and in the open field to be eaten by vultures or wild beasts. ³Blood has run down the streets of Jerusalem like water and drenched the fields like flowing brooks. No one was left to bury the dead. ⁴We have become the laughingstock of neighboring nations, the subject of their jokes and derision.

⁵How long will you let this go on, O Lord? How long will you be displeased with us? Will our humiliation never end? ⁶When will you discipline the nations that don't acknowledge you, that don't even admit that you exist? ⁷They have devoured Jacob's descendants and devastated his country. ⁸O Lord, don't hold the sins of our fathers against us. May your tender mercies save us, for we are in desperate need. ⁹O God, please help us. You are our salvation. For your own reputation's sake, deliver us from our enemies and forgive us our sins.

¹⁰Why should the heathen say, "Where is this God of theirs?" Let them understand that you are very real and not imaginary. Avenge us by defeating them in war. Let their people die as ours did. ¹¹May the groans of our people, imprisoned and sentenced to death, come before you. According to your great power, rescue us from our enemies or we will surely die. ¹²Make these neighboring nations feel the consequences of war seven times more than we did. They have shamed you, O Lord; how much longer will you let them do this?

¹³We are your people, O Lord, the sheep of your pasture. We will thank you forever for saving us. We will sing your praises for generations to come.

PSALM 80

A Prayer for Restoration

¹Hear our prayer, O Shepherd of Israel, who led Joseph's descendants

like a flock. You allowed your glory to be seen between the cherubim in the Most Holy Place. ²Let the tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh see you spring into action to save us.

³Restore us to your favor, O God, and turn your face toward us that we may be saved. ⁴O Lord God, how long will you discipline your people by not answering their prayers? ⁵You have fed us the bread of sorrows and made us drink bowls of tears.

⁶Our enemies laugh at us, and we are the scorn of our neighbors. ⁷Restore us to your favor, O God of hosts, and turn your face toward us that we may be saved. ⁸You brought us out of Egypt and carried us as one would a tender vine. You drove out the nations and planted us in Canaan. ⁹You cleared the ground and helped us become deeply rooted and soon we covered the land. ¹⁰Like a huge vine we covered the mountains with shade. Our branches were like limbs of the mighty cedars. ¹¹They reached west to the Mediterranean Sea and east to the Euphrates River. ¹²But now you have allowed the walls of our cities to be broken down, and we are prey to every army that marches by.

¹³Wild animals invade our villages and attack our children; animals from the fields come and eat our food. ¹⁴Come and help us, O Lord of hosts! Look down from heaven and see your vine languish. ¹⁵You planted it with your right hand. ¹⁶We are like a vineyard that has been cut down and burned. Rebuke our enemies that they may perish. ¹⁷But let your hand rest on the One at your right hand, the Son of Man whom you have chosen to help you. ¹⁸Then we will not turn away from you. Revive our faith in you and we will trust you forever. ¹⁹Restore us to your favor, O Lord, and turn your face toward us that we may be saved.

PSALM 81

A Song for a Festival

¹Sing praises aloud to God, our

strength! Shout for joy to the God of Israel. ²Sing a song accompanied by harps, lyres and tambourines. ³Blow the trumpet to celebrate the Festival of the New Moon, and when the moon is full, to celebrate the Passover and the Festival of Tabernacles. ⁴This is what the Lord has asked us to do as written in the laws of Israel.

⁵These days of celebration remind us of our release from slavery when He passed over our homes in Egypt, where we had to listen to a language we did not understand. ⁶The Lord says, "I took the heavy loads from your backs and relieved your hands from making bricks. ⁷You cried to me in your trouble, and I delivered you. I spoke to you in thunders from Sinai. I tested your faith at Meribah where there was no water. ⁸Listen to me, my people, while I tell you something important. I wish you would listen carefully.

⁹There must be no strange gods among you. You must never bow down to a foreign god. ¹⁰I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. ¹¹But you would not listen. You wouldn't have anything to do with me. ¹²So I let you rebel in stubbornness and have your own way.

¹³If you had only listened to me and followed my counsel, ¹⁴I would have subdued your enemies. I would have turned against them and saved you. ¹⁵Those who hated the Lord would have bowed in fear before Him. Never again would they have dared to attack Israel. ¹⁶I would have fed you with the finest wheat and satisfied you with honey from the rock."

PSALM 82

God's Sovereignty

¹God presides over the heavenly council and in the assembly of representatives from worlds afar. He is the final judge. ²He says to Israel's judges, "How long will you show partiality to the wicked and let the unjust go free? ³It's time to defend the rights of the poor, the orphans, the

weak and the oppressed. ⁴It's time to rescue the helpless and deliver them from the hands of the wicked.

⁵My people don't know how to be just or show kindness. They walk about in moral darkness while the foundations of righteousness are shaken. ⁶They are my children, royal sons and daughters of God. ⁷But they will die like any other human being, regardless of status, unless they change their ways." ⁸Come, O God, and be our defending judge. All the nations of this world belong to you.

PSALM 83

A Prayer to Frustrate the Plans of Israel's Enemies

¹O God, don't remain silent! Don't be so quiet and so still! ²Your enemies are asserting themselves. Those who hate you are preparing to attack. ³With great cunning they make plans against your people, plotting against your truth and those you have sheltered. ⁴They encourage each other by saying, "Come, let's destroy these Israelites. Let's wipe them off the face of the earth so no one will know they ever existed." ⁵So they are consulting together and uniting forces in an alliance against you, ⁶including the Edomites, Ishmaelites, Moabites, Hagarites, ⁷Gebalites, Ammonites, Amalekites, Philistines and the people of Tyre. ⁸Even the Assyrian superpower has joined them and promised to help the Ammonites and the Moabites who are descendants of Lot.

⁹O Lord, defeat them as you did the Midianites, as you did Sisera and Jabin by the Kishon River. ¹⁰You defeated them at Endor, and the ground was covered with the bodies of their troops. ¹¹Defeat this alliance with its commanders as you did Oreb and Zeeb. Defeat their princes and kings as you did Zebah and Zalmunna. ¹²They challenged your authority and said, "Let us take away Israel's pasturelands."

¹³Lord, scatter this alliance and make our enemies as harmless as dust, as a

tumbleweed blown by the wind. ¹⁴Scatter our enemies as a forest fire scatters the animals. ¹⁵Chase them out of the hills with wind and storm. Terrify them so they'll never attack us again. ¹⁶Shame them with defeat and make them acknowledge your name. ¹⁷May they be defeated and ashamed, and may they perish in disgrace. ¹⁸Let them know that you are the only true God and that the whole world belongs to you.

PSALM 84

Happy Are Those Who Serve in God's Temple

¹How lovely is your earthly home, O Lord of hosts! ²My soul longs, even faints, to be in the heavenly courts of the Lord. My heart and my soul cry out to be near the living God.

³The sparrows have found their nests, and swallows have made a home near your altar where they will raise their young, O Lord of hosts, my Savior and King! ⁴How happy are those who serve you in your Temple and praise you in your courts!

⁵Blessed are those who find strength in you and who travel the road to Zion! ⁶When they pass through the Valley of Weeping, they will find springs of comfort. Blessings will fall on them like gentle autumn rains. ⁷They will go from strength to strength until they see you face to face.

⁸O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer. Please listen to me, O God of Jacob. ⁹Bless the king, O Lord. Look with favor on your anointed leader.

¹⁰One day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to live in a place of ease among the wicked. ¹¹The Lord is our protector and a glorious King. He showers us with kindness and grace. He will not withhold any good thing from those who do right.

¹²O Lord of hosts, how happy are those who trust in you!

PSALM 85

A Prayer for God's Favor

¹Lord, you have turned our country around and given us prosperity. ²You have forgiven our sins and covered our iniquities. ³You have turned from disciplining us and are once again protecting us.

⁴Make our restoration complete, O God, and continue to favor us with your presence. ⁵We know that you are not an angry God. We know that you are not a God who stays displeased forever. ⁶Will you revive our nation so your people can once more rejoice in you? ⁷Show us with your unfailing love, O Lord. Grant us your salvation.

⁸I will listen to what the Lord our God has to say for He will speak peace to His people, to those who turn to him with all their hearts. ⁹He is ready to save those who honor Him so that other nations may see His glory in our land.

¹⁰Then faithfulness and eternal love will cover the earth, and righteousness and peace will kiss each other. ¹¹Our faith will reach up to God and He will shower us with His righteousness.

¹²Yes, the Lord will give us what is good and our land will produce as never before. ¹³Righteousness is what He's looking for; it prepares the way for Him to bless His people.

PSALM 86

A Prayer for Mercy and Understanding

¹Please listen to me, Lord, and answer me, for I am very helpless and needy.

²Keep my heart for you, for I can't, even though I am devoted to you. Save me, Lord, your servant who trusts you.

³Be merciful to me, Lord. Every day I lift my heart to you in prayer. ⁴Fill my heart with joy. I know my prayers have reached your ears. ⁵Lord, you are kind and good, always ready to forgive. You abound in unfailing love to those who call on you.

⁶Listen to me, Lord. Hear my prayer. Listen to my cry for mercy. ⁷In the day of trouble I will call on you because I know

you will answer me. ⁸There is no god like you, even if all the idols of the heathen were real. Not one of them could do what you have done. ⁹One day all nations which you have made will bow down to worship you; they will acknowledge you and glorify your name ¹⁰for you are great and have done marvelous things. You alone are God.

¹¹Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth. Give me an undivided heart that I may more faithfully obey you. Unite my heart with yours to honor your name. ¹²O Lord, my God, I praise you with my whole heart. I will glorify your name forever. ¹³Your continuous love and mercy toward me are great. Many times you have delivered me from death.

¹⁴O Lord, the proud have again turned against me. A gang of ruthless men are plotting to kill me. They have no respect for you and pay no attention to what you say. ¹⁵O Lord, you are a God of compassion. You are gracious and kind, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. ¹⁶Turn your love toward me as never before. Please help me and give me strength. Save the son of a devoted mother who loved you.

¹⁷Let everyone see your goodness and know that you hear the prayers of the helpless. Make my enemies ashamed of their plans. You, Lord, have helped me and comforted my soul.

PSALM 87

The Glories of Jerusalem

¹The Lord has built His city on a sacred hill. ²More than any other place in all Israel, the Lord loves Jerusalem. ³Glorious things have been spoken about you, O city of God. ⁴The Lord says, "When I list the people who obey me, it will include people from Egypt, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, Ethiopia and every other country. These also belong to the inhabitants of Zion, even though they were born elsewhere."

⁵All nations belong to you, city of Zion,

not only those who were born there. This makes it the city of God, for the Most High will defend it. ⁶The Lord will make a list of those who are His and will take into consideration where they were born. ⁷Those who love Him will dance and sing, "Thank you for all our blessings!"

PSALM 88

A Prayer for Help When Depressed

¹O Lord my God, I have wept before you day and night. ²Please hear my prayer and listen to my cry. ³So many troubles have fallen on me that I am close to death. ⁴I'm tottering on the edge of the grave. My last ounce of strength is almost gone. ⁵I feel like a dead man, like one who has already been buried, like someone who has been forgotten, cut off from the land of the living.

⁶I feel I've been thrown into a deep pit where it is dark and foreboding. ⁷You must be displeased with me for I'm overwhelmed by waves of sorrows. ⁸My friends have abandoned me and I am repulsive to them. I feel shut up in a dungeon and can't free myself. ⁹My eyesight is weak from so much crying. Lord, every day I have asked you to help me and have lifted up my hands in prayer.

¹⁰Do you help the dead? Do you work miracles for them? Are they the ones who praise you? ¹¹Do they talk to each other about your love? Do they speak about your faithfulness? ¹²Are your wonders seen by those in the grave? Is your loving kindness appreciated where the dead are forgotten?

¹³Lord, every morning I ask you for help and bring my prayer before you. ¹⁴Why do you turn away from me? Why are you rejecting me? ¹⁵I have suffered many terrors since my youth and have often been near death's door. I am helpless with fear and depression. ¹⁶You seem to want to crush and destroy me. ¹⁷Every day the hostility of my enemies surrounds me like a flood. I'm closed in from every side. ¹⁸Even my closest friends have abandoned me. Darkness is now my only friend.

PSALM 89

A Song About God's Mercy and Love

¹O Lord, I will sing of your mercy and your love. I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. ²I know that your love stands firm forever and your faithfulness is as permanent as the heavens.

³You said, "I have made a covenant with the man I chose to be king. I have promised my servant David ⁴that a descendant of his will be King and rule forever and the royal line of David will never die out."

⁵O Lord, the heavens sing of the wonderful things you do for sinful man. The beings who inhabit the farthest reaches of space sing of your faithfulness. ⁶Who can be compared to the Lord? Who in all the universe is equal to Him? ⁷They all stand in awe of you; you are revered by all who surround you. ⁸No one has all power and is as mighty as you, Lord. No one is as faithful and trustworthy as you.

⁹You rule the raging sea; you calm the boisterous waves. ¹⁰You can crush the largest whale by a word; you can scatter the largest army by your awesome power. ¹¹The universe belongs to you. You created the world and everything in it, so it belongs to you. ¹²You created everything from the north to the south. Mountains such as Tabor and Hermon sing your glory. ¹³How mighty you are! How great is your strength! What a powerful right arm you have!

¹⁴Your kingdom is built on justice and righteousness. Love and mercy are seen in everything you do. ¹⁵How happy are the people who worship you, who walk in the light of your kindness. ¹⁶It's because of you that they are happy. No wonder they praise you for your goodness. ¹⁷You are their glory and strength. By your favor you exalt them and help them triumph over their enemies. ¹⁸The Lord is our defense and shield. The Holy One of Israel is our king.

¹⁹Years ago you said to your faithful servant, Samuel, "I have chosen one who will lead out in war for me. I have chosen

someone from among the people. ²⁰I have chosen my servant David to be king by anointing him with holy oil. ²¹My strength will be his, and my power will make him strong. ²²His enemies will not outwit him, and the wicked will not humble him. ²³I will crush all those who attack him and strike down those who would kill him. ²⁴I will be faithful to him, and because of me, he will be honored. ²⁵I will extend his kingdom from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean. ²⁶He will say to me, 'You are my Father and my God. You are my Rock of salvation.'

²⁷"I will exalt him as my firstborn son and make him the greatest of kings. ²⁸I will keep my promises to him. The covenant I will make with him is forever. ²⁹His royal line will never come to an end. His throne will be secure and will last as long as the heavens. ³⁰But if his descendants reject my teaching and do not keep my law, ³¹if they break my commandments and ignore my advice, ³²then I have no choice but to let them suffer the consequences of their own sins. ³³However, I will not stop loving David or break my agreement with him.

³⁴"I will not break the covenant I made with him or change one thing I promised to do for him. ³⁵I am a holy God and will not lie to David. ³⁶His royal line will continue forever. His kingdom will last as long as the sun shines and the heavens exist. ³⁷His kingdom is forever. It is as sure a witness as the moon that shines in the night sky."

³⁸But, Lord, you must be displeased with your chosen king. You have turned your face away from your anointed. ³⁹Does this mean that you have broken your promise and that you will give his throne to someone else? ⁴⁰You have permitted his fortifications to be attacked, their walls to be breached and their strongholds to be destroyed. ⁴¹Those who pass through our land laugh at him; armies come in and take whatever they want. ⁴²You have given his enemies the victory and now they are celebrating

what they have done to him. ⁴³You have made his weapons useless and have not stood by him in battle. ⁴⁴You have taken away his splendor and knocked his throne to the ground. ⁴⁵You have made him old before his time and covered him with shame.

⁴⁶How long will you do this, Lord? Will you hide yourself from him forever? Your displeasure seems like an angry fire. ⁴⁷Remember how short our lives are, Lord. You didn't create us with immortality. ⁴⁸Not one of us can live on our own without dying. No one can keep himself from going to the grave.

⁴⁹Lord, where are the former proofs of your love? Where are the promises you made to your servant David? ⁵⁰He's the laughingstock of all his enemies; every nation taunts him. ⁵¹How long will you let his enemies mock him? How long, Lord, will you let them insult and taunt him?

⁵²In spite of this, he will praise you. The Lord be praised forever and ever. Amen.

PSALM 90

God's Eternity and Man's Short Life

¹Lord, you have been our security in all generations. ²Before you created the mountains and even before you formed the world, you were there as an eternal God, and you will be forever.

³You say to people, "Return to dust," and they do. ⁴A thousand years to you is like yesterday to us; they are no more to you than a watch in the night. ⁵You could sweep the whole human race away as you did at the time of the flood. We are like the flowers ⁶that blossom in the morning, then wither and die by evening. ⁷You could consume us in a moment. The very thought of such awesome power overwhelms us.

⁸You know every bad thing we have done; even what we have done secretly. It is as clear to you as if we had done it publicly in broad daylight. ⁹Our whole lives are open to your scrutiny. They come to an end with a sigh. ¹⁰Seventy years is all we have, eighty years if we're

strong. Yet much of that time is spent in labor and trouble. Then we're gone and forgotten. ¹¹Who really understands the awesome power you have? Who knows the fury you could unleash? ¹²Help us to understand how short our lives really are so we may fill our hearts with wisdom.

¹³How long until you return to us, O Lord? How long? Have pity on your servants. ¹⁴Fill us with your love in the early morning hours so we can sing your praise and be glad all our lives. ¹⁵Give us as much happiness as you have given us sadness, as many good years as troublesome ones. ¹⁶Let us see your mighty deeds; let our children see your glorious power. ¹⁷Let your favor rest upon us and establish the work we have done for you.

PSALM 91

Safe in the Lord

¹He who comes to the secret place of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

²I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and fortress, my God, the One I can trust." ³He will deliver you from Satan's snare and from the coming dreadful pestilence. ⁴He will cover you with His feathers and hide you under His wings. His truth will defend and protect you. ⁵You will not be afraid of dangers lurking at night, nor of an enemy's arrows that fly by day. ⁶You will not fear plagues that stalk the night, nor disasters that strike at noon.

⁷A thousand will fall beside you and ten thousand will die around you, but death will not touch you. ⁸With your own eyes you will see what happens to the wicked. ⁹Because you have made the Lord your defender and the Most High your refuge, ¹⁰no disaster will befall you nor will any plague come near your house. ¹¹He will send His angels to protect you as you walk in His ways. ¹²They will lift you up in their arms so you won't stub your toe on a rock. ¹³You will be able to fight off lions and step on snakes, even young lions and poisonous

snakes will be subject to you.

¹⁴God says, "I will save those who love me. I will protect those who know my name. ¹⁵When those who trust me call to me, I will answer them. I will be with them when they are in trouble. I will rescue them and honor them. ¹⁶I will satisfy them with long lives and let them experience my salvation."

PSALM 92

A Sabbath Song

¹It's good to give thanks to the Lord and to sing praises to the Most High. ²It's good to tell Him of your love in the morning and confirm your loyalty to Him at night. ³It's good to praise the Lord with musical instruments, the lute, the harp and the melodious lyre.

⁴O Lord, you have made my heart glad by what you have done. My heart overflows with songs of praise. ⁵O Lord, what great things you do and how deep are your thoughts! ⁶The fool doesn't see the obvious hand of God in things; neither do those who are spiritually blind. ⁷The wicked have sprung up everywhere like weeds, and those who do wrong have prospered, but the time is coming when they will vanish from the earth. ⁸But you, O Lord, have always been on your throne. ⁹Those who are against you will perish, Lord, and workers of iniquity will someday vanish.

¹⁰You have restored the king's self-respect. Our neighboring nations respect our borders much like people respect a wild bull. You have blessed us with peace and happiness. ¹¹I have seen the defeat of my attackers, and I have heard my assailant's cry for mercy. ¹²Those who love you will flourish like palm trees. We will grow as the cedars of Lebanon. ¹³We will be like trees planted in the house of the Lord. We will grow strong in the courtyard of our God.

¹⁴Even in our old age we will bear fruit. We will remain productive and continue to be vigorous for our God. ¹⁵We will proclaim His goodness. The Lord is our

Rock of defense. Nothing but goodness is found in Him.

PSALM 93

The Lord Is King

¹The Lord is king! He is clothed with majesty and strength. He set the earth firmly in orbit so that no one can move it. ²Your kingship, O Lord, has been in place from the beginning of time, from all eternity. ³The oceans raise their voices to you in praise; their pounding waves send forth sounds of your majesty and power.

⁴But mightier and more powerful than oceans or the great waves of the sea is the majesty of the Lord Himself. ⁵Your law, O Lord, is eternal and your testimonies are sure. Holiness adorns your Temple forever.

PSALM 94

God Is Our Refuge

¹Lord, you are a God who disciplines. You are a God who will put an end to sin. ²Rise up, O God, and judge the earth. You know those who are proud and arrogant. ³How long will you allow the wicked to continue doing evil and exult over the righteous? ⁴How much longer will arrogant criminals boast of their violence and crime? ⁵They are crushing your people, Lord, and doing everything they can against us. ⁶They take advantage of widows and orphans and murder those they don't want in their neighborhoods. ⁷They keep telling themselves, "The Lord doesn't care. He doesn't see what's going on down here."

⁸How can people be so irrational? How foolish can they be? Will they ever learn? ⁹If God made ears, can He not hear? If He made eyes, can He not see? ¹⁰Since He made this world, isn't He still in charge? Does He who teaches lack knowledge?

¹¹The Lord knows what we think. He knows how irrational and futile man's thoughts can be. ¹²Happy is the person you discipline, the one you teach from your law. ¹³You give the righteous a sense of assurance during their days of

trouble until a grave is dug for all the wicked. ¹⁴The Lord will not abandon those who belong to Him; He will not forsake His people. ¹⁵The time will come when justice will have its day and all the followers of God will be glad.

¹⁶Who rises up for me against the wicked? Who takes my side against evil-doers? ¹⁷If the Lord had not stood by me, I would be dead and buried. ¹⁸Often I said to myself, "My feet are slipping out from under me; this is the end." But each time you held me up.

¹⁹Whenever I am worried or anxious, you make me glad. ²⁰Can a corrupt judicial system be allied with you, a system that uses the law to cause suffering? ²¹Wicked judges band together against the righteous and condemn the innocent to death. ²²But the Lord has been my defense, and my God will continue to protect me. ²³God will carry out His justice against the wicked, and they will reap the consequences of their sins. The Lord will destroy them and cleanse the earth of evil.

PSALM 95

A Call to Worship

¹Come, let us praise the Lord. Let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation. ²Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving and joyfully sing praises to His name. ³For the Lord is a great God and a great King—above all gods. ⁴The deepest valleys of the earth are in His hand; the highest mountains belong to Him also. ⁵The seas are His because He made them, and the dry land because He formed it with His own hands.

⁶Come, let us bow down and worship Him; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. ⁷He is our God, and we are His people, the sheep of His pasture. ⁸Listen now to Him speak: "Don't harden your hearts and be stubborn as your ancestors were at Meribah, as they were that day in the desert at Massah. ⁹Don't test and try me as they did when they doubted my love in spite of everything I

had done for them. ¹⁰I had to delay their entrance into Canaan for forty years because of their attitude and refusal to follow my instructions. ¹¹I took an oath, saying, 'I will not bless their sinning by giving them the rest they desire.'"

PSALM 96

Praise God for His Righteous Judgment

¹Let's sing a new song to the Lord. Let the whole world sing praises to Him. ²Sing to the Lord and bless His name. Tell the good news every day that He has saved us from our sins.

³Declare His glory to the world and tell of His mighty acts to everyone. ⁴The Lord our God is great and greatly to be praised. We honor Him above all other gods. ⁵Those gods are only idols, but the Lord, our living God, made the heavens. ⁶Glory and majesty surround Him; beauty and power fill His Sanctuary.

⁷Give praise to the Lord, O people of the earth. Tell of His glory and power. ⁸Give Him the honor due His name and bring an offering when you come to His holy Temple. ⁹Worship the Lord in the beauty of His holiness. Bow before Him with awe and respect. ¹⁰Tell the nations, "The Lord is King! He has made the earth, and no one can move it out of its place. He will judge the people with equity."

¹¹Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice. Let the ocean waves roar with laughter, along with everything in the sea. ¹²Let the trees in the woods and fields wave their branches and shout for joy. ¹³For the Lord will come to judge the world with righteousness and His people with truth.

PSALM 97

Praise the Lord for His Greatness

¹The Lord is King! Let the earth be glad. Let the islands of the sea rejoice.

²Clouds and darkness may hide Him from our view, yet His kingdom is built on what is right and fair. ³When He ap-

pears, fire goes out from Him; His enemies disintegrate in His presence. ⁴The lightning He sends illuminates the whole world. The earth trembles from the sound of His thunder. ⁵The mountains melt like wax when He appears because He is Lord of all the earth. ⁶The heavens themselves proclaim His righteousness, and all people on earth see His glory.

⁷All those who worship idols are put to shame because the lifeless gods they have bragged about stand dumb. They should all bow before the Lord. ⁸Those who live in Zion are glad, and the villages of Judah rejoice at the righteous judgments of the Lord. ⁹You, O Lord, are the Most High God and Ruler over all the earth. You are much greater than all other gods.

¹⁰God loves those who hate wickedness. He guards those who love Him and delivers them from the hands of the wicked. ¹¹Light shines on those who do right, and joy comes to the honest in heart. ¹²Rejoice in the Lord, you who are righteous, and be thankful for what He has done for you.

PSALM 98

A Song of Praise

¹Sing a new song to the Lord because He has done wonderful things. His right hand and His holy arm have brought us victory. ²The Lord has shown us what He can do. He has saved us from our enemies in the sight of the nations. ³He has faithfully kept His promise to Israel and demonstrated His loyalty and love. People everywhere have heard what He has done for His people. ⁴Sing to the Lord; praise Him with musical instruments and with shouts of joy.

⁵Sing to Him accompanied by the harp. Sing the old melodies with stringed instruments. ⁶Bring on the trumpets and the horns and shout for joy before the Lord our King. ⁷Let the sea in its vastness roar with praise. Let every living thing praise the Lord.

⁸Let the overflowing brooks clap their

hands and the hills echo with songs of praise. ⁹Let the earth sing for joy because the Lord is coming to judge the earth and to rule His people with justice.

PSALM 99

Praise the Lord, for He Is Holy

¹The Lord is King; let the nations tremble at His majesty. He sits between the cherubim; let the earth bow in reverence. ²The Lord is not only mighty in Zion, but supreme over all the earth. ³Let everyone praise His awesome name, for He is holy.

⁴The Lord, our mighty King is just and equitable. He has done what is just and right in Jacob. ⁵Exalt the Lord our God and worship at His footstool, for He is holy.

⁶Moses and Aaron were His servants. Samuel also called on His name. They called to the Lord and He answered them. ⁷He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud. They carried out the laws and commands He gave them.

⁸O Lord, you answered their cry for help. You were forgiving and loving even when you had to discipline them for their misdeeds. ⁹Praise the Lord our God and worship at His holy mountain, for the Lord our God is holy.

PSALM 100

Praise the Lord for His Faithfulness

¹Sing joyfully to the Lord, all you who live on earth. ²Serve the Lord with gladness; come into His presence with singing.

³Know that the Lord is God. He is the One who made us and not we ourselves. We are His people, the sheep of His pasture. ⁴Enter His Temple gates with thanksgiving and His courtyard with praise. Be thankful for what He has done for you and praise His holy name. ⁵For the Lord is good, His love never fails and His faithfulness to His people endures through all generations.

PSALM 101

A Song About God's Love and Justice

¹I will sing about you, O Lord. I will

sing about your love and justice. ²I will be careful to live a blameless life, but I will need your help. I will live wisely in my own house. ³I will set no wicked thing before my eyes; I will hate it because it turns me away from the Lord. I will not let this world influence me against Him. ⁴I will not be dishonest; I will have nothing to do with such evil. ⁵If anyone slyly degrades his neighbor, I will not tolerate it. I will not listen to those who look down on others.

⁶But I will help those who are faithful to the Lord and bring them into my house. I will employ the innocent and support them. ⁷I will not employ anyone who is dishonest, and those who tell lies will not remain in my presence. ⁸Every morning I will commit myself to oppose wickedness. I will use my influence to rid our city of evildoers.

PSALM 102

The Brevity of Life and God's Eternity

¹Hear my prayer, O Lord, and listen to my cry for help. ²Don't hide your face from me just when I need you. Please listen and answer me quickly when I call!

³My life is fading away like vanishing smoke; my body burns with fever. ⁴I feel like mown grass, withered and drying in the sun. I've lost all desire to eat or to live. ⁵I moan all day; my body is nothing but skin and bones. ⁶I feel like a vulture in the wilderness or an owl in the desert. ⁷I lie awake all night. I am like a lonely sparrow on a housetop.

⁸People insult me all day long, and those who ridicule me use my name as a curse. ⁹My food tastes like ashes, and tears fall into my drink. ¹⁰It seems as if you're angry with me too, Lord. It seems that you've picked me up and thrown me aside. ¹¹My days are like an evening shadow and my life is drying up like mown grass.

¹²But you, Lord, live on forever; there's never been a time when you did not exist. ¹³Someday you will arise and take pity on Israel, but now is the time to

favor her. ¹⁴Your servants have pity on the ruins of her cities. ¹⁵Other nations will one day respect her again, and the kings of the earth will recognize your glory in doing it. ¹⁶The Lord will build up Israel, and His glory will be seen in Jerusalem. ¹⁷He will respond to the pleas of His destitute people and will not let their prayers go unanswered.

¹⁸We will record for future generations all that the Lord has done so those not yet born may read it and praise Him, ¹⁹saying, "The Lord looked down from His Sanctuary in heaven and saw what was happening on earth. ²⁰He heard the groans of His imprisoned people and rescued those doomed to die."

²¹So the name of the Lord will be praised in Israel and glorified in Jerusalem. ²²Someday people from all nations will come together to worship the Lord. ²³He has weakened me before my time; my days are numbered. ²⁴O God, your years go on forever; please don't take me away in the middle of my life. ²⁵You created the earth and with your hands spread out the sky. ²⁶They will perish, but you will remain. They will wear out, and you will change them as a change of clothes. ²⁷But you will always be the same and your life will never end. ²⁸Our children and grandchildren will live in your presence, and their descendants will be with you forever.

PSALM 103

Praise the Lord for His Mercies

¹Praise the Lord, O my soul; may everything within me praise His holy name. ²Praise the Lord, O my soul, and don't forget all the benefits He's given you.

³He forgives your sins and heals your diseases. ⁴He has kept you from an early grave and treats you with love and compassion. ⁵He gives you the comforts of life so your strength is renewed like an eagle's. ⁶The Lord will vindicate the oppressed and see that justice is served. ⁷He revealed His plans to Moses and let Israel

see His mighty acts in setting them free.

⁸The Lord is very merciful and gracious. He does not act in passionate anger but abounds in unending love.

⁹The Lord is angry with sin, but His displeasure will not last forever. ¹⁰He does not punish us as we deserve, nor repay us for our wrongs against Him.

¹¹As high as the heavens are above the earth, that's how great His unending love is for everyone who loves Him. ¹²As far as the east is from the west, that's how far He removes our transgressions from us. ¹³As a caring father is to his children, that's how kind the Lord is to His children. ¹⁴He knows what we are made of and remembers that we will return to dust.

¹⁵As for the unbeliever, his days are like grass, like yesterday's dandelion in the field. ¹⁶The wind blows, and only the stem remains. ¹⁷But the unending love of God continues forever, and those who love Him will be given eternal life. This same love extends to their children and grandchildren. ¹⁸He blesses those who are true to His covenant and who love to obey Him.

¹⁹The Lord's throne is in heaven and He is King over everything. ²⁰Praise the Lord, you strong and mighty angels; obey His commands and listen to what He has to say. ²¹Praise the Lord, you angels who minister for Him and serve Him. ²²Praise the Lord, all creatures great and small which inhabit His dominion. May my whole being praise the Lord!

PSALM 104

Praise God for the Marvels of Nature

¹Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, how great you are! You are clothed with glory and majesty. ²You cover yourself with light as we put on a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent over our heads. ³You built your royal palace above the firmament. You use the clouds as a chariot and ride on the wings of the wind. ⁴The winds are your messengers and flashes of lightning your servants.

⁵You set the earth firmly in orbit and

no one can shake it out of its place. ⁶In the beginning the earth was completely covered with water, hiding the mountains. ⁷Then you spoke and the waters fled away. They rushed away from the mountains when they heard your voice.

⁸The mountains rose and the valleys sank until water collected where you had prepared for it. ⁹After the great flood, you set a boundary for the waters which they cannot pass. They will never cover the earth again.

¹⁰You made springs flow in the valleys and rivers between the mountains. ¹¹You provided water for the animals to quench their thirst. ¹²Birds nest in the trees and sing their songs from their branches. ¹³From your lofty abode you water the mountains with rain from heaven and the earth abounds with the vegetation you provide. ¹⁴You make grass grow for cattle, plants for man to cultivate and seeds to plant new crops. ¹⁵Grapes grow and gladden man's heart; olive oil makes his face shine, and bread gives him strength.

¹⁶The cedars of Lebanon receive abundant water; the huge trees which the Lord planted. ¹⁷Birds come and build their nests in them; storks make their homes in the fir trees. ¹⁸Wild goats climb the high mountains and badgers hide in the cliffs. ¹⁹You put the moon in place to mark months and seasons and gave the sun knowledge of when to set.

²⁰You made the evening, and when it begins, the beasts of the forest start prowling. ²¹Then young lions roar and start looking for food which God provides. ²²Before dawn, they go back to their dens to rest. ²³In the morning people go out to work in the fields until evening. ²⁴O Lord, you have made so many wonders! In wisdom you have arranged them all! The earth is full of your creatures.

²⁵Then there is the mighty ocean, teeming with countless creatures large and small. ²⁶Ships go there, and you made whales to play in it. ²⁷All things depend on

you for food, and you feed them as they need it. ²⁸You provide it and they gather it. You open your hand and there is plenty for man and beast. ²⁹When you turn away from them, they fear for their future. When you take away their breath, they die and return to dust.

³⁰Whatever your Spirit creates, lives; daily you sustain the earth and all its creatures. ³¹The glory of the Lord will always endure and He rejoices in what He has made. ³²He can look at the earth and make it tremble. He can touch the mountains and smoke billows forth.

³³I will sing to the Lord all my life; as long as I live I will sing praises to my God. ³⁴My thoughts of Him are sweet and my gladness comes from Him. ³⁵Some day sinners will be gone from the earth and wickedness will be no more. Praise the Lord, O my soul! Praise the Lord!

PSALM 105

Thank the Lord for His Guidance Throughout History

¹O give thanks to the Lord! Call on His name. Tell all the nations what He has done. ²Sing praises to the Lord. Tell about all His wonderful acts. ³Glory in His holy name; let those who seek the Lord rejoice.

⁴Let us go to the Lord for help and ask Him to strengthen us. Seek Him daily. ⁵Remember the marvelous things He has done, the miracles and the wise decisions He made for us. ⁶Remember what He has done for the children of Abraham and for the descendants of Jacob, His chosen people. ⁷He is the Lord our God. His commandments are for all the world. ⁸He will remember His covenant forever, and His promises extend over thousands of generations. ⁹He will keep the promise He made to Abraham which he repeated to Isaac ¹⁰and confirmed to Jacob as a covenant, a promise that can never be broken.

¹¹The Lord said, "I will give you the land of Canaan for you and your descendants forever." ¹²When God's people were few in number, yes, very few, still

foreigners living in a strange land, ¹³wandering around the country from one place to another, He made the promise. ¹⁴God allowed no one to hurt them and even warned kings not to harm them. ¹⁵He said, "Don't touch Abraham; he is my chosen servant. Don't harm my anointed or molest my prophet."

¹⁶Then a famine came which took away all their supplies of food. ¹⁷Before that He sent a man named Joseph into Egypt, a man sold as a slave. ¹⁸He went there in chains, with an iron collar around his neck. ¹⁹What he predicted came true; the word of the Lord was tested and proven right. ²⁰The king of Egypt released him and put him in charge of all Egypt. ²¹He made him lord of his house, then governor over the country. ²²He instructed other officials and had authority over the king's advisers.

²³Then Jacob moved to Egypt and lived in the land of Ham. ²⁴There the Lord's people increased in numbers until the Egyptians feared them. ²⁵Soon the Egyptians hated God's people and conspired against them. ²⁶The Lord sent His chosen servants, Moses and Aaron, to help them. ²⁷They did the Lord's mighty acts and performed great miracles in Egypt.

²⁸God sent darkness over the land, but the Egyptians still rebelled against His word. ²⁹He turned their rivers into blood which caused their fish to die. ³⁰The country was overrun by frogs, even in the bedchamber of the king. ³¹God spoke, and flies and gnats swarmed and covered the land. ³²He sent hail and lightning instead of rain. ³³He broke their vines and fig trees and damaged every tree in the country. ³⁴He spoke to the locusts and caterpillars, and they invaded the land without number. ³⁵They ate all the vegetation and devoured everything that the earth had produced for them. ³⁶He slew the firstborn of every family in the land, including the firstborn of all the animals.

³⁷Then He brought His people out of Egypt with silver and gold, and there was

not one feeble person among them. ³⁸The Egyptians were afraid of them and were glad to see them go. ³⁹He led them by a cloud during the day to give them shade and by a pillar of fire at night to give them heat. ⁴⁰He fed them with bread from heaven, and when they asked Him for meat, He sent them quail. ⁴¹When they were thirsty, He gave them water from a rock, and it flowed through the desert like a stream. ⁴²God had not forgotten His promise to Abraham, His servant.

⁴³So He set His people free, and they sang for joy. ⁴⁴He gave them their own land, and they reaped the benefits of their own labor. ⁴⁵He did all this for them so His people could obey His laws and keep His commandments. Praise the Lord!

PSALM 106

Praise God for Forgiveness

¹Praise the Lord! Give thanks to the Lord because He is good and His loving kindness endures forever. ²Who knows all the great things the Lord has done? Who can praise Him enough for His mighty acts?

³Happy are those who keep His commandments, who always try to do what is right. ⁴Lord, don't forget about me when you show favor to your people. Include me with those who will be saved. ⁵I want to see you bless your people. Let me share in their happiness so I can experience gladness with those who belong to you.

⁶We have sinned just as our forefathers did. We have been wicked and have done evil in your sight. ⁷Our ancestors didn't appreciate the miraculous things the Lord did for them in Egypt; they forgot how merciful He had been, and when they reached the Red Sea, they turned against Him and doubted His word. ⁸Yet He saved them just as He had said He would and showed the world His power. ⁹He commanded the waters of the Red Sea to part, and when they did, His people walked across on dry land. ¹⁰He saved them from the hand of their

enemies and rescued them from Pharaoh's pursuing army. ¹¹The waters of the Red Sea closed in on the Egyptian troops, and not one of them survived. ¹²Then our forefathers believed His promises and praised Him for what He had done.

¹³But it wasn't long until they forgot His mighty acts again and refused to listen to His counsel. ¹⁴They craved the food they had in Egypt and questioned His love and care for them. ¹⁵So He gave them what they asked for, but it only brought them trouble, disease and death. ¹⁶Some men were jealous of those two ancient saints, Moses and Aaron. ¹⁷The earth opened its mouth and swallowed up Korah, Dathan, Abiram and their families. ¹⁸Fire also came down on their followers and destroyed them. ¹⁹Even before that, at Sinai our forefathers made a golden calf which they worshiped as God. ²⁰So they exchanged the glory of the Lord's presence for an image of an ox that eats grass. ²¹They forgot the great miracles the Lord had performed to save them out of Egypt ²²and His awesome deeds at the Red Sea. ²³When the Lord considered destroying them, Moses pled with Him not to do so, and the Lord responded to his plea.

²⁴Yet they still did not believe God's promise to bring them into the Promised Land and showed no interest in going there. ²⁵They grumbled and complained in their tents and wouldn't listen to the Lord. ²⁶So He told them that He would not take them into the Promised Land but would let them die in the desert. ²⁷Many of their descendants were killed in battle, and those who were captured had to live among the heathen. ²⁸Then at Peor, they took part in the worship of Baal by eating meat from sacrifices offered to the dead. ²⁹They provoked the Lord with their attitudes, and He responded with more discipline; a terrible plague broke out among them. ³⁰An Israelite brought a temple prostitute into the camp, but Phinehas followed them to the man's tent and killed

them both, and the plague stopped.

³¹This was not held against him, but was to his credit for generations to come.

³²Then by the waters of Meribah, they rebelled and troubled Moses so much that he acted foolishly trying to quiet them. ³³They put such pressure on him that he spoke in anger and missed out on entering the Promised Land. ³⁴After settling in Canaan, they didn't drive out the remaining heathen as the Lord had told them to do, ³⁵but married them and adopted their pagan ways. ³⁶Soon they were worshiping their idols, which drew them away from the Lord. ³⁷They sacrificed their own sons and daughters as religious prostitutes and offered their infants to demons. ³⁸They sacrificed so many innocent children that the country seemed polluted with blood. ³⁹They degraded themselves by participating in sexual orgies as part of pagan worship.

⁴⁰The Lord abhorred their degrading practices and was extremely displeased with His people. ⁴¹He had no choice but to remove His protection and let them be overrun by heathen armies and ruled by their enemies. ⁴²Their enemies oppressed them, and they were kept subjected to their power by heavy taxation.

⁴³Time and again the Lord rescued them, but they continued to rebel against Him and sank deeper into sin. ⁴⁴But when they cried for help, the Lord heard them and delivered them. ⁴⁵He never forgot the promise He had made to their forefathers, and He responded to their prayers in unending love. ⁴⁶He caused those who carried them away captive to have pity on them.

⁴⁷Save us, O Lord our God, and bring us back from heathen lands to our own country. We will always thank you and praise your holy name. ⁴⁸Come, let us praise the God of Israel. Let us praise Him now and forever. Let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the Lord!

PSALM 107

Thank the Lord, for He Is Good

¹O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His mercy endures forever. ²Let the redeemed of the Lord tell what He has done, how He has saved them from their enemies, ³and brought them home from foreign lands, from east and west, from north and south.

⁴Our forefathers lived in the desert because there was no city they could call their own. ⁵At times they were so hungry and thirsty they almost gave up hope of survival. ⁶Then they prayed to the Lord, and He saved them from their distress. ⁷He led them along the way to a city they could call their own. ⁸O that we would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men! ⁹He satisfies our hunger and quenches our thirst. He fills our hearts with His goodness.

¹⁰Some have been discouraged to the point of giving up; others have been taken away and chained to prison walls by our enemies ¹¹because they rebelled against the words of God and rejected the counsel of the Most High. ¹²He broke their pride by subjecting them to bitter labor, and no one seemed to care. ¹³Then they cried to the Lord and He saved them from their troubles. ¹⁴He lifted their spirits, broke their chains and restored their strength. ¹⁵We should thank the Lord for His love and for all the wonderful things He has done for His people. ¹⁶He shatters bronze gates and cuts the bars of iron in two.

¹⁷Our forefathers became sick through their sinful ways and suffered unduly because of their continual wickedness. ¹⁸They were so close to death that the sight of food nauseated them. ¹⁹Then they called on the Lord, and He saved them out of their distress. ²⁰He spoke and they were healed. He delivered them from the pit of death. ²¹We should thank the Lord for His unending love and the wonderful things He has done for His people. ²²Let's thank Him with sacrificial

giving and with songs of joy, telling what He has done.

²³Some of our people made a living by sailing the ocean on ships. ²⁴They have seen what the Lord can do; they have seen His power to control the mighty storm. ²⁵He speaks and the winds come. They blow across the waters, stirring up the mighty waves. ²⁶The ships begin to rock and are lifted high into the air, then plunged into the depths. The hearts of men melt with fear and their courage vanishes. ²⁷They stumble and stagger like drunken men; they are at their wits end to know what to do. ²⁸Then in their trouble, they call on the Lord, and He saves them out of their distress. ²⁹He calms the storm, and soon the waves are still. ³⁰They are glad that everything is quiet and peaceful again and that God has guided them back to a safe harbor. ³¹We should thank the Lord for His love and for all the wonderful things He has done for His people. ³²We should exalt Him in our congregations and praise Him in our board meetings.

³³The Lord caused rivers to dry up and prevented mountain springs from flowing. ³⁴He turned rich farm land into salty wasteland because of the wickedness of those living there. ³⁵He changed deserts into rich farm land by causing springs to flow. ³⁶He brought the hungry there and helped them build a city. ³⁷They sowed their fields, planted vineyards and reaped abundant harvests. ³⁸He blessed them with many children and kept their cattle from decreasing in number.

³⁹When our people sinned again, they were brought low through oppression; they were mistreated and suffered greatly. ⁴⁰He allowed proud nobles to wander in the desert, living out their lives in the wilderness. ⁴¹But He rescued those held in low esteem and delivered the needy out of their distress. He increased their families until their descendants were like flocks. ⁴²Those who wanted to do right saw this and rejoiced, and the wicked were put to silence.

⁴³Let those who think they are wise think about these things. May they carefully consider the great power and love of the Lord.

PSALM 108

Confidence in God

¹O God, I have total confidence in you. It is settled in my heart. I will sing and praise you and make music in my soul.

²Awake, my harp and lyre. Let's awaken the sun. ³I want to thank you, O Lord. I want to sing praises to your name before all the people. ⁴O Lord God, your mercy and love is so great that it reaches heaven. Your faithfulness extends to the clouds and spreads throughout the universe. ⁵O Lord, may your name be exalted in the heavens and your glory be spread throughout the earth. ⁶Save us by your power. Answer our prayer so the people who love you may be delivered by your strong right hand.

⁷Lord, you have spoken from your Sanctuary, saying, "I will parcel out the land of Shechem and give the Valley of Succoth to my people. ⁸The land of Gilead belongs to me. Manasseh is also mine. Ephraim is my helmet, and Judah is my scepter. ⁹I will use the land of Moab as my washbowl and leave the imprint of my sandal in Edom to let them know that all the land is mine. I will shout in victory as I triumph over the Philistines."

¹⁰But Lord, who will show me how to defeat their cities and get over their walls? Who will lead us to war in the land of Edom? ¹¹Lord, have you forsaken us? If you don't go with us, who will lead our armies against the enemy?

¹²Help us defeat our enemies, because human strength is worthless. ¹³But with your help we will gain the victory. We will defeat our enemies and drive them back home.

PSALM 109

A Prayer to Stop False Accusers

¹I praise you, Lord; please don't keep quiet. ²Wicked and deceitful mouths

are constantly spreading lies about me. ³They hate me and attack me for no reason whatever. ⁴They oppose me though I love them and hate me though I pray for them. ⁵They reward me evil for good and hatred for my friendship.

⁶May the leader of this treacherous group be called before a judge who knows no mercy, to be tried for what he has done. May Satan himself be there to accuse him. ⁷When he is tried, let him be found guilty. May even his pleading condemn him and his prayers work against him, for they are coming from fear of the consequences and not from a penitent heart. ⁸May his years be few, and may a good man take his place. ⁹May his children be left fatherless and his wife a widow. ¹⁰May his family know what it is to beg for food and feel what it's like to be evicted from their homes. ¹¹May creditors take away his property and strangers get everything he has worked for. ¹²May no one be kind to him or have pity on his children. ¹³May his sons die without having children and his name be forgotten forever. ¹⁴May his father's wickedness not be forgotten and the sin of his mother not be blotted out. ¹⁵May their sins remain before the Lord, and may He cut off the memory of this wicked family from the earth.

¹⁶This murderer never showed kindness, but took advantage of poor people, evicting them from their homes, even if they were handicapped, sick or broken-hearted. ¹⁷He loved to curse others; may everyone curse him. He never wished anyone well; may no one stand up in his defense. ¹⁸He cursed God as naturally as he dressed himself. His cursing was to his body like water and to his bones like oil. ¹⁹His guilt is as obvious as the clothes he wears, and his murderous ways encircle him like a golden belt. ²⁰May the sentence of the Lord be against him and his friends, those who threaten to take my life.

²¹Lord, help me as you promised, and deal gently with me because of your

steadfast love. ²²I feel a desperate need for you to deliver me. Chest pains strike fear for my life. ²³I am only a shadow of my former self; I can be brushed away like a grasshopper. ²⁴I have lost weight from fasting, and can hardly stand, my knees are so weak. ²⁵When people see me, they shake their heads and laugh.

²⁶Help me, O Lord; I have nothing to depend on but your unflinching love. ²⁷Please let my enemies know that you are on my side, that it is your hand that rescues me. ²⁸They may curse me, but you can bless me. You can shame my persecutors into submission. Then your servant will be glad.

²⁹My accusers will be ashamed when they see that you are on my side. May their shame be as obvious as a mantle. ³⁰Then I will praise you so heartily that everyone in the entire congregation can hear me. ³¹I will tell them how you stand beside the needy and save your children from the murderous hands of those who would condemn them.

PSALM 110

God's Son Appointed King

¹The Lord God will say to my Master, "Sit here next to me until I subdue all your enemies and make them your footstool."

²The Lord sends from Zion my righteous Master with His powerful scepter, saying, "Rule over your enemies." ³Your people, Lord, will be ready and willing to stand by your side in that day when you exercise your power. They will come in their youth to you and cover the hills and mountains like the morning dew.

⁴The Lord God made a promise which He will never recant, "You will be a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

⁵My Lord will sit on God's right side and on the day of His wrath, He will slay all His enemies. ⁶He will judge the nations, and their bodies will lie unburied above the ground. Every king will be defeated in the day of the Lord's power. ⁷My Lord will then be King. He will drink from the

brooks of Israel and stand victorious in our midst.

PSALM 111

God's Faithfulness

¹Praise the Lord! With all my heart I will thank Him. I will express gratitude to Him when His people are assembled. ²How great are the Lord's works! All who love Him delight in understanding them. ³Everything He does is honorable and majestic. His righteousness never ends.

⁴He is known for His wonderful deeds. The Lord is gracious and compassionate. ⁵He provides food for His people and never forgets what He has promised. ⁶He shows His power in behalf of His people by giving them the heritage He promised.

⁷In all He does, He is faithful and just. His word is dependable and sure. ⁸His promises and precepts are true and right. They are as trustworthy and eternal as He is. ⁹He set His people free and made a covenant with them. His name is holy and awesome! ¹⁰Respect for the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. He will give sound judgment to all who strive to obey Him. Our praise for Him shall never end.

PSALM 112

Rightdoing Brings Happiness

¹Praise the Lord! Happy is the man who respects and honors the Lord, who takes pleasure in obeying Him. ²His children's influence will be felt throughout the land, and they will share in the blessings of their godly parents. ³Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever.

⁴Light shines on the pathway of honest men to guide them in the dark. The Lord is merciful, kind and just. ⁵Happy is the kind and generous man who runs his business honestly.

⁶The righteous will not be forgotten; he will always be remembered. ⁷His faith is not shaken by bad news because his heart is fixed on God, and he trusts all things to the Lord. ⁸He feels secure and unafraid,

knowing that one day his enemies will be subdued. ⁹He gives generously to the needy and shows unending kindness to others. His righteous acts will be remembered, and he will be honored.

¹⁰The wicked man sees all this and becomes angry. He gnashes his teeth at the righteous man, but his wishes will come to nothing.

PSALM 113

The Majesty and Compassion of God

¹Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord all you who are His servants. Praise His name. ²Blessed be the name of the Lord now and forever. ³From the sun's rising to its setting, may the name of the Lord be praised. ⁴The Lord is ruler over all nations and His glory fills the heavens.

⁵Who is like the Lord our God who sits enthroned in space? ⁶He takes a personal interest in everything in heaven and on earth. ⁷He picks up the poor man from the dust and lifts the needy out of the ashes. ⁸He seats them with princes and makes them their companions. ⁹He honors the childless woman in her home and makes her a joyous mother of children. Praise the Lord!

PSALM 114

God's Power Seen in Delivering Israel

¹When Israel left Egypt and the descendants of Jacob left that foreign land, ²Judah became the place of the Lord's Sanctuary, and Israel was His kingdom. ³When the Red Sea saw them coming, it looked and ran away. Later the Jordan River also flowed backwards. ⁴The mountains jumped like rams, and the hills skipped like lambs.

⁵Red Sea, what made you run from God's people? Jordan, what made you turn back? ⁶You mountains, why did you jump like rams? You hills, why did you skip like lambs? ⁷Tremble, O earth; the King is coming! Tremble and shake, for the God of Jacob approaches! ⁸He brings water out of rocks and makes springs flow from solid cliffs.

PSALM 115

A Comparison of God and Idols

¹Not to us, but to you, Lord, must all glory be given, because of your steadfast love and faithfulness. ²Why should people ask us, "Where is your God?"

³Our God lives in heaven and does whatever He wants anywhere on earth. ⁴The gods of the heathen are of silver and gold, manufactured by the people who worship them. ⁵They have mouths, but they can't speak. They have eyes, but they can't see. ⁶They have ears, but they can't hear. They have noses, but they can't smell. ⁷They have hands, but they can't feel. They have feet, but they can't go anywhere. They just stand there and don't say a thing. ⁸And those who make them are just like them; they don't hear anything they don't want to. That's what happens to the minds of those who worship what they have made.

⁹Israel, trust in the Lord. He is our help and protection. ¹⁰O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord. He is your help and shield. ¹¹Everyone who worships the Lord should trust Him. He is the One who helps and protects you.

¹²The Lord has not forgotten us. He will bless us. He will bless the whole house of Israel and especially the house of Aaron. ¹³He will bless everyone who honors Him, whether rich or poor.

¹⁴The Lord will continue to bless you more and more, both you and your children. ¹⁵You will be blessed by the living God who created heaven and earth. ¹⁶The highest heavens belong to Him, but He gave the earth to people to be their home.

¹⁷The dead can't worship the Lord, nor can He be worshiped by anyone who dies, for all the dead are silent. ¹⁸But we who are alive will praise the Lord. We will thank God and bless His name from now on and forever. Praise the Lord!

PSALM 116

Gratitude for Rescue From Death

¹I love the Lord because He has heard

my prayers and supplications. ²He answered when I called. I will depend on Him as long as I live.

³The pains of death engulfed me, and I thought I was dying. I was distressed and greatly troubled. ⁴Then I called on the Lord, "I beg you, O Lord, please save me!" ⁵Our merciful and gracious God heard and saved me. He is full of compassion. ⁶The Lord protects those with childlike faith. When I was in danger and trusted Him, He came to my rescue. ⁷O my soul, rest in the Lord for He has been generous with you. ⁸He has saved me from death, stopped my tears, and kept me from defeat. ⁹So I will walk as in the presence of the Lord as long as I live.

¹⁰I trusted the Lord and still believed in Him, even though I was suffering. ¹¹I still loved His people, even though I said, "You can't depend on anyone." ¹²What can I give to the Lord for all His goodness to me? ¹³I will gratefully receive the cup of His salvation and thank Him for saving me. ¹⁴I will do everything I promised to do for Him in front of His people. ¹⁵How precious to the Lord are those who die trusting in Him.

¹⁶Lord, I am the son of a woman who served you the best she knew. You freed me from the chains that bound me to the evil one. ¹⁷I will bring an offering of thanksgiving from a heart full of gratitude and will always call on the name of the Lord. ¹⁸I will keep the pledge I made to you in front of the people. ¹⁹I will praise the name of the Lord in the Sanctuary courtyard. From the center of Jerusalem I will praise the Lord!

PSALM 117

All Nations Should Praise the Lord

¹Praise the Lord, all nations! Let everyone praise Him! ²His mercy and kindness toward us is great, and His faithfulness endures forever. Praise the Lord!

PSALM 118

God's Love Never Ends

¹⁰ give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His steadfast love for us never

ends. ²Let the people of Israel rejoice and say, "His steadfast love never ends." ³Let their ministers rejoice and say, "His steadfast love never ends." ⁴Let everyone who worships Him rejoice and say, "His steadfast love never ends."

⁵When I found myself in distress, I asked the Lord to help me, and He did. ⁶The Lord is with me, so I refuse to be afraid. What can anyone do to me that will hurt my soul? ⁷The Lord is on my side to help me, so what I desire for my enemies will happen to them. ⁸It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to depend on man. ⁹It is better to trust the Lord than to trust princes.

¹⁰The enemy surrounded me, but I was victorious because the Lord helped me. ¹¹They surrounded me on every side, but with the Lord's help, I cut them off. ¹²They swarmed around me like bees, but I cut them down like fire raging through dry grass. ¹³I was fiercely attacked and it looked like the end, but the Lord helped me. ¹⁴The Lord is my strength and song. He is my salvation. ¹⁵Just listen to the shouts of joy and gladness in the tents of God's people! "The Lord brought about this victory. ¹⁶His power and right hand came to our rescue. The Lord won the battle!" ¹⁷I am not dead as my enemies had hoped. I'm very much alive and will tell what the Lord has done for us. ¹⁸The Lord taught me a lesson of dependence. He humbled me, but He didn't let me die.

¹⁹Open the doors of the Temple; we want to go in and give thanks to the Lord. ²⁰The righteous may go in, for those doors are the doors of heaven. ²¹I praise you, Lord, because you heard me and saved me. You gave us the victory.

²²Remember that the stone which the builders of the Temple rejected was the very one they needed as the cornerstone. ²³This is the Lord's doing and is a marvelous object lesson to us. ²⁴Today is the day God has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. ²⁵Now that you have saved us from defeat, O Lord, bless us and grant us

salvation. We beg you to give us success. ²⁶Bless the One who comes to us in the name of our God. We will bless Him as He comes to the Temple.

²⁷The Lord is God. He has given us victory and hope. Come with branches, and join the procession. Bring the sacrifice to the horns of the altar. ²⁸Yes, Lord, you are my God. I will thank you forever. I will exalt you and proclaim your greatness. ²⁹Let us give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His steadfast love continues forever.

PSALM 119

Meditations on the Word of God The Law of God

¹Happy is the man who lives blamelessly, whose life is guided by the law of the Lord. ²Happy is the man who listens to the testimonies of the Lord and tries with all his heart to know Him better. ³Happy is the man who does no wrong, but who walks in the way of the Lord. ⁴Lord, you have given us your laws and told us to keep them. ⁵How I wish that my nature were inclined to do what you ask me to do. ⁶Then I wouldn't feel ashamed of myself when I consider your commandments.

⁷I will praise you with my whole heart as I learn how to apply your righteous laws to my life. ⁸I will keep your statutes; only stay close to me and help me.

Obedience to God's Commandments

⁹How can a young man keep his life pure? By living according to your word. ¹⁰Lord, I love you with all my heart; don't let me disobey your law. ¹¹I have hidden your words in my heart so I won't sin against you.

¹²I will praise you, O Lord; only teach me your ways and help me to obey. ¹³I want to learn all about your laws and then teach them to others. ¹⁴I want to be obedient to your word even more than I want riches. ¹⁵Every day I will study your precepts and keep your ways before me. ¹⁶I delight in your commandments. I will not neglect your word.

God's Law Is a Safe Guide

¹⁷Bless me with life so I can keep your commandments. ¹⁸Open my eyes so I can see new things written in your law. ¹⁹I'm a stranger on earth and need your commandments to guide me. ²⁰My heart aches with longing to understand your laws better at all times.

²¹You caution those who stray from your commands and rebuke the arrogant who challenge them. ²²Help me to live above the insults and scorn I receive because of keeping your commandments. ²³Even though princes and rulers speak against me, I will continue to study your precepts. ²⁴Your testimonies make me happy. They are my counselors, giving me guidance.

Eager to Keep God's Commandments

²⁵Lord, I've been humbled in the dust; revive me as you promised in your word. ²⁶I confess my sins and acknowledge my guilt. Teach me now to walk in your ways more perfectly. ²⁷Help me to understand your law better and to meditate on your wonderful works.

²⁸My soul is tired and longs for your presence. Strengthen me as your word promises. ²⁹Keep me from deceitful ways, and by your grace, teach me your law. ³⁰I have freely chosen to obey you; your ordinances are before me. ³¹I cling to your testimonies, O Lord, don't let me be put to shame. ³²I'm eager to keep your commandments as my understanding of you increases.

A Prayer for Understanding

³³Teach me, O Lord, the meaning of your statutes and I will keep it to the end. ³⁴Explain your law to me so I can understand it better, and I will obey with all my heart. ³⁵Help me keep your commandments, because they bring me happiness.

³⁶Turn my heart toward your law more than toward accumulating riches. ³⁷Help me not to desire worthless trinkets, but give me more desire for your word. ³⁸Reaffirm your promises to those who

are devoted to you and your law.

³⁹Keep me from disgrace, because that would reflect on your law. ⁴⁰O Lord, I do want to obey your precepts. In your righteousness endow me with new life.

Trusting God's Law

⁴¹Show me your matchless love, O Lord, and your salvation which you have promised. ⁴²Then I will be able to answer those who insult me, and they will see that I trust your word.

⁴³Help me to be truthful at all times and to let others know that obeying your laws brings hope. ⁴⁴I want always to keep your commandments because I love you. ⁴⁵I will walk in freedom because I keep your law. ⁴⁶I will share your word with kings and not be ashamed.

⁴⁷I delight in your commandments because I love them. ⁴⁸I respect your commandments and meditate on your instructions.

Rejoicing in God's Word

⁴⁹Lord, don't forget the promise you made when I was young, for it has been my hope through the years. ⁵⁰My comfort in my suffering is that your promises preserve my life. ⁵¹Godless men scorn and make fun of my childlike faith, but I will not turn away from your law. ⁵²I remember your ancient precepts, and I find comfort in them, O Lord.

⁵³I become angry when I see wickedness in the land by those who ignore your law. ⁵⁴The beauty of your statutes is my song wherever I go. ⁵⁵When I awake in the night, I commit anew to obeying your law. ⁵⁶It has been a blessing to me to keep your commandments.

Devotion to God's Word

⁵⁷You are my example; I want to be more like you by observing your words. ⁵⁸More than anything else in the world I want your favor; be gracious to me as you promised. ⁵⁹When I think about your ways, I turn to your word for guidance. ⁶⁰I love you and want to obey your

commandments without a moment's hesitation. ⁶¹Though cords of wickedness ensnare me, I will not forget your law.

⁶²When I awake in the night, I will thank you for your righteous commandments. ⁶³Those who love you and keep your commandments are my closest friends. ⁶⁴This world is full of evidences of your love. Teach me more of your statutes.

Appreciation of God's Law

⁶⁵Lord, continue to be good to me; you've never broken any of your promises. ⁶⁶Give me knowledge and good judgment on how to keep your law. ⁶⁷Before you disciplined me, I went astray, but now I know better how to obey. ⁶⁸You are so good and kind! Teach me more of your statutes.

⁶⁹Godless people smear my reputation with lies, but I wholeheartedly keep your law. ⁷⁰Their hearts are self-serving and repulsive, but I delight in your law.

⁷¹It is good for me to have suffered because I learned to appreciate your precepts more than ever. ⁷²Your law is of more value to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.

The Justice of God's Law

⁷³O Lord, you designed and created me; give me a better understanding of your commandments. ⁷⁴Fellow believers will be glad to see me because I have trusted in your word.

⁷⁵I know that your judgments are right, and it was best for you to discipline me. ⁷⁶May your steadfast love comfort me according to your promise. ⁷⁷Have mercy on me that I may live, for your law is my delight.

⁷⁸May the godless be ashamed of their subversive lying about me; I will meditate on your word. ⁷⁹Those who love you and your testimonies will be my friends forever. ⁸⁰Help me to blamelessly keep your commandments that I may not be put to shame.

A Prayer for Help

⁸¹I long for your salvation, but my hope is in your word. ⁸²My eyes are tired from looking for your promise. I keep asking, "When will the Lord come to comfort me?" ⁸³I feel as useless as a shriveled up wineskin, but I will not forget what you have said. ⁸⁴How much longer do I have to wait for your help? When will you judge those who persecute me?

⁸⁵The proud and arrogant don't like your law, so they've set a trap for me. ⁸⁶But all your commandments are good. People who say that your law can't be kept are persecuting me. ⁸⁷They have almost made an end of me, but I have not forsaken your law. ⁸⁸Spare my life, Lord, because of your enduring love that I may keep your words.

Hope Found in God's Word

⁸⁹O Lord, your word is as eternal as the universe. ⁹⁰Your faithfulness never ends. You created the earth and it endures because of your love and care. ⁹¹Nature continues its unending cycles because of your word. All things serve you and obey your commands. ⁹²If your word had not been my strength and joy, I would have given up in despair.

⁹³I will not forget your word because they have given me life. ⁹⁴I'm all yours, Lord, because I love you. Save me and help me understand your word. ⁹⁵My enemies wait to kill me, but I find refuge pondering your testimonies. ⁹⁶In this life everything comes to an end, but your commandments last forever.

Love for God's Precepts

⁹⁷O how I love your law! I could meditate on it all day long. ⁹⁸Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies because they are forever in my heart. ⁹⁹I have more understanding than my teachers because I study your testimonies. ¹⁰⁰I have more wisdom than older men because I obey your law.

¹⁰¹I have not gone where I shouldn't because I want to keep your command-

ments. ¹⁰²I have not turned against your commandments because you yourself have given them to us. ¹⁰³How sweet your promises taste, sweeter than honey to my tongue. ¹⁰⁴It's from your precepts that I gain a sense of right and wrong. I hate every evil way.

Appreciation of God's Word

¹⁰⁵Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path. ¹⁰⁶With your help, I promise to keep your righteous ordinances.

¹⁰⁷I have terrible inner struggles, Lord; lift my spirits according to your word. ¹⁰⁸Accept my offering of gratitude and teach me how to better keep your commandments. ¹⁰⁹Though I daily risk my life in defense of my country, I will not forget your law. ¹¹⁰The wicked are trying to trap me, but I have not turned against your precepts. ¹¹¹Your testimonies are my richest possession, yes, the joy of my heart. ¹¹²From the depths of my heart I want to keep all your commandments until the end of my life.

Courage From God's Word

¹¹³I am very uncomfortable with those who are disloyal to you, but I love your law. ¹¹⁴You are my hiding place and protector. I hope in your word. ¹¹⁵I wish that evil-minded people would leave me alone so I could better keep your commandments. ¹¹⁶Give me physical and moral strength as you promised. Don't let me be ashamed of the hope I have in your word. ¹¹⁷Please keep me close to you because I don't trust myself. I never want to turn against you or your law.

¹¹⁸I know that you can't save those who disobey your law; their deceitfulness is an open book to you. ¹¹⁹You will consume the wicked as easily as rub-bish, therefore I will continue to love your law. ¹²⁰I tremble in awe of you and the righteousness of your judgments.

Help Me to Obey God's Word

¹²¹Lord, I have tried to do what is right. Don't turn me over to those who hate me. ¹²²Promise me, Lord, that you will help me. Don't let the arrogant pressure me to disobey you. ¹²³My eyes grow tired as I look for your salvation, for the promises in your word. ¹²⁴Deal lovingly with me, Lord, and teach me more about your statutes. ¹²⁵I am your servant; give me greater insight to understand your teachings.

¹²⁶Lord, it's time for you to act because your law is being broken. ¹²⁷I treasure your commandments more than gold, even pure gold. ¹²⁸Because I know that your precepts are right, I direct my steps by them and hate everything that is evil.

Desire to Obey God's Law

¹²⁹Your testimonies have been a wonderful help to me, Lord. I follow their counsel with all my heart. ¹³⁰Opening your word brings light to the blind and understanding to the simple. ¹³¹I pant with open mouth, longing to be fed by your word.

¹³²Turn to me and have mercy on me as you do on all those who love you. ¹³³Direct my footsteps by your promise and don't let sin control me. ¹³⁴Deliver me from those who would harm me so I will not be hindered in keeping your law. ¹³⁵Show me your kindness and teach me to obey your word. ¹³⁶Tears stream from my eyes because men disobey your law.

God's Word Brings Joy

¹³⁷You are righteous, Lord, and your laws are just. ¹³⁸Your rules are righteous and trustworthy. ¹³⁹My zeal for your honor is wearing me out, for my enemies ignore your words. ¹⁴⁰Your promises are pure; I love to hear them. ¹⁴¹No matter how despised I am, I will not forget your precepts.

¹⁴²Your righteousness will last forever and your law will always be true. ¹⁴³My heart is troubled and I'm filled with fear, but your word brings me joy. ¹⁴⁴Your law is always right. Give me understanding so I may live.

A Prayer for Help

¹⁴⁵I'm crying out with all my heart, Lord. Please hear me! I want to keep your commandments as I should. ¹⁴⁶I'm asking for help; save me from my enemies so I may keep your law. ¹⁴⁷Before the sun rises, I cry out to you for help. I put my hope in your promises. ¹⁴⁸I stay up late at night to study your word. ¹⁴⁹O Lord, please hear my prayer and renew my life according to your justice.

¹⁵⁰Those who devise wicked schemes are nearby, but they are far from your law. ¹⁵¹But you are near, and your commandments are true. ¹⁵²Long ago I learned that your laws never change; they will last forever.

A Prayer for Help

¹⁵³Consider my suffering, Lord, and help me because I have tried not to neglect your law. ¹⁵⁴Defend me and save me as you have promised. ¹⁵⁵The wicked cannot be saved because they do not want to obey your laws. ¹⁵⁶Your compassion is so great, Lord; please be merciful to me as you have promised in your word.

¹⁵⁷Some people persecute me because of my commitment to you, but I have no intention of turning from your testimonies. ¹⁵⁸When I look at those who betray you, I am filled with disgust because they pay no attention to your commandments. ¹⁵⁹Consider how I love your precepts! Preserve me because of your unending love. ¹⁶⁰Truth is at the heart of your law and every one of your commandments stand forever.

Peace to Those Who Love God's Law

¹⁶¹Princes have attacked me, but my heart is awed by the power of your word. ¹⁶²I'm so happy when I study your word because it's like discovering rich treasures. ¹⁶³I hate dishonesty and lying, but I love your law. ¹⁶⁴Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous ordinances. ¹⁶⁵Great peace comes to those who love your law and nothing can turn them away from you. ¹⁶⁶I place all my hope in

your promises and continue to keep your testimonies. ¹⁶⁷The reason I obey your word is that I really do love you. ¹⁶⁸I will continue to keep your commandments, and you know my reason for doing so.

A Prayer for Understanding

¹⁶⁹Let my cry for help reach your ears, O Lord. Give me understanding as you have promised. ¹⁷⁰Listen to my prayer and save me according to your word. ¹⁷¹My lips will praise you for teaching me your commandments. ¹⁷²My tongue will sing about your promises, for your laws are righteous. ¹⁷³May your hand be ready to help me because I have chosen to keep your commandments. ¹⁷⁴I long to see you, Lord, but meanwhile, your law is my delight. ¹⁷⁵Let me live a bit longer so I can tell others what you have done for me, and may your word sustain me.

¹⁷⁶I have gone astray like a lost sheep trying to find its way home. Lord, look for me, because I have not forgotten your law.

PSALM 120***A Prayer for Relief From Bitter Enemies***

¹When I was in trouble, I called on the Lord and He answered me. ²Lord, keep me from lying and help me not to be influenced by those who are deceitful. ³What will the Lord do to those who lie, cheat and plan evil? ⁴His judgment will be as painful as being pierced by a warrior's arrow or touched by a hot coal.

⁵Living in the midst of liars is as bad as living with the pagans of Meshech or among the savages of Kedar. ⁶Sometimes I feel I have lived too long with people who lie and love to fight. ⁷More than anything, I want peace, but all they want is to go to war.

PSALM 121***Help Comes From the Lord***

¹Do I look to the mountains as the heaven do, expecting my help to come from there? ²No, my help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. ³He will not let you slip or fall but is always there to

hold your hand. ⁴He never slumbers or sleeps but watches over His people day and night.

⁵The Lord is your keeper; He protects you as the shade protects you from the blazing sun. ⁶The sun will not smite you by day nor the moon by night. ⁷The Lord will keep you from evil. He will preserve your soul. ⁸He will watch over your comings and goings both now and forever.

PSALM 122

The Joy of Pilgrims Going to the Temple

¹I was happy when they said, "Come, let's go to the Temple of the Lord." ²And now we're standing here, right inside the gates of God's city. ³Jerusalem is a beautiful city, crowded with pilgrims. ⁴This is where leaders of the tribes come to praise the Lord for what He has done, as was decreed. ⁵This is where the kings of Israel sit to judge the people, on thrones from the house of David.

⁶I pray for peace in Jerusalem, saying, "May those who love you prosper. ⁷May there be peace inside your walls and prosperity within your borders." ⁸To my brothers and sisters I say, "May the peace of Jerusalem be with you and the peace of God be in your soul." ⁹For the sake of our God and the Temple of the Lord, I will always seek the good of Jerusalem.

PSALM 123

A Prayer for Relief From Ridicule

¹I will look to you, O Lord. I will look up to the heavens where you sit and rule the universe.

²As a servant depends on his master and a maid on her mistress, so we depend on your kindness, Lord, until you have mercy on us.

³Be merciful to us, O Lord; be merciful. We have endured so much contempt. ⁴For too long, we have been ridiculed by the proud, scorned by the lazy and mocked by the arrogant.

PSALM 124

The Lord Is on the Side of His People

¹If the Lord had not been on our side, what would have happened to Israel? ²If the Lord had not been on our side when we were attacked by our enemies, ³they would have swallowed us alive because of their anger. ⁴Their armies would have engulfed us like a flood, drowning us, ⁵like raging waters, they would have swept us away.

⁶Praise the Lord who saved us from being a prey between their teeth. ⁷We escaped from them as a bird from the fowler's snare. Their trap has sprung, but we are still free. ⁸Our help came from the Lord, the creator of heaven and earth.

PSALM 125

The Lord Is the Strength of His People

¹Those who trust in the Lord are as unmovable as Mount Zion; they cannot be shaken but will abide there forever. ²Just as the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people.

³The wicked will not occupy our land forever; otherwise, the righteous might lose heart and succumb to evil.

⁴Lord, be good to the righteous, to those who are honest in heart. ⁵Those who do not walk in the straight way, the Lord will punish together with the wicked. Peace be on Israel.

PSALM 126

A Joyful Return Home

¹When the Lord brought us back home to Jerusalem, it was like a dream had come true. ²How we laughed and sang to be home again! The neighboring nations said to each other, "Their God has done great things for them."

³Yes, He has done great things for us, and that's why we're so happy. ⁴Restore our fortunes, Lord, like the streams in the desert. ⁵Then those who cried as they planted their crops will have a bountiful harvest and will reap it with joy. ⁶Those who bear seed to the field while weeping will come home rejoicing, carrying an abundant harvest with them.

PSALM 127***Laboring Is Useless Unless
the Lord Builds the House***

¹Unless the Lord is the builder of a house, the efforts of the workers are useless. If the Lord does not shield our city from invading armies, there's no point in sentries being on duty. ²It is useless to get up early or stay up late, anxiously worrying about the next meal. He will provide, and trusting Him helps those who love Him to sleep well.

³Children are a gift from the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward from Him. ⁴The children a young man has will be security for him in his old age, just as arrows in his quiver give security to a warrior. ⁵Happy is the man who has many children because they will help him in times of trouble.

PSALM 128***Happy Are Those Who Fear the Lord***

¹Happy are you who respect the Lord and show it by keeping His commandments. ²Then the Lord can bless your work, and happiness and prosperity will be yours. ³Your wife will be like a fruit-bearing tree, and your children will be like young olive shoots around your table.

⁴A man who loves and obeys the Lord will surely be blessed. ⁵May the Lord bless Jerusalem from Mount Zion all the days to come, and may prosperity be in her gates forever. ⁶May you live to see your children's children. Peace be to Israel.

PSALM 129***A Song of Victory***

¹Tell us, Israel, how you have been oppressed since you became a nation. ²"Since I was young, my enemies have persecuted me, but they have not overcome me. ³They used the whip to plow bloody furrows on my back, as a farmer plows long, open furrows in a field. ⁴But the Lord came to my rescue and freed me from the whip of the wicked."

⁵May Israel's enemies be ashamed and driven back. ⁶Let them be like grass

planted on a flat roof which dies from the heat of the sun. ⁷There's not enough to fill a reaper's hands or the arms of one who harvests. ⁸May no one say to those who attack us, "Blessings in the name of the Lord! May His blessings be upon you!"

PSALM 130***Waiting for the Help
That Comes From the Lord***

¹From the depths of my heart I cry to you, O Lord. ²Please open your ears to my pleadings and give me the help I need. ³If you held us accountable for all our past sins, who could stand in your presence? ⁴But if we confess our sins, you are always ready to forgive us. That's why we love and respect you so much.

⁵Eagerly I wait for the Lord to help me; as I wait, I will trust in Him. ⁶I wait for the Lord to help me, more than the night watchman waits for the dawn; yes, with more longing than that. ⁷Let Israel hope in the Lord, because He is merciful. His steadfast love never ends, and He is fully able to abundantly save. ⁸The Lord will redeem His people from all their sins.

PSALM 131***Trust in the Lord***

¹Lord, my heart is humbled, and I give up my pride. I will no longer look down on others or preoccupy myself with being great. ²Instead, I will be content and at peace with myself, quietly resting in you as a baby rests in his mother's arms, or a child secure in his father's love. ³People of Israel, put your hope and trust in the Lord.

PSALM 132***The Lord Has Chosen Jerusalem***

¹Lord, remember how David endured so many hardships, ²how he vowed to the mighty God of Jacob, saying, ³"I will not go to my house nor lie down on my bed; ⁴I will not sleep or rest ⁵until I make plans to build a house for my God, the mighty God of Jacob."

⁶In Bethlehem we heard about the

Ark of the Covenant, and when we went to look, we found it in Kiriath Jearim. ⁷So we said, "Let's bring the Ark to Jerusalem! Let's worship the Lord there. ⁸Arise, O Lord, and come to your Temple, a Temple to house the Ark of the Covenant. ⁹May your priests do what's right, and may your people sing for joy, praising you for what you have done."

¹⁰Lord, you promised to stand by your servant David. Don't reject the one you have chosen to be king. ¹¹You made a definite promise to David, and you don't break your promise. You said, "I will make one of your sons king, who will sit on the throne after you. ¹²And if your son holds to my covenant and keeps my commandments, then his sons will also sit on their father's throne."

¹³There is no doubt that the Lord has chosen Jerusalem, that He wants to make it His city and dwelling place. ¹⁴He said, "This is where I will make my home; this is where my Ark will rest, and I will rule from here forever. ¹⁵I will bless Jerusalem and provide all her needs. I will also feed her poor with bread. ¹⁶I will clothe her priests with salvation, and her people will shout for joy.

¹⁷"I will make one of David's descendants the permanent Ruler. I will set up the Light to light all nations. ¹⁸I will cover His enemies with shame, but His crown will shine and His kingdom will flourish."

PSALM 133

Unity of God's People

¹How good and pleasant it is for God's people to live together in unity! ²It's like perfumed oil which was sprinkled on Aaron's head and ran down his beard and robes.

³It's like the dew falling gently on Mount Hermon and the mountains surrounding Jerusalem, bringing a freshness to revive every living thing. It's from Mount Zion that the Lord blesses His people and gives them life forevermore.

PSALM 134

Praise the Lord in His Temple

¹Praise the Lord, you who minister by night in His Temple. ²Raise your hands in prayer, and praise the Lord for another morning.

³The Lord who made heaven and earth will hear you, and from Jerusalem He will bless all His people.

PSALM 135

Praise God for Freedom

¹Praise the Lord! Praise His name! Praise Him, all you who serve Him.

²Those who serve Him in the courts of the house of our God, come and praise the Lord. ³Praise the Lord, for He is good. Sing praises to His name, for He is so gracious. ⁴The Lord has chosen Jacob, and Israel is His chosen possession.

⁵I know the Lord is great. He is greater than all gods. ⁶He does whatever He wants in heaven or on earth, in the seas and in the depths of earth. ⁷He makes clouds form from the vapors of earth. He brings lightning and rainstorms, and winds blow from His storehouses. ⁸In Egypt He struck down the firstborn of both man and beast.

⁹He worked signs and miracles against Pharaoh and his servants. ¹⁰He struck down nations and kings. ¹¹He struck down Sihon, king of the Amorites, also Og, king of Bashan, and all the city kings who fought against us in the land of Canaan. ¹²He gave their land to Israel as an inheritance. He gave it to His people forever.

¹³Your name, O Lord, endures forever, and what you have done will be remembered for all generations to come. ¹⁴Yes, the Lord will vindicate His people and will have compassion on those who serve Him.

¹⁵The idols of the heathen are only silver and gold, made by their own hands. ¹⁶These gods have mouths, but they can't speak; they have eyes, but they can't see. ¹⁷They have ears, but they can't hear; they have no lungs, so they can't breathe. ¹⁸Those who make these

idols are just like them and so are those who trust in them. They're blind and deaf to what's right.

¹⁹Praise the Lord, you people of Israel. Praise the Lord, you who descended from Aaron and minister in His Temple. ²⁰Let all the Levites praise the Lord. Let all who come to worship praise the Lord. ²¹Praise the Lord in Zion. Jerusalem is where He makes His home. Praise the Lord!

PSALM 136

God's Enduring Mercy

¹Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His steadfast love endures forever. ²Give thanks to the great God of gods; His steadfast love endures forever. ³Give thanks to the Lord of lords; His steadfast love endures forever. ⁴He can do great wonders; His steadfast love endures forever.

⁵He created the heavens; His steadfast love endures forever. ⁶He created the waters and dry land; His steadfast love endures forever. ⁷He created the sun, moon and stars; His steadfast love endures forever. ⁸He made the sun to govern the day; His steadfast love endures forever. ⁹He made the moon and stars to shine at night; His steadfast love endures forever. ¹⁰He struck down the firstborn in Egypt and set His people free; His steadfast love endures forever.

¹¹He led His people out of Egypt; His steadfast love endures forever. ¹²He did this with a mighty show of power; His steadfast love endures forever. ¹³He divided the Red Sea; His steadfast love endures forever. ¹⁴He led His people through on dry land; His steadfast love endures forever. ¹⁵He drowned the king and his attacking army; His steadfast love endures forever. ¹⁶He was with His people in the wilderness; His steadfast love endures forever. ¹⁷He struck down the kings of Canaan; His steadfast love endures forever.

¹⁸He struck down the strongest of kings; His steadfast love endures forever. ¹⁹He struck down Sihon, king of the Amorites; His steadfast love endures for-

ever. ²⁰He struck down Og, king of Bashan; His steadfast love endures forever. ²¹He gave their land to His people; His steadfast love endures forever. ²²He gave the land of Canaan to Israel; His steadfast love endures forever.

²³He did not forget His people when they needed Him; His steadfast love endures forever. ²⁴He saved us again and again from our enemies; His steadfast love endures forever.

²⁵He feeds every living creature; His steadfast love endures forever. ²⁶O give thanks to the God of heaven; His steadfast love endures forever.

PSALM 137

Longing to Be Free

¹When we were captives in Babylon, we sat down by the river and wept as we thought about Jerusalem. ²We hung our harps on the willow trees growing along the banks. ³Our captors made us take our harps, then said tauntingly, "Come, sing to us some of your Hebrew songs of victory." ⁴But how could we sing while captive in a foreign land? We sang, but our hearts were not in it. ⁵If I forget that I'm a Hebrew and Jerusalem is my city, may my right hand be paralyzed. ⁶May my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth if I forget who I am or don't love Jerusalem more than my greatest joy.

⁷Lord, remember how the Edomites hated Jerusalem and how, when they attacked her, they kept shouting, "Tear her down! Down to the ground!" ⁸Babylon, your hatred of Jerusalem was no different. You will be repaid; your enemies will do the same to you. Then it will be our turn to be happy because we will finally be free. ⁹Your enemies will be cruel; they will take your infants and crush their heads against the rocks.

PSALM 138

The Lord's Goodness

¹I thank you, Lord, with all my heart. I praise you and exalt you before all those heathen gods. ²Each day I face your holy

Temple and worship you. I praise you for your steadfast love and faithfulness. Your word and your name are exalted above everything. ³When I called to you for help, you answered me. You renewed my strength and gave me courage to carry on.

⁴All the kings who visit my palace will praise you, O Lord, when they hear how you keep your promises. ⁵They will leave my palace singing the praises of Israel's God and His great glory. ⁶Though the Lord our God is high above, He regards the lowly, but He keeps a distance from those who are haughty. ⁷When I'm in trouble, He is there to save my life. He takes a stand against my enemies and with His right hand He delivers me. ⁸The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me. Your loving kindness, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

PSALM 139

God Knows Everything

¹O Lord, you have searched my heart and know me inside and out. ²You know when I sit down and when I rise; you discern my thoughts before I think them. ³You walk beside me all day long, and when I lie down at night, you're there. You know everything I do and say. ⁴There's not a word that comes from my mouth, O Lord, that you don't know beforehand. ⁵You are behind me, in front of me and all around me wherever I go. You have touched me and drawn me close to you.

⁶I can't comprehend such knowledge. It's so wonderful that no matter how hard I try to understand, I can't grasp it all. ⁷Where can I go to leave the presence of your Spirit? Where shall I run that you're not already there? ⁸If I were to launch out into space, you'd be there. If I were to tunnel into the depths of the earth, you'd be there. ⁹If I had wings and could fly to the ends of the earth or to the most remote island in the sea, ¹⁰your presence would be there and your arms would be ready to hold me. ¹¹Even if I hid in the dark, everything around me would

be as visible to you as in the daylight. ¹²Darkness to you is as light as the day.

¹³You shaped me before I was born; you put my bones together while I was still in my mother's womb. ¹⁴I praise you, for this body is incredibly and wonderfully made. Your whole creation is amazing. ¹⁵When I was developing in my mother's womb, you knew everything that took place. To you nothing is hidden or mysterious. ¹⁶You saw my unformed body inside the womb. You knew how long I would live before I was born.

¹⁷How precious are your tender thoughts toward me, O Lord. There are so many of them, they never end! ¹⁸If I could count them, they would be more in number than the grains of sand on the sea shore. Every morning, you are still there for me.

¹⁹O Lord, I wish you would take care of my enemies. I wish these bloodthirsty men would stop bothering me. ²⁰These visitors from other countries talk against you every chance they get, and in private, they curse your name. ²¹I hate what they're saying about you, Lord. I hear they're planning to attack Israel because of what you have done for us. ²²I hate them with a justified hatred and count them as my enemies.

²³O Lord, search my heart; test me so I can know my thoughts as you know them. ²⁴Let me know if there is any wicked way in me, and then help me walk in the way I should go.

PSALM 140

A Prayer for Protection From Violent Men

¹O Lord, save me from the plots of evil men and protect me from the violence of the wicked. ²They plan evil and stir up trouble so they can start a war. ³Their tongues are like those of a deadly snake; there's poison in every word they say. ⁴Protect me, Lord, from the power of the wicked and keep me safe from violent men who are determined to overthrow me. ⁵Proud men are trying to trap me

even in my own home. They have laid their snares to trip me and spread their nets to catch me.

⁶But I have cried to the Lord, "You are my God; please hear my plea for help."
⁷O Lord, my God, you are the only One who can defend me. You've protected me many times in battle. ⁸Lord, don't give the wicked what they want. Don't let their plots succeed. ⁹Don't let my enemies be victorious. Make their plans backfire on them. ¹⁰Make their plans fail and be like hot coals falling on their own heads. May they fall into their own traps, never to recover.

¹¹Don't let those who accuse me succeed in their plans. May those men of violence be overthrown by their own evil. ¹²Lord, I know you defend those who love you. You bring justice to the poor and needy. ¹³Those who love you will thank you for helping them. The upright will someday dwell in your presence.

PSALM 141

A Prayer for the End of Wickedness

¹Lord, I'm crying out to you for help. Come quickly to my rescue. Please listen to me when I call on you! ²Let my prayer be like the smoke of incense and my outstretched hands as the evening sacrifice.

³Help me control my tongue, Lord, and put a sentry at the door of my mouth. ⁴Keep me from wanting to give in to temptations or to be busy with things that would separate me from you. Help me not to make friends with wicked men or join in their evil deeds. ⁵May righteous men correct me in kindness; let their rebuke be a blessing I receive graciously. My prayer is against the deeds of the wicked. ⁶I pray that evil rulers will be overthrown and that the wicked will realize that your word is true. ⁷May they say, "As a plowman breaks up the earth, so the righteous God of Israel has broken our bones and they lie at the mouth of the grave."

⁸O Lord God, my eyes are fixed on you. I need your refuge; don't leave me unpro-

ted. ⁹Save me from the traps the wicked have laid for me and from the snares of evil men. ¹⁰Let the wicked be caught in their own traps while I safely escape.

PSALM 142

A Prayer for Relief From Persecutors

¹I'm constantly asking the Lord for help. Every day I plead with Him in prayer. ²I take all my problems to Him and tell Him all my troubles. ³When I'm ready to give up, He knows what I should do. Wherever I walk, my enemies have laid their traps for me. ⁴When I look around for help, no one is there to protect me but you; no safe place remains; no one cares about me but you.

⁵Lord, I come to you for help. You are my protector. You are all I want in this life. ⁶Please listen to my cry for help because I'm about ready to give up. Save me from those who are persecuting me, for they are stronger than I am. ⁷Deliver me from their oppression so my spirit can be free again to praise your name. Then your people will listen to me with confidence because they have seen how you've helped me.

PSALM 143

A Prayer for Deliverance

¹Hear my prayer, O Lord; listen to my plea! Because you are faithful and righteous, I know you will help me. ²Don't judge me by what I have done, Lord, because no one can stand before you and claim to be righteous.

³My enemies have pursued me trying to crush out my life. They've forced me to hide in dark caves until I feel that I'm already dead and buried. ⁴I'm ready to give up in desperation. I can't take any more; please help me.

⁵I remember days gone by and think about everything you have done for me and all the work of your hands. ⁶I lift up my hands to you in prayer. My soul longs for you like a drought-stricken land longs for water. ⁷O Lord, please answer me quickly. I've almost lost all hope. Don't

hide yourself from me, or I will surely die.
⁸May the morning light bring the comfort of your presence and unfailing love. I'm putting all my trust in you, Lord. Show me what to do, for my life is in your hands.
⁹Lord, save me from my enemies. I come to you for shelter.
¹⁰Teach me to do your will for you are my God. Send your Holy Spirit to show me what to do.

¹¹For your name's sake, rescue me, O Lord, and in your righteous way, get me out of this trouble.
¹²In your steadfast love, cut off my enemies. Destroy them, for I am your servant.

PSALM 144

The Lord Is Our Rock and Protector

¹Praise the Lord, my Rock and my Protector! He helps me train for war and teaches my hands to do battle.
²His love is better than a fortress. He is like a huge stronghold for deliverance and my protective shield of defense. I go to Him for help, and He subdues attacking armies.

³Lord, why do you care so much about me? What value is there in a human life that you give it such priority?
⁴Man's life is like a puff of wind, and his years are but a passing shadow.

⁵O Lord, open the heavens and come down from the sky. Set your foot on the mountains so they will smoke.
⁶Send flashes of lightning and scatter the attacking armies. Use lightning as arrows and send the enemy running.

⁷Reach down and pull me away from these waves of attacking men. Save me from the hands of foreigners.
⁸These men are liars. They agree under oath to a peace treaty and then turn around and break it.

⁹After our victory, Lord, I will compose a new song to you. I will sing it for you as I play the ten-stringed harp.
¹⁰The song will be about the One who gives victory to kings, who delivers His servant David from deadly swords.
¹¹O Lord, rescue me from the hands of foreigners with their cruel swords. They speak nothing but falsehoods and even lie under oath.

¹²When this war is over, may our children grow up in peace. May our sons be like strong, young trees, and our daughters like shapely pillars carved to adorn a palace.
¹³May we grow crops and harvest them, filling our barns. May our sheep bear their young in our pastures, multiplying into thousands and ten thousands.
¹⁴May our oxen carry heavy loads, undisturbed by invading armies. May there be no more weeping or cries of distress in our streets.
¹⁵Happy are the people of whom this will be true. Happy are the people whose Lord is the God of heaven.

PSALM 145

God Is Worthy of Praise

¹I will exalt you, my God and my King. I will praise your name forever and ever.
²Every day I will thank you. I will sing praises to you as long as I have any breath in my being.

³The Lord is great and most worthy of praise. No one can comprehend His greatness.
⁴Lord, what you have done will not be forgotten, but your mighty acts will be repeated from one generation to another.
⁵They will tell about your awesome deeds and about the glory of your presence.
⁶They will talk about your mighty acts and the great things you have done.
⁷They will tell each other about your goodness and sing about your loving kindness.

⁸Yes, the Lord is most gracious and compassionate. He restrains His attributes of justice and is full of mercy and unfailing love.
⁹He is good to everyone and has compassion on all He has made.
¹⁰Your whole creation will praise you, Lord, and your people will praise your name.
¹¹They will tell others of the glory of your kingdom and talk to them about your mighty power.
¹²Soon everyone will know about your mighty acts and the majesty of your beneficent rule.
¹³Yes, your rule is eternal and your kingdom is forever. It will endure throughout all generations. The Lord never breaks His promises; He is gracious in everything He does.

¹⁴The Lord helps those who are in trouble and lifts the load of those who are weak. ¹⁵All things in creation look to you for help, and at the proper time you provide them with the food they need. ¹⁶You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

¹⁷The Lord is righteous in all His ways and kind in all that He does. ¹⁸He comes close to those who call on Him in truth, who seek Him with all their hearts. ¹⁹He fulfills the desires of those who honor Him. He hears their cry and saves them. ²⁰He carefully watches over all those who love Him, but He will not save the wicked from the final destruction.

²¹As long as I live, I will praise the Lord. Let every living thing praise His holy name forever.

PSALM 146

Happy Is the Man Who Depends on the Lord

¹Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! ²I will praise the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praises to my God the rest of my life.

³Don't put your trust in princes or in any one else, because no human being can save you. ⁴Men die and their bodies turn to dust; on that very day their plans come to an end. ⁵But happy is the man who depends on the God of Jacob and who places his hope in the Lord God of Israel.

⁶He made heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them, and He always keeps His promises. ⁷He administers justice to the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. He sets the prisoners free. ⁸The Lord gives sight to the blind and lifts the load from those who are burdened. The Lord loves those who want to do right. ⁹He watches out for strangers displaced by war and comforts widows and orphans who are left. But he sets Himself to ruin the plans of the wicked.

¹⁰The Lord will reign forever; Zion's God will reign for all eternity. Praise the Lord!

PSALM 147

Praise God for His Word

¹Praise be to the Lord! It is good to sing praises to our God. He is so gracious, it is only right to praise Him.

²The Lord restores Jerusalem and brings back the exiles. ³He heals the brokenhearted and binds up the wounds of those who are hurt. ⁴He counts the stars of heaven and gives each one its name. ⁵Great is our God and abundant is His power. His thoughts are beyond our limits. ⁶He responds to the teachable spirit of the meek and rejects the arrogance of the wicked. ⁷Sing to the Lord songs of thanksgiving. Make music on your harps to our God. ⁸He covers the sky with clouds; He waters the earth and makes grass grow on the hills. ⁹He provides animals with food and feeds the young ravens when they cry. ¹⁰He does not delight in the strength of the horse or in the bravery of men. ¹¹But He delights in those who respect Him and trust His unailing love.

¹²Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise our God, all you who live in Zion! ¹³The Lord is your strong gate of defense. He blesses you and your children also. ¹⁴He brings peace to your borders and provides you with the finest wheat. ¹⁵He gives a command to the earth and it quickly obeys Him. ¹⁶He covers the earth with snow like wool and sprinkles nature with frost like silver ashes. ¹⁷He sends hail from the sky as hard as stones. Who can stand against the icy blasts He sends? ¹⁸He tells the warm winds to blow, then the ice melts and rivers begin to flow. ¹⁹He reveals His word to Jacob and gives His laws to Israel. ²⁰He has not done this for other nations, so they do not know His laws.

Let's praise the Lord for what He has done to help us!

PSALM 148

Praise the Lord of Creation

¹Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise the Lord from outer space. ²Praise Him, all you angels. Praise Him, you who inhabit the universe.

³Praise Him, sun and moon. Praise Him, twinkling stars. ⁴Praise Him, you heavens. Praise Him, you vapors in the highest heavens.

⁵Let them all praise the Lord, for He commanded, and they were created. ⁶He established everything in the world of nature, and no one can change it. His decrees will last forever.

⁷Praise the Lord, all you oceans. Praise Him, all you mighty creatures in the sea. ⁸Praise Him, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, and you strong winds that do His bidding. ⁹Praise Him, hills and mountains, fruit trees and tall cedars. ¹⁰Praise Him, wild creatures and cattle, small creatures and birds that fly. ¹¹Praise Him, you kings of earth, you princes and all other rulers. ¹²Praise Him, young men and maidens, old men and children.

¹³Let everyone and everything praise the Lord! His name alone should be exalted because He is greater than anything in heaven and on earth. ¹⁴He has raised up a king for His people. Let all the saints praise the Lord. Israel is close to His heart. Praise the Lord!

PSALM 149

Praise God for Victory and Strength

¹Praise the Lord! Write a new song and sing it to the Lord. Praise Him in the assembly of the saints.

²Let Israel rejoice in their Creator and

the people of Zion be glad that He is their King. ³Praise His name with dancing and make music to Him with tambourines and the harp.

⁴The Lord delights to see His people happy. He honors with victory those who depend on Him. ⁵Let the saints rejoice in their relationship with Him. Let their hearts sing all through the night.

⁶Let our armies praise the Lord as they wield their double-edged swords. ⁷Let them shout the joy of victory as they defeat attacking armies and subdue the wicked who would do them harm.

⁸Let them capture kings and bind their nobles in chains. ⁹Let them praise the Lord for victory and for the strength He gave them to defeat the enemy. The Lord has honored them. Praise the Lord!

PSALM 150

Let All Things Praise the Lord

¹Praise the Lord! Praise God in His heavenly Sanctuary. Praise Him, all you who live throughout the universe. ²Praise Him for His mighty deeds; praise Him for the greatness of His power.

³Praise Him with the sound of trumpets; praise Him with harps and stringed instruments. ⁴Praise Him with tambourines and dance; praise Him with harps and flutes. ⁵Praise Him with clashing cymbals; yes, praise Him with loud clashing cymbals.

⁶Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

PROVERBS

Proverbs Gives Understanding

1 These are the sayings of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel. ²These proverbs will give you wisdom, understanding and insight. ³They will discipline your moral nature and help you to be just, honest and fair with everyone. ⁴They will give intelligence to those with little knowledge, and common sense and discretion to the young. ⁵They will help the wise and add to their wisdom; they will guide the educated and increase their understanding. ⁶These proverbs will open up life's meanings and answer questions wise men often ask. ⁷Reverence for the Lord is the foundation of knowledge. People are fools who refuse to listen to Him.

Counsel to a Son

⁸My son, listen to the instructions of your father and don't go against what your mother has taught you. ⁹What God-fearing parents say will make you an honorable person and will be like a laurel of victory on your head or a golden chain around your neck. ¹⁰My son, when you're young and sinners entice you to go along with them, don't do it. ¹¹If they say, "Come on, let's have fun and rob some innocent people. If they resist, we'll beat them up. ¹²If we stick together we can take on anyone; if he fights back, we'll kill him. Then we'll dig a pit and throw him in, and no one will know what happened. ¹³Soon our houses will be full of treasures and we'll have all the money we need. ¹⁴So, come join us. We'll share what we get, and you'll have a part with the rest of us."

¹⁵My son, don't go along with them. Don't get involved in that sort of thing. ¹⁶What they're doing is wrong. They act as if they're going on a picnic and are determined to get what they want, even if it means killing someone. ¹⁷You know that it's useless to try to catch a bird with a net when it's sitting there watching you.

¹⁸That's the way it is when you try to catch happiness. These young men are only hurting themselves. They'll end up either fighting among themselves or being caught and executed. ¹⁹That's what happens to anyone who is greedy, who is willing to kill to get rich.

Wisdom Is Like a Beautiful Woman

²⁰True wisdom is like a beautiful young woman who has a booth in the marketplace. She graciously offers her riches to all who pass by. ²¹She posts announcements on the city gates and puts them up on all the street corners in town. ²²She says, "You foolish people, how much longer do you want to go on in your foolishness? How much longer will you laugh at wisdom and scorn knowledge? ²³Listen to me. I'll open my heart and share my thoughts with you. ²⁴When I called, you rejected me. I reached out my hand, but you turned away from me. ²⁵You ignored my advice and did not want me to correct you.

²⁶"So when you get into trouble, I will laugh at what you have done, and when you are frightened, I will purposely mock you. Then perhaps you'll turn and listen to me. ²⁷The only time you call on me is when calamity strikes or disaster hits or you're overwhelmed with troubles. Then you call out to me. ²⁸But when you call, I will not answer. When you look for me, you won't be able to find me. ²⁹You hated wisdom from above and did not choose to respect and reverence the Lord. ³⁰You refused to listen to me and paid no attention when I tried to correct you. ³¹You will have to eat the fruit of your own doing and suffer the consequences of your own mistakes. ³²People get killed because they don't want to listen to the wisdom from above. ³³But those who listen to me will live without worry. They will be at peace with themselves and will have no reason to fear."

The Value of Wisdom

2 My son, listen to me and store my commandments in your heart. ²Turn your ear to wisdom and your heart to understanding. ³Call out to wisdom and plead for understanding. ⁴Search for wisdom as if you were searching for silver or hunting for hidden treasure. ⁵Then you will understand what it means to reverence the Lord and will find the wisdom which comes from God. ⁶You will acknowledge that it is God who gives wisdom. He is the source of knowledge and understanding. ⁷He holds wisdom in store for the upright and shields the blameless.

⁸He protects those who treat others fairly and watches over those who are loyal to Him. ⁹When you love God, you will gain insight into what is honest, fair and right and will know what course to take. ¹⁰Wisdom will be in your heart, and knowledge will be a joy to you. ¹¹Sound judgment will be at your side to help you, and understanding will keep you from doing wrong. ¹²Wisdom will keep you from being deceived by wicked men and will protect you from people whose words are evil. ¹³It will protect you from men who walk in darkness rather than light. ¹⁴It will keep you from those who see what they can get away with and who delight in doing wrong. ¹⁵It will help you stay away from those whose paths are crooked and who are devious in everything they do.

¹⁶It will also save you from being enticed by immoral women or some lonely wife using sweet words. ¹⁷It will protect you from the woman who, for no reason, has left her husband and forgotten the covenant they made with God when they were young. ¹⁸If you spend the night in her house, you're on the road to disaster. You'll fall into sin, the end of which is death. ¹⁹No one who tastes the stolen fruit of love is ever the same in this life again.

²⁰But with wisdom by your side you'll be able to walk in the ways of good men and follow the path of right doing. ²¹Those who do right will live in the land.

It will be given to the blameless forever. ²²But the wicked will die and be cut off from the land, and those who keep on sinning will be rooted up forever.

Don't Depend on Your Own Understanding

3 My son, don't forget what I've told you; take my commandments to heart. ²Then you'll live a long and happy life, and success will be yours wherever you go. ³Don't let loyalty and faithfulness slip away from you. Hang them around your neck like ornaments and engrave them on your mind. ⁴When you do this, both God and man will be pleased and will favor you.

⁵Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don't depend on your own understanding. ⁶Put the Lord first in everything you do and He will direct your life. ⁷Don't think of yourself as being so wise. Respect the Lord, and stay away from wickedness. ⁸If you do this, it will bring health to your body and give strength to your bones.

⁹Honor the Lord with your wealth and give Him the first of your harvest. ¹⁰Then He will bless you, and soon your barns will overflow and your grape presses will be full.

¹¹My son, don't reject the discipline of the Lord or resent being reproved by Him. ¹²The Lord carefully disciplines those He loves, just as a loving father cares about what kind of a man his son will become.

¹³Happy is the man who finds true wisdom and the man who grows in understanding. ¹⁴True wisdom is more profitable than silver and is better than the accumulation of gold. ¹⁵Wisdom from above is more precious than rubies and nothing you desire is equal to it. ¹⁶Wisdom holds out her right hand and offers a long and happy life, and in her left hand she offers riches and honor. ¹⁷Her ways are peaceful and her paths pleasant. ¹⁸She is like a tree of life to those who eat her fruit. Those who par-

take of it are gladdened and refreshed.

¹⁹The Lord formed the earth with wisdom and stretched out the heavens with understanding. ²⁰By His insight He divided the water vapors above from the water vapors below and allowed the dew to water the dry ground.

²¹My son, hold on to wisdom and sound judgment and never let them out of your sight. ²²They will not only give life to you, but will be like precious jewels hung around your neck. ²³Then you will walk through life in safety and your feet will not stumble. ²⁴When you go to bed at night, you won't be afraid; when you fall asleep, your rest will be sweet.

²⁵There's no need for you to be afraid of the ruin that will overtake the wicked. ²⁶Have confidence in God, and He will keep you from slipping away from Him. ²⁷Don't hold back from doing good when it is in your power to do so.

²⁸Don't tell those who come to you for help, "Not right now, but another time," just because it is inconvenient for you. ²⁹Don't take advantage of your neighbor who lives next to you because he trusts you. ³⁰Don't accuse people of things for no reason, especially if they have done you no wrong. ³¹Don't envy a violent man and don't do what he does. ³²The Lord hates the actions of such men but is pleased with those who are upright and takes them into His confidence. ³³The Lord cannot bless the homes of the wicked, but He abundantly blesses the homes of the righteous. ³⁴The Lord is not pleased with scorners, but delights in giving grace to the humble. ³⁵Those who are wise in the Lord, He will honor, but fools who feel no need of Him will be ashamed.

Wisdom Will Protect You

4 My children, listen to your father; pay attention to what he says so you'll begin to understand. ²I'm telling you what is good. Don't turn your backs on what I'm saying. ³When I was a boy growing up in my father's house, still young and my mother's only child, ⁴my

father taught me well. He said, "Son, take hold of my words with all your heart. Live according to my commandments and you'll never regret it. ⁵Reach out for wisdom; reach out to get understanding. Don't forget or stray from what I'm telling you. ⁶Don't ignore wisdom, and she will protect you. Love her, and she'll be there to help you. ⁷Wisdom is the most important thing in life to pursue. Even if it costs everything you have, go after understanding. ⁸Put her first in your life and she will honor you. Love her with all your heart and she will serve you forever. ⁹In the end she will be like a wreath of victory on your head, and in the end, a crown of life."

¹⁰Listen to me, my son, and accept what I have to say. If you do, you'll live a long and happy life. ¹¹I've taught you all I know and have guided you along right paths. ¹²If you walk in them, you will not stumble. If you run, you will not fall. ¹³So hold on to what I'm telling you. Don't let go. Grasp wisdom and understanding because they are your life. ¹⁴Don't do what the wicked do or walk in the footsteps of evil men. ¹⁵Stay away from them. Don't let them entice you. Turn away from their suggestions and go your own way. ¹⁶Those kinds of people are bent on evil. They can't go to sleep until they feel satisfied that they have done some evil. They toss and turn at night until they think of how to take advantage of someone else. ¹⁷They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. ¹⁸The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn. Their way gets brighter as the morning progresses, until the full light of day. ¹⁹But the path of the wicked is like the first sign of darkness. Soon they can't see what they're stumbling over.

²⁰My son, listen to what I'm telling you; open your ears to what I have to say. ²¹Don't let wisdom out of your sight; keep understanding close to your heart. ²²They are life to those who find them; they bring health to a man's body.

²³Above everything else, guard the affections of your heart; the emotional attachments you make determine the course of your life. ²⁴Watch what you say and how you say it; always speak the truth and never with hostility about anyone or anything. ²⁵Look straight ahead; focus on what is good and right. ²⁶Think carefully about which direction you're going and walk only on solid ground. ²⁷Don't swerve to the right or to the left; don't turn down the road of wickedness.

Warnings Against Adultery

5 My son, pay attention to what I'm saying. Listen to what I'm telling you, ²so you will know how to conduct your life and watch what you say. ³The lips of an immoral woman drip with honey and her hushed tones are smoother than oil, ⁴but in the end your relationship with her will bring you bitterness and pain as if you've been run through by a double-edged sword. ⁵She's on the road to death, and following her is digging your own grave. ⁶She doesn't think about tomorrow. The road she's on is crooked and she doesn't seem to care.

⁷So listen to me, my son, and don't turn away from what I'm saying. ⁸Stay as far away from such a woman as you can. Don't even think of going near her house. ⁹You'll end up giving your best strength to her, and the years you devote to her will take their toll. ¹⁰You'll spend your wealth on her and her friends, and all your work will enrich someone else. ¹¹At the end of your life you will groan, and find that your body is exhausted and your health has been spent for nothing. ¹²You'll regret your life, and too late you'll tell yourself, "I hated discipline and refused to be corrected. ¹³I didn't listen to my teachers or take to heart what they told me. ¹⁴I have come to moral ruin while living among God's people."

¹⁵Drink from the waters of home and draw water from your own well. ¹⁶Why let your emotions flow out like water to every woman you meet? ¹⁷Your body is

sacred—why share it with a stranger?

¹⁸Only give yourself to the wife of your youth and blessings will rest on your home. ¹⁹Your wife is like a gentle deer to you. Her breasts are yours to hold, and there is no sin in being captivated by her love. ²⁰Why should your body be ravished by a stranger? Why should you hold the breasts of another man's wife? ²¹The Lord sees whatever you do and follows wherever you go. He knows what you're doing. ²²Someday you'll have to face the consequences of your own actions. You'll find that sin did not set you free but bound you with ropes and made you a slave. ²³You will die because you refused to discipline yourself. You will be lost by your own choice.

Don't Be Foolish

6 My son, if you foolishly cosigned a bank loan for your neighbor, if you shook hands and agreed to back someone financially, ²if you got caught by your own impulsiveness and financially obligated yourself to someone by giving your word, ³then do this, my son, to get out of whatever you got yourself into: Go to your neighbor; humble yourself and plead your case. ⁴Don't ignore the situation or allow yourself to rest until you've done this. ⁵Free yourself as quickly as possible, like a deer running from the hunter or a bird escaping the net of the bird-catcher.

Don't Be Lazy

⁶Lazy people should observe a colony of ants and learn from their diligence. ⁷No one is there to organize them or tell them what to do. They have no commander or ruler giving them daily orders. ⁸Yet they store up provisions in summer and gather their food during harvest. ⁹How long will lazy people lie around waiting to be inspired to go to work? When will they get up and do something? No one will wake them up and structure their lives for them. ¹⁰A little extra sleep each morning, a few more naps during the day, a lit-

tle extra leisure in the evening, ¹¹and poverty is going to creep up like a thief, rob them, and before they know it, they'll end up on the streets as beggars.

Six Things the Lord Hates

¹²Wicked, worthless people talk with crooked language; ¹³they wink their eyes, signal with their feet and motion with their fingers to deceive you. ¹⁴While they're talking with you, their minds are full of mischief, planning to cause you trouble. ¹⁵But all this will catch up with them and they'll end up destroying themselves. ¹⁶There are six things the Lord hates—actually seven things that He does not like: ¹⁷First and foremost, pride. Second, dishonesty. Third, taking advantage of innocent people. ¹⁸Fourth, always devising wicked schemes. Fifth, being in a hurry to sin some more. ¹⁹Sixth, falsifying reports in court. Seventh, sowing suspicion among friends.

Don't Forget What You Were Taught

²⁰My son, follow your father's advice and don't forget what your mother has taught you. ²¹Hold their words close to your heart and hang around your neck what you have been told. ²²Wherever you go, they will guide you; while you're sleeping, they will watch over you, and when you waken, they will talk to you. ²³The precepts you learned are like a lamp and the instructions you received are like a light at night. Corrections and discipline are part of life. ²⁴They will keep you from going out with a sinful woman and from being seduced by a man's unfaithful wife. ²⁵Don't lust after a beautiful woman. Don't allow her flirtatious eyes to lead you astray. ²⁶That kind of longing after women will ruin you; it will prey on you until it drains your life away. ²⁷Can a man scoop up fire and put it inside his shirt without getting burned? ²⁸Can a man walk with his bare feet on hot coals without getting singed? ²⁹That is what happens when a man sleeps with another man's wife. You can-

not do that and get away with it.

³⁰No one condemns a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger, especially when he's starving. ³¹But if he's caught, he'll be held accountable and will be asked to pay back seven times more than what he stole, even if it costs him everything he has, but people will forgive him and overlook what he did. ³²But a man who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife lacks common sense because he not only destroys his reputation, but ends up destroying himself. ³³Disgrace and dishonor will follow him the rest of his life. Not only will he regret his foolishness, but women will not trust him and people will not forget what he has done. ³⁴There is no one more angry than a jealous husband. He will show no mercy when he gets his chance to get even. ³⁵He will not be paid off, and no amount of money will satisfy his anger.

7 My son, follow your father's advice and store up my words within you. ²Practice what I've told you and live. Protect and value my teachings as you would your own eyes. ³Tie them like a string around your finger and write them on your heart forever. ⁴Say to wisdom, "I love you like a sister." Tell understanding, "You're my closest friend." ⁵Both of them will keep you from falling into adultery and from giving in to the charms of your neighbor's wife.

Don't Be Seduced Into Sin

⁶One day as I was looking out the window of my house, ⁷I saw a group of young men and noticed one doing something really foolish. ⁸As the group split up to go home, the youth walked by the house of a certain woman. ⁹It was early evening, as the day was fading and night was settling in.

¹⁰Out came the scantily-dressed woman, intent on seducing him. ¹¹She called out loudly to him, and was bold and shameless in her manners. ¹²She

looked like those who walk the streets in certain sections of town. ¹³She grabbed him, kissed him and then said brazenly, ¹⁴"I've gone to the Temple today and offered my sacrifice and have some lamb's meat left over. ¹⁵When I came home and looked out the window, I saw you, the one I've been admiring. Now you're here beside me. ¹⁶Come in! I've been waiting for you. My sheets are colorful linens from Egypt and there are other things you need to see. ¹⁷My bed is large and soft, perfumed and waiting. ¹⁸Come in, and we can make love all night long. Let's enjoy ourselves! ¹⁹My husband is out of town; he has gone to another country. ²⁰He is searching for places to invest his money, so he won't be back for weeks."

²¹With this kind of talk she caused him to yield and with flattery she seduced him. ²²At first he hesitated, then he followed her. Like an ox being led to the slaughter, he let her take his hand and lead him into her house. Like a buck, he stepped into a trap without realizing it. ²³But the arrow of the hunter will pierce his heart. Like an innocent bird he flew into the net, unaware that when the husband comes home, it may cost him his life.

²⁴Now, my son, listen to me and pay attention to what I'm telling you. ²⁵Don't let such a woman play on your emotions and turn your heart away from that which is good. Don't follow her as if she were someone special. ²⁶She has seduced many men; you're not the only one. And don't think you'll get away with it without paying the price. ²⁷Her house is like a highway; you will find yourself traveling a road you'll wish you weren't on, for it leads to death.

God, the Source of Wisdom

8 Listen! Isn't wisdom calling out? Isn't understanding raising her voice? ²She stands on the hilltops and beside the busy highways. ³By the city gates and in the market places, she cries out, ⁴"To all men I call out; all leaders and people everywhere. ⁵Do you lack wis-

dom? Pursue it! Do you lack understanding? Go after it! ⁶Listen! I have something to tell you. I'm going to show you what is right and good. ⁷I'm going to tell you the truth, because my lips detest dishonesty. ⁸Everything I say is just and nothing I say is crooked or false. ⁹Those with good sense will know that my words are true, and those who stop and think will know that what I say is right. ¹⁰Value my teachings as silver and value understanding as gold. ¹¹I am Wisdom. I am more precious than rubies. Nothing you desire can compare with me. ¹²I am Wisdom and live with Prudence. We possess knowledge and have insight and understanding.

¹³"To respect God means to hate evil. I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and a filthy mouth. ¹⁴I give good counsel and sound advice. I have understanding and power. ¹⁵I stand beside kings and guide rulers to make laws that are just. ¹⁶I help princes rule and assist judges in making decisions. ¹⁷I respond with love to those who love me and those who seek me will find me. ¹⁸I give away riches and honor; wealth and prosperity are mine. ¹⁹What I give is better than gold and fine silver. ²⁰I lead people in ways of right-doing and into paths of justice. ²¹I bestow wealth on those who appreciate me and I will fill their homes with treasures.

²²"I am the One who was with God from the very beginning before He did His first works so very long ago. ²³I have always existed. I was appointed to a new office and installed even before the world was made. ²⁴I existed long before the oceans were formed or there were any springs of water. ²⁵I existed before the mountains were made or the hills were shaped. ²⁶I was there before the earth with its fields was created. I was there when the dust of the earth was first made. ²⁷I was there when the heavens were created and when the horizon was stretched out over the oceans. ²⁸I was there when the clouds were put in place and the springs of water feeding the great deep were let loose. ²⁹I was by God's side as He gave the sea its

boundary and told the waters where to stay. I was by His side when He first laid the foundations of the earth. ³⁰I was His craftsman. I never left His side and delighted in being with Him. ³¹I rejoiced over making this world and delighted in creating mankind."

³²My son, listen to me. Happy are those who walk in the way of Wisdom. ³³Don't brush aside what Wisdom is telling you. Listen to what Wisdom has to say: ³⁴"Happy is the man who stands at my gates and waits at my door. ³⁵All who search for me will find life, and God will be pleased. ³⁶Those who don't look for me injure themselves, and those who reject me have chosen death."

Wisdom Has Seven Pillars

9 Wisdom's house has seven pillars which she has designed. ²She has prepared her food and mixed her drinks. She has set her table ready for guests. ³She has sent out her maids to invite everyone to come and eat. ⁴She calls out, "Let those who want understanding, who feel their lack of judgment, come to Wisdom's house and eat. ⁵Come, eat my food and the drink I have prepared. ⁶Forsake your foolishness and live; walk in the way of understanding.

⁷"If you correct a conceited person, you'll get hurt, ⁸and a mocker will hate you. But if you correct a wise man, he'll love you. ⁹If you give instructions to a person who is wise, he will end up even wiser. Teach a righteous man and he will add to his knowledge. ¹⁰Reverence for the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a knowledge of God will give understanding. ¹¹If you eat from my table, your days will be many, and years will be added to your life. ¹²If you live wisely and with understanding, you will be rewarded. If you ridicule Wisdom, you will suffer loss."

The Foolish Man

¹³Foolishness is like a loud and crude woman. She acts on impulse and knows nothing. ¹⁴She sits on her porch that

stands in the busiest part of town, ¹⁵calling out to people going about their business, ¹⁶"Come, have a free meal at my expense. It is foolish for you to work so hard." ¹⁷The foolish listen as she tells them that stolen fruit tastes sweet and food eaten secretly is delicious. ¹⁸The foolish man doesn't know he's walking into a death trap from which there is no escape. Those who have gone there before him have ended their lives in shame.

The Many Proverbs of Solomon

10 Here are some more proverbs from King Solomon:

A wise son makes his father glad, but a foolish son brings grief to his mother. ²Wealth gotten dishonestly doesn't bring lasting happiness, but righteousness brings eternal life. ³It's not the Lord who makes good people go hungry; He will stop the wicked from prospering forever. ⁴A lazy man will soon be poor, but hard work will reward the diligent. ⁵A wise son harvests the crops when they're ready, but he who vacations during harvest is a disgrace to his father.

⁶The words of a man who loves God show his happiness, but a wicked man's words cover his violent nature. ⁷Good people will be remembered as a blessing, but a wicked man's name will be repulsive. ⁸Sensible people accept advice, but chattering fools come to their own ruin. ⁹Honest people are secure in their dealings, but the dishonest will be caught in their own lies. ¹⁰One who winks deceptively causes grief, and one who never stops chattering will come to his own ruin.

¹¹The mouth of the righteous is like a fountain of life, but violence spews from the mouth of the wicked. ¹²Hatred and hostility stir up trouble, but love forgives and covers up wrongs. ¹³Those who have wisdom will speak with understanding, but those who lack judgment can expect to be punished. ¹⁴Wise men store up knowledge, but fools chatter constantly and bring trouble. ¹⁵The wealth of the rich protects them like a fortified city,

while poverty destroys the poor. ¹⁶What you receive for doing right is abundant life, but what you receive for doing evil is guilt and punishment.

¹⁷He who listens when corrected is on the path of life, but the man who rejects reproof will go astray. ¹⁸A man who hides hatred with smooth words is lying, and he who gossips is the worst kind of fool. ¹⁹The more a person talks, the more likely he is to sin, but he who listens more than he talks is wise. ²⁰A good man's word is like gold, but a wicked man's mind is worthless. ²¹The words of the righteous give hope to many, but a fool ruins the lives of others by his stupidity. ²²The Lord's blessings bring lasting riches, without sorrow.

²³Fools love mischief as if it were a sport, but intelligent people find pleasure in wisdom. ²⁴The wicked will get what they fear most, but the righteous will receive what they want most. ²⁵When the storms of life are over, the wicked will be gone, and the righteous will be established forever. ²⁶The way vinegar affects the teeth and smoke the eyes, that's the way a lazy person irritates those who hired him. ²⁷Respecting the Lord adds years to your life, but the years of the wicked will be short. ²⁸The hope of the righteous brings joy, but the hopes of the wicked will end. ²⁹The ways of the Lord give strength to the righteous, but those who do evil will lose His protection. ³⁰Good people will never perish from the earth, but the wicked will someday be gone. ³¹The righteous will continue to speak wisdom, but the tongue that speaks evil will be stopped. ³²Righteous people know the right thing to say, but the mouths of the wicked tell lies.

11 The Lord hates dishonest scales, but honest measurements are His delight. ²Those who are proud will surely fall, but wisdom comes to those who are humble. ³Integrity will guide the righteous, but the wicked are de-

stroyed by their duplicity. ⁴Riches are worthless in the day of the Lord, but righteousness delivers from death. ⁵The blamelessness of the righteous gives them serenity, but the wicked are destroyed by their own wickedness. ⁶Righteousness brings freedom to those who are honest, but transgressors are caught by their own desires.

⁷When a wicked man dies, his hope of changing is gone; confidence placed in riches will come to nothing. ⁸Those who do right will be delivered, but destruction will come on the wicked. ⁹A hypocrite thinks nothing of destroying his neighbor with his mouth, but a good person will know how to end the slander. ¹⁰When righteous men rule the city, people rejoice, and when wicked men are put out of office, people celebrate. ¹¹A city prosper when ruled by those who are righteous, but it is destroyed when managed by those who are wicked. ¹²A person who lacks wisdom criticizes his neighbors, but a man of sound judgment says nothing. ¹³He who betrays confidence is a gossip, but a man who can be trusted knows how to keep quiet. ¹⁴By one person's lack of judgment, a nation can fall, but in the consensus of good counselors, there is safety. ¹⁵Those who promise to co-sign for a stranger's debt will live to regret it, but he who refuses to get involved in such an agreement is safe.

¹⁶A gracious woman will always be treated with respect; she will hold to honor as powerful men hold to wealth. ¹⁷A kindhearted man will reap blessings for himself, but a cruel man reaps nothing but trouble. ¹⁸Wicked people don't really gain anything, but those who do right will be rewarded. ¹⁹They will live forever, but those who pursue evil will die. ²⁰The Lord detests the schemes of the wicked, but He delights in the ways of the blameless. ²¹You can be sure that the wicked will not escape the results of their doings, but those who do right will go free.

²²A beautiful woman without good judgment is like a gold ring in a pig's

nose. ²³The desires of the righteous will be fulfilled, but the hopes of the wicked will be dashed forever. ²⁴One man is generous and becomes rich, while another hoards his money and loses everything. ²⁵Generous people will prosper because they help others; others, in turn, will help them. ²⁶People curse a man who hoards his grain so the price will rise, but they bless the man who sells it. ²⁷He who looks for good will find it, and he who looks for evil will find trouble.

²⁸Whoever puts his trust in money will fall like autumn leaves, but those who put their trust in God will be like green leaves on a healthy branch. ²⁹He who brings trouble on his family will inherit nothing but the wind; those who act foolishly will end up working for the wise. ³⁰The fruit of righteous living is everlasting life, and those who turn others to God are wise. ³¹If the righteous have a taste of their future reward while on earth, how much more will the wicked have a taste of theirs.

12 He who loves knowledge will also love correction, but he who hates to be corrected is stupid. ²The Lord favors the actions of good men but condemns the actions of the wicked. ³A man will not establish himself in society by being wicked, but the righteous will be rooted in people's hearts.

⁴A woman of noble character is a credit to her husband, but a shameful wife is like decay in his bones. ⁵The advice of the righteous will be fair, but you can never trust the advice of the wicked. ⁶The wicked are out for your blood, but the righteous are interested in your welfare. ⁷The plans of the wicked will be overthrown, but the house of the righteous will stand firm. ⁸A man of wisdom will be praised, but a man with a warped mind will be despised. ⁹It's better not to be so highly esteemed yet have a servant, than to flaunt false evidence of wealth and have no food.

¹⁰A righteous man loves and cares for his animals, but even the kindest acts of a wicked man are cruel. ¹¹He who works his land will have plenty to eat, but he who chases after worthless ventures and neglects his land has no sense. ¹²The wicked long to have a share in the plunder of evil men, but the righteous long for the riches of God. ¹³An evil man is eventually trapped by his own sinful talk, but a righteous man avoids trouble by being careful what he says. ¹⁴He will feel good about what he says just as he enjoys the reward of hard work. ¹⁵The way of a fool is always right to himself, but a wise man listens to what others have to say. ¹⁶A fool shows annoyance immediately, but a wise man overlooks insults.

¹⁷Those who tell the truth demonstrate righteousness, but a false witness cannot be trusted. ¹⁸Careless words pierce like a sword, but words spoken wisely bring healing. ¹⁹Lips which tell the truth will endure forever, but lying lips will not last long. ²⁰Deceit is in the heart of the wicked, but joy is in the heart of those who plan peace. ²¹The righteous never intend to do evil, but the wicked are filled with mischief.

²²Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who are honest are His delight. ²³A wise man doesn't flaunt his knowledge, but a fool blurts out whatever comes to mind. ²⁴Diligent hands lead to advancement, but lazy hands make labor a drudgery. ²⁵Anxiety and worry make a man's heart heavy, but a kind word cheers him up. ²⁶A righteous man turns his friends from evil, but the wicked lead their friends astray. ²⁷A lazy man refuses to work for his food, but the diligent man takes advantage of every opportunity. ²⁸The way of righteousness is a happy life and at the end of its path lies immortality.

13 A wise son listens to his father's instruction, but one who scorns wisdom will not tolerate correction. ²A good man will be rewarded for what he says,

but the wicked have an appetite for harming others. ³He who preserves life is careful what he says, but he who talks without thinking will come to ruin. ⁴A lazy person never gets what he wants, but a hard-working man gets what he goes after. ⁵Honest people hate lying, but wicked people do shameful things. ⁶Right-doing protects a person's innocence, but wickedness proves the ruin of sinners.

⁷Some people act as if they're rich when they're poor, while others act as if they're poor when they're rich. ⁸A rich man may have to use money to ransom his life, but no one threatens the life of a poor man. ⁹The light of those who do right shines brightly, but the wicked will die like a flame going out. ¹⁰Pride only leads to arguments, but wisdom listens and asks for advice. ¹¹The more easily money is made, the harder it is not to spend it, but the harder it is to come by, the easier it is to save. ¹²When hopes are constantly crushed, the heart feels sick, but when hope is realized, it's like eating from the tree of life. ¹³He who scorns instructions will have nothing but trouble, but he who appreciates instruction will be rewarded. ¹⁴The teachings of the wise are like a fountain of life; they will keep a man from walking the ways of death. ¹⁵Good judgment brings respect, but the life of a man who cannot be trusted is hard. ¹⁶Sensible people think before they act, but stupid people show their ignorance.

¹⁷An unreliable messenger brings nothing but trouble, but a trustworthy messenger brings healing. ¹⁸Those who don't want to learn will be poor, but those who listen and learn will be honored. ¹⁹A longing fulfilled is sweet to the soul, but fools refuse to turn from evil. ²⁰Those who keep company with the wise will become wise; those who keep company with fools will suffer for it. ²¹Trouble follows the sinner, but success is the reward of the righteous. ²²A good man will have something to leave to his grandchildren, but the wealth of sinners will eventually be given to the righteous.

²³A poor man's farm may produce abundant food, but injustice can sweep it all away. ²⁴If you don't discipline your son, it shows you don't love him; if you love your child, you will carefully correct him. ²⁵The righteous are content with what they have to eat, but the wicked are never satisfied.

14 Strong families are built by wise women, but women who are foolish tear their families apart. ²Those who are honest respect God, but those who are devious are irreverent. ³A fool talks too much and brings reproof on himself, but a wise man weighs his words and keeps his reputation. ⁴Without oxen to pull the plow the barn will remain empty, but with a good pair of oxen the barn will soon be full. ⁵A reliable witness always tells the truth, but a false witness pours out lies. ⁶Those who make fun of it never find wisdom, but it comes easily to those with understanding. ⁷Don't keep company with men who are fools; you won't gain knowledge and understanding from them. ⁸The wise know what is right and do it, but fools deceive themselves into thinking they're the only ones who are right. ⁹Those who don't care whether they sin or not are fools, but when good people sin, they try to make things right.

¹⁰No one else can know the depths of someone's sadness, and no one else can experience the delight of one's own joy. ¹¹The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the house of a good man will flourish. ¹²There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. ¹³Even in laughter the heart can be sad, and when the laughter is over, the sadness returns. ¹⁴Bad people will be paid back for what they do, and good people will be rewarded for their good deeds. ¹⁵A fool believes anything and charges ahead, but a wise man thinks about what he does. ¹⁶A wise person respects the Lord and shuns evil, but a fool is hot-tempered and reckless. ¹⁷A quick-tempered man

does foolish things, but a wise man does good. ¹⁸Foolish people receive what their foolishness deserves, but those who are wise are crowned with knowledge.

¹⁹The time will come when evil men will bow in the presence of those who do good; the wicked will bow at the door of the righteous. ²⁰A poor man is shunned by his neighbors, but the rich have many friends. ²¹Those who look down on their poor neighbors are sinners, but those who are kind to the poor are happy. ²²A man who does good will earn trust and respect, but a man who does evil will come to ruin. ²³Hard work produces profit, but all talk and no work leads to poverty. ²⁴Wise people are praised for their wisdom, but fools only reap more foolishness.

²⁵A witness who tells the truth saves lives, but a false witness lies and doesn't care who is destroyed. ²⁶Reverence for the Lord gives confidence to a man and a sense of security to his children. ²⁷Reverence for the Lord is like a fountain of life; it turns a man away from death. ²⁸A king's greatness depends on how many people he rules, for without people, a prince is nothing. ²⁹If you stay calm, it shows how wise you are, but if you get agitated, people think you're stupid. ³⁰A heart full of peace gives life to the body, but envy and jealousy rot the bones.

³¹If you oppress the poor, you show contempt for their Maker; but whoever is kind to the poor honors the Lord. ³²Wicked people bring about their own downfall, but even in death, the hope of the righteous is their refuge. ³³Wisdom makes her home in the heart of the wise, but it is not present in the hearts of fools. ³⁴Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people. ³⁵A king is pleased with a wise servant, but he censures one who acts without discretion.

15 A gentle answer calms anger, but harsh words stir up hostility. ²When wise people speak, knowledge makes good sense, but when fools speak,

nonsense gushes out. ³The Lord sees everywhere and knows everything that happens; He sees the good as well as the bad. ⁴An honest tongue is like a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes a man's spirit. ⁵A fool ignores his father's instruction; but he who profits from correction is wise.

⁶The house of a good man is full of righteousness, but the house of the wicked is full of trouble. ⁷Knowledge is spread by the lips of the wise, not by the lips of fools. ⁸The Lord is not pleased with the sacrifices of the wicked, but the simple prayers of the righteous delight Him. ⁹The Lord is not pleased with the behavior of the wicked, but He loves those who want to do right. ¹⁰Discipline is not welcome to him who forsakes the way; he who hates correction cannot be given eternal life.

¹¹If the Lord can see into the grave where the dead are, how much more can He see into the hearts and minds of the living. ¹²Scoffers shun correction; they resent advice from those who are wise. ¹³A happy heart makes a cheerful face, but a sad heart crushes the spirit. ¹⁴Intelligent people want to learn, but fools are satisfied to be ignorant. ¹⁵Every day is wretched for those who are depressed, but those who are cheerful count every day as a continual feast. ¹⁶It is better to have less with the presence of the Lord than to have great wealth and nothing but trouble. ¹⁷A plate of vegetables served with love is far better than a steak dinner served with hatred. ¹⁸A hot temper brings on arguments, but a patient man dissolves contentions.

¹⁹A lazy man's path is filled with thorns, but an honest man's life is like an open highway. ²⁰A wise son makes his parents happy, but a fool is a source of grief. ²¹Fools delight in folly, but those who are wise do what is right. ²²Plans fail for lack of counsel, but counsel sought will bring success. ²³It is good to be able to give the right answer and very good to speak the right word at the right time.

²⁴The righteous seek the path that leads to a better life and avoid the path that leads to death. ²⁵The Lord will bring down the houses of the wicked, but He has special care for the widows. ²⁶The Lord hates the thoughts of the wicked, but He is pleased with the thoughts of the righteous. ²⁷A greedy man brings trouble on his family, but he who can't be paid to do wrong will live a happier life. ²⁸The righteous weigh answers before they speak, but evil gushes from the mouths of the wicked.

²⁹The Lord hears the prayers of the righteous, but refuses to listen to those who do wickedly. ³⁰A cheerful countenance makes others happy and good news refreshes the body. ³¹He who listens to correction will feel at home among the wise. ³²He who refuses instruction is only hurting himself, but he who heeds reproof will gain understanding. ³³Respecting the Lord gives a man wisdom and humility comes before honor.

16 Man prepares himself to give an answer, but only the Lord can teach him to say it effectively. ²The ways of man may seem innocent to him, but the Lord weighs the motives. ³Commit your plans and decisions to the Lord, and under His guidance you will succeed. ⁴Everything the Lord made has a future, but the future of the wicked is extinction. ⁵The Lord will not accept those who are arrogant; even if they join forces, they will not escape destruction. ⁶Because of God's love and mercy, sin can be forgiven, but by respecting the Lord, a man will avoid evil.

⁷When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, even his enemies leave him alone. ⁸It's better to have a little, honestly earned, than to have a large income, dishonestly gained. ⁹A man may plan his life, but the Lord directs his steps. ¹⁰To his people, the king's authority is like a divine pronouncement, so what he says should be just.

¹¹Honest weights and measures are pleasing to the Lord, whether on the scale or in business dealings. ¹²It is intolerable for rulers to do evil, because justice is what makes a government strong. ¹³A ruler delights in honest people and values a man who speaks the truth. ¹⁴The wrath of the king is a sign of death, but wise men know how to appease his anger. ¹⁵When a king is happy, it cheers the nation; his kindness is like a spring rain. ¹⁶It is much better to have wisdom than gold, and understanding should be chosen over silver.

¹⁷The road traveled by good people avoids evil, and he who looks where he's going will preserve his life. ¹⁸Pride leads to self-destruction and arrogance to a man's downfall. ¹⁹It is better to be humble and remain poor than to be arrogant and live in luxury. ²⁰Whoever pays attention and learns will prosper, and the man who relies on God will be happy. ²¹A wise man soon has a good reputation; the kinder his words, the more persuasive his teaching. ²²Understanding is a fountain of life to those who have it, but fools will be chastened.

²³Intelligent people think before they speak and thus increase reception of what they say. ²⁴Pleasant words are like honey—sweet to the taste and healthful to the body. ²⁵There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end result is death. ²⁶A man's appetite makes him work harder because hunger drives him on to finish a job. ²⁷Wicked people are always plotting evil; even their words are like a scorching fire. ²⁸Wicked people cause dissension, and gossip separates the best of friends. ²⁹A wicked man deceives his neighbors and even leads friends to do wrong. ³⁰He who narrows his eyes and smacks his lips while plotting evil has already done wrong.

³¹Gray hair is like a crown of glory if it belongs to those who are righteous. ³²He who is slow to anger is better than a mighty warrior. It is better to have your emotions under control than to conquer

a fortified city. ³³Men cast lots to determine God's will, but the Lord's will is not found by chance.

17 It's better to eat a dry crust of bread with peace and quiet than to have a banquet in a house full of strife. ^{2A}A wise servant will control a disgraceful son and will share in the inheritance as one of the children. ³Gold and silver are tested by fire, but the heart is tested by the Lord. ⁴Evil people love to listen to evil and liars listen eagerly to malicious tongues. ⁵If you make fun of poor people, you insult God; you will not go unpunished if you gloat over someone else's ruin.

⁶Grandchildren are a crown to the elderly, and the glory of children is their parents. ⁷Smooth, deceptive talk by an evil man is wrong, but the lying lips of a ruler are worse. ^{8A}A bribe is like a magic charm to the one who uses it because every time he gives it, it works. ⁹He who forgives and forgets shows love, but he who recites wrongs breaks up the closest friends. ¹⁰An intelligent person learns more from one rebuke than a fool learns from a hundred lashes.

¹¹An evil person will continue to cause trouble, which is why the sternest official will be asked to judge him. ¹²It is better to meet a mother bear robbed of her cubs than to become involved with a fool in his folly. ¹³If a man pays back good with evil, trouble will never leave him or his children. ¹⁴Starting an argument is like a leak in a dam; stop the discussion while you can. ¹⁵Condemning the innocent or letting the wicked go free—the Lord detests such things. ¹⁶It doesn't do any good to spend money on educating a fool because he has no desire to learn.

^{17A}A real friend loves you no matter what happens. What are brothers for if they can't stick together in hard times? ¹⁸Only a man who has no sense will put up security for a neighbor's debts. ¹⁹He who loves to argue loves sin; he who protects himself with arrogance invites de-

struction. ²⁰No good comes to a man with an evil heart; he who tells lies will get into trouble. ²¹To have a fool for a son brings grief; the parents of a fool have no joy.

^{22A}A merry heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit drains your strength. ²³Wicked people accept bribes and pervert the course of justice. ²⁴An intelligent person fixes his attention on wisdom, but a fool lets his mind wander everywhere. ^{25A}A foolish son brings nothing but grief to his father and sorrow to his mother. ²⁶To impose a fine on the innocent is like beating a man for being honest. ^{27A}A man of intelligence chooses his words carefully, and a man of understanding will have a calm spirit. ²⁸Even a fool is thought to know something if he keeps his mouth shut; he is considered wise if he just sits there.

18 People who don't get along with others are interested only in themselves; they don't use sound judgment. ^{2A}A fool doesn't wish to understand anything; all he wants to do is to air his own opinion. ³With wickedness comes contempt, and then shame and dishonor. ⁴The words of the wise are like refreshing water drawn from a deep well or a bubbling brook. ⁵It is not right to favor the guilty who have money or to punish the innocent who are poor. ⁶When a fool starts to argue, it makes people want to beat him. ^{7A}A fool's mouth is his undoing; he ties himself up in knots with his own words.

⁸Words of gossip are like choice morsels; people greedily eat them and they spread through the body like poison. ^{9A}A lazy person is not much different from one who is destructive. ¹⁰The name of the Lord is like a fortress; people run to it and are safe. ¹¹Rich people think their wealth protects them like a strong wall, but their confidence is misplaced. ¹²Pride precedes a man's fall, but before honor comes humility. ¹³Listen before

you speak; or you will sound like a fool to your own disgrace.

¹⁴A man's spirit and his will to live sustains him when he's sick, but if that goes, then all hope is gone. ¹⁵The mind of the wise acquires knowledge; understanding comes by listening to others. ¹⁶A gift opens the way for the giver and ushers him into the presence of the great. ¹⁷The first one to present his case seems right until others begin to question him. ¹⁸If two equally strong opponents meet to argue, casting lots can often settle the issue. ¹⁹A brother whom you have offended is harder to win back than a fortified city; if you argue with him, it will be like building a wall between you.

²⁰The fruit of your mouth satisfies like a meal; you can be content with what your lips produce. ²¹The tongue has power to give life or bring death; a man will eat its fruits. ²²Whoever has a good wife has found a good thing; it shows that the Lord has favored him. ²³When a poor man asks for something, he must beg, but everyone listens when a rich man speaks, even if he is rude. ²⁴A man who wants to have friends must be friendly; but there is one Friend who sticks closer than a brother.

19 It's better to associate with a poor man who is honest than with a rich fool who is dishonest. ²It's not good to have enthusiasm without knowledge; being hasty only gets you into trouble. ³By stupid decisions a man ruins his life; then he blames God for it. ⁴When a person is rich, he attracts many friends, but when he is poor, they all leave him.

⁵A false witness will not go unpunished, and if you lie, you'll not go free. ⁶Many seek the friendship of important people and everyone is friendly to those who give gifts. ⁷A poor man's relatives stay away from him and his friends avoid him; even though he pleads with them, they leave him. ⁸He who learns all he can is doing himself a favor, and he who un-

derstands what he learns will prosper. ⁹A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who lies will perish.

¹⁰It's not fitting for a fool to live in luxury, nor for servants to tell princes what to do. ¹¹A wise man controls his temper, and when someone wrongs him, it's to his credit to ignore it. ¹²When a king gets angry, his anger is like the roar of a lion, but when he favors someone, it's like a refreshing dew. ¹³A foolish son can bring his father to ruin. A quarrelsome wife is like water that is constantly dripping. ¹⁴Money and houses can be inherited, but a good wife is a gift from the Lord.

¹⁵Laziness brings on sleep and too much sleeping leads to poverty. ¹⁶He who keeps God's commandments keeps his life, but he who ignores them will be put to death. ¹⁷When a person gives money to help the poor, he's loaning it to the Lord; what he's given will be repaid. ¹⁸Discipline your children while they're young; otherwise, you're just helping them destroy themselves. ¹⁹Let a man with a strong temper suffer the consequences; if you rescue him, you'll have to do it again. ²⁰Listen when someone gives you advice and be willing to learn; in the end you'll be wiser.

²¹Man plans to do all kinds of things, but what the Lord plans will ultimately be done. ²²What people want is for a man to be faithful and kind; a faithful man who is poor is better than a rich liar. ²³Respect for the Lord lengthens a man's life, and a person who is content will spare himself a lot of trouble. ²⁴Some people are so lazy they would like others to feed them. ²⁵Punish a mocker and the rest of the people will learn a lesson. Rebuke a wise man and he'll learn from his mistakes.

²⁶Only the most disgraceful person would think of robbing his father or turning his mother away from his house. ²⁷When a son stops learning, he'll soon ignore what he's learned before. ²⁸A corrupt witness laughs in his heart at justice, and wicked people love the taste of evil.

²⁹Penalties are for those who mock justice, and beatings are reserved for fools.

20 Wine turns people into mockers; alcohol gets people into fights; whoever is deceived into drinking it is not wise. ²An angry king is like a roaring lion; it is suicide to make him mad. ³An honorable man stays out of arguments, but a fool jumps in with both feet. ⁴A lazy farmer who doesn't plow in the spring will look for a harvest and find nothing.

⁵A person's innermost thoughts are like water in a deep well, but someone with insight can draw them out. ⁶Many claim they will be loyal, but it is hard to find someone who really can be trusted. ⁷Happy are the children who follow the example of honest parents. ⁸When a king sits on his throne to judge, he discerns truth from error. ⁹Who can say, "I have made my heart clean and am pure of all sin"?

¹⁰Deceptive weights and measures are an abomination to the Lord. ¹¹Even a child is known by what he does, whether he is honest and good. ¹²It is the Lord who has given us eyes to see and ears to hear. ¹³The farmer who loves to sleep will eventually become poor, but if he keeps busy, he'll have plenty to eat. ¹⁴The customer complains about the product when he is buying it, but after he brings it home, he boasts about what a good deal he got. ¹⁵Gold and precious gems are of great value, but knowledge and wisdom are worth more than that. ¹⁶If someone promises to pay another's debt, something should be held for security. ¹⁷What a man gains by fraud he enjoys as he would fine food, but the time will come when it will taste like a mouth full of gravel. ¹⁸Follow good counsel and you will succeed; don't go into battle without a plan.

¹⁹A gossip can never keep a secret, so don't share confidences with a person who talks too much. ²⁰If you curse your parents, your life will be like a lamp

whose flame goes out in the middle of the night. ²¹Wealth that has been gotten quickly is easily wasted. ²²Don't take it on yourself to repay a wrong; leave that to the Lord. ²³The Lord is not pleased when people use dishonest scales and weights. ²⁴Only the Lord can direct a man's steps; no one can understand His ways.

²⁵It's a financial trap for a man to rashly make a pledge to the Lord and only later consider what he has done. ²⁶A wise king will discover who did wrong and will see that the punishment fits the crime. ²⁷The Spirit of the Lord speaking within a man is like a lamp to help him see himself as he really is. ²⁸Honesty and love will preserve a king and kindness will secure his throne. ²⁹Young men are honored for their strength and old men for their experience. ³⁰Punishment clears away evil; a painful experience cleanses a man's soul, making him change his ways.

21 The mind of a king is in the hands of the Lord; He can direct it as easily as He directs the course of a stream. ²A man may justify everything he does as right, but the Lord judges his motives. ³To do what is right and just is more important to the Lord than bringing sacrifices. ⁴Arrogance and pride are what the wicked thrive on, and like evil actions, these too are sin. ⁵Those who plan and work hard will have plenty, but trying to get rich quick will lead to poverty.

⁶Riches gained by telling lies vanish like the mist, but not before catching you in a deadly snare. ⁷The violence of the wicked will destroy them because they refuse to do what is right. ⁸The way of those who sin is devious, but the conduct of the innocent is upright. ⁹Better to camp on the roof of your house than to live inside with a nagging wife. ¹⁰Wicked people crave more wickedness; they have mercy on no one. ¹¹When a scoffer is punished, he finally learns his lesson even if he is simpleminded, but all a wise man needs is to be told of his mistake.

¹²The righteous man considers the heart of the wicked and turns away. He knows that God will put an end to their evil doings. ¹³If a man closes his ears to the cry of the poor, no one will hear him when he cries for help. ¹⁴A gift given in secret will quiet anger and a secret reward will soothe wrath. ¹⁵When justice is done, the righteous are glad, but the wicked are troubled. ¹⁶A man who fails to use common sense will soon rest among the dead. ¹⁷He who lives for pleasure will end up poor, and those who waste their money on wine and expensive food will not be rich. ¹⁸The wicked will suffer what they have brought on others, and the unfaithful will pay for what they have done.

¹⁹It is better to live alone in the desert than with an ill-tempered spouse. ²⁰The wise plan ahead and save for the days to come, but stupid people spend money as fast as they get it. ²¹Be kind and honest, and you'll live a long life; respect others, and you'll find happiness and honor. ²²A wise man knows how to conquer the city without a battle; he brings down the stronghold in which the people have trusted.

²³If you know how to guard your mouth, you'll save yourself a lot of trouble. ²⁴Show me a scoffer and I'll show you someone arrogant and proud. ²⁵A lazy man ends up destroying himself because he refuses to work. ²⁶All day long he dreams of getting rich, but a righteous man works and gives of himself without sparing. ²⁷The Lord detests sacrifices brought to Him by the wicked, even more when brought for the wrong reasons. ²⁸A false witness will perish, but the words of a truthful man will endure. ²⁹The wicked are obstinate and put on a front, but righteous people will reconsider and think things through. ³⁰Human wisdom and careful planning will accomplish nothing if the Lord is against it. ³¹You can make all the right preparations for battle, but the Lord is the One who gives the victory.

22 A good reputation is more desirable than great riches, and to be respected is better than silver or gold. ²The rich and the poor have this in common—the Lord is the Maker of them all. ³The wise see trouble coming and avoid it, but fools keep going and run into it. ⁴Humility and respect for God will bring riches, honor and a happy life. ⁵Thorns and thistles are in the path of the wicked and he who values his soul will stay away from them.

⁶Start a child on the right path while he's young, and when he is old, he'll not forget what he's been taught. ⁷The rich rule over the poor, and a borrower is a slave to the lender. ⁸He who sows wickedness will reap what he sowed; his power to do evil will come to an end. ⁹A generous man will himself be blessed because he shares his food with the poor. ¹⁰Get rid of the critic and scorner, and quarrels and insults will stop. ¹¹He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have even the king as his friend.

¹²The Lord watches over His truth and frustrates the words of a traitor. ¹³A lazy man uses the excuse that there is a lion in the street, and if he goes outside, he might get killed. ¹⁴The mouth of an adulteress is like a deep pit; he who is not close to the Lord will fall into it and reap his own punishment. ¹⁵Children are inclined to do foolish things, but punishment, appropriately given, will teach a lot. ¹⁶He who oppresses the poor to get rich and he who gives gifts to the rich to get their attention will both come to want.

Thirty Wise Sayings

¹Listen and pay attention to the words of the wise; apply what you've learned with your whole heart. ²You will be glad to have memorized the words of the Lord when you are able to speak them readily. ³I have made known these sayings to you so you will put your trust in the Lord. ⁴I have written thirty more sayings for you which are filled with counsel and wisdom. ⁵They are true and

reliable and will help you give sound advice to those who want answers.

²²One: Don't exploit the poor because they're poor and don't take away the rights of the needy in court. ²³If you do, the Lord will plead their case in court and take a stand against you because of what you did to them.

²⁴Two: Don't make friends with a violent, hot-tempered man; don't associate with one who is easily angered. ²⁵You might become like him and find yourself caught in a trap. ²⁶Three: Don't make financial promises lightly or take responsibility for someone else's debts. ²⁷If you do and you're unable to pay, the law will take your bed right out from under you.

²⁸Four: Don't move boundary stones put there by your forefathers. ²⁹Five: Show me a man who does his work faithfully and well; he is worthy to be in the presence of kings; he is not just an ordinary man.

23 Six: When you sit down to eat with a king or a ruler, consider what is set before you ²and don't let your appetite run away with you, but control yourself as if someone were holding a knife at your throat. ³Don't be greedy for the delicacies he serves, for you may make an agreement you later regret.

⁴Seven: Don't wear yourself out trying to get rich. Be wise enough to pace yourself through life. ⁵Don't look longingly at wealth; riches often sprout wings and soar away like an eagle. ⁶Eight: Don't accept an invitation to a selfish man's house and don't crave the fine dinner you think you've missed. ⁷A selfish man is always thinking about money; he says to eat what you want, then talks about how much the meal costs. ⁸By the time you finish, you'll feel like vomiting what you ate and will wish you hadn't wasted your compliments on him.

⁹Nine: Don't try to make sense to a fool because he will only ridicule your wisdom. ¹⁰Ten: Don't move a property

line or confiscate land owned by widows and orphans. ¹¹The Lord is their defender and He will argue their case against you. ¹²Eleven: Apply yourself to gaining knowledge and pay attention to what your teachers tell you.

¹³Twelve: Don't withhold discipline from a child; even if you use a paddle, he will not die. ¹⁴By disciplining him, you'll save him from foolishness and perhaps even save his soul from death. ¹⁵Thirteen: When I see you acting wisely, my son, it makes me happy beyond words; I can't describe it. ¹⁶My heart rejoices when you speak up for what is right. ¹⁷Fourteen: Don't be envious of dishonest people who have more than you; let the Lord be the center of your life. ¹⁸If you do, He will reward you, and your hope will not be cut off.

¹⁹Fifteen: Listen, my son, and be wise. Give serious thought to where your life is headed. ²⁰Don't join those who love to drink and gorge themselves on meat. ²¹Drunkards and gluttons end up being poor; if all you do is go to parties and come home and sleep, you'll end up in rags.

²²Sixteen: Keep listening to your father who gave you life and don't look down on your mother when she is old. ²³Be willing to pay any price for truth and never sell it; do the same for wisdom, self-discipline and understanding. ²⁴The father of a righteous man has great joy and takes pride in a wise son. ²⁵May your father be glad that you're his son and your mother rejoice that she gave you birth.

²⁶Seventeen: Listen to me, my son, give me your affections and watch how I live. ²⁷Don't become ensnared by a prostitute; that's as bad as falling into a deep pit. Being seduced by an unfaithful woman is like falling into a narrow well. ²⁸Such women are like bandits who rob you of everything you have and then go after someone else.

²⁹Eighteen: Who has trouble? Who has sorrow? Who is always fighting with someone? Who is always blaming oth-

ers? Who gets all bruised and battered? Who has bloodshot eyes? ³⁰Those who linger over wine and go looking for mixed drinks. ³¹Don't let wine tempt you, even though it looks rich and red and sparkles in your glass. It may go down smoothly, ³²but later it bites like a snake and shoots poison into your veins. ³³Your eyes will begin to see strange sights, your judgment will be warped, and you will imagine all sorts of things. ³⁴You'll feel seasick, as if you were holding on to a boat's mast in the midst of a storm. ³⁵You'll say to yourself, "The way I feel, someone must have hit me. But I'm not hurt. I don't remember a thing. Why can't I think straight? I need another drink!"

24 Nineteen: Don't envy the wicked and don't try to make friends with them. ²All they ever talk about is wickedness and every time they open their mouths, they talk about making trouble. ³Twenty: It takes understanding to build a house and wisdom to establish a home. ⁴It takes knowledge to fill a house with valuable and beautiful things.

⁵Twenty-one: A wise man has great power; knowledge gives a man great strength. ⁶When you go to war you need wise guidance; there is safety in getting advice from many counselors. ⁷Twenty-two: The fool can't understand wisdom—it's too deep for him; he has nothing to say when important matters are discussed.

⁸Twenty-three: He who is always scheming will earn a reputation of being untrustworthy. ⁹Planning evil is sin; people detest the scheming of scoffers. ¹⁰Twenty-four: If you give up in times of difficulty, it shows how little strength you really have. ¹¹Twenty-five: Rescue those who are unjustly condemned and don't permit them to be led away. ¹²If you tell yourself, "That's none of my business," when you're able to help, God will hold you responsible for what you could have done. He knows all about you

and will reward you according to what you do and don't do.

¹³Twenty-six: Eat some honey, my son; it is good. Eat it from the honeycomb when it tastes the sweetest. ¹⁴Wisdom is like honey, it's good for the soul. If you find it, you have hope for the future which no one can take from you. ¹⁵Twenty-seven: Don't be like an outlaw waiting to rob a good man of his possessions. ¹⁶No matter how often an honest man suffers calamity, he finds courage to rise again; but repeated disasters overcome the wicked. ¹⁷Twenty-eight: Don't gloat when your enemy falls into trouble and don't celebrate when he's defeated, ¹⁸or God will be displeased and will no longer fight for you against your enemies.

¹⁹Twenty-nine: Don't let evil people worry you. Don't envy them or the things they have, ²⁰for a wicked person has no hope. He will die like a flame blown out. ²¹Thirty: Reverence the Lord, my son, and give honor to the king. Don't join with those who are rebellious. ²²They can be destroyed in a moment if God or the king decides to do so.

More Wise Sayings

²³Here are some additional sayings of wise men: It is not good for a judge to be partial and take sides. ²⁴If he pronounces a guilty person innocent, people will curse him and officials will denounce him. ²⁵But a judge who is fair, who will not hesitate to convict the guilty, will prosper and be blessed by God. ²⁶An honest answer is a true sign of friendship and as pleasing as a kiss on the lips. ²⁷Work in the fields first; get them ready for planting, and then go and work on your house.

²⁸Don't testify against your neighbor unless you must do so in court. Never say things about your neighbor that are not true. ²⁹Don't say to yourself, "I'll get even with my neighbor and do to him what he has done to me."

³⁰One time I walked past the fields of a

lazy man and the vineyards of a man who lacked judgment. ³¹The fields were full of weeds and thorns, and the stone wall protecting the vineyard was in ruins. ³²When I saw it, I thought about it and learned a lesson from what I saw. ³³A little more sleep, a few more naps, a little more folding of the hands in rest, ³⁴and poverty will creep up on you before you know it. Your wealth will be gone as if you had been robbed.

More Proverbs From Solomon

25 Following are more of Solomon's proverbs, copied by scribes at King Hezekiah's court.

²We are in awe of God because we cannot fathom His wisdom; we honor the king who searches for understanding. ³It is as hard to know what a king is thinking as it is to measure the heights of heaven or the depths of the sea. ⁴Remove impurities from silver, and the craftsman can make a thing of beauty. ⁵Remove the wicked from the king's court, and his government will be known for its honesty and justice. ⁶When you stand before a king or any great person, don't try to impress him with your own importance. ⁷It's better to be honored by an invitation to sit next to him than to be humiliated by a request to leave.

⁸Don't be in a hurry to go to court or too quick to testify about something you have seen. What will you do if there are witnesses who prove you wrong? ⁹If you and your neighbor have a difference, don't tell it to everyone you meet. ¹⁰A disagreement made public will give you a bad reputation.

¹¹Good counsel and simple faith well expressed are like golden apples in a silver bowl. ¹²Caution given by a person of experience is like a gift of fine gold to one willing to listen. ¹³To those who send him, a trustworthy messenger is like a refreshing drink on a hot summer day. ¹⁴People who promise things they never give are like clouds and wind that bring no rain.

¹⁵With patience you can even cause

rulers to change their minds. A gentle tongue can break the strongest bones. ¹⁶If you discover fresh honey, be temperate; too much of it will make you sick. ¹⁷Don't visit your neighbor's house too often; he'll get tired of you and begin to dislike you. ¹⁸A man who testifies falsely against his neighbor hurts him as if he had used a club, a sword or an arrow. ¹⁹Relying on someone untrustworthy in times of trouble is like trying to chew with a loose tooth or walk on a broken foot. ²⁰Attempting to cheer someone who has a pain-filled heart by singing happy songs is like taking a poor man's clothes on a cold winter day or pouring vinegar on an open wound.

²¹If your enemy is hungry, give him food; if he is thirsty, give him water. ²²When you do this, he will feel ashamed of hating you and the Lord will reward your compassion. ²³Gossip generates anger the same way a north wind brings rain. ²⁴It's better to live on the roof than to share the house with a quarreling wife. ²⁵Hearing good news from a distant land is as welcome as a drink of cool water to the thirsty. ²⁶A righteous man who gives in to evil is as depressing as a muddied spring or a stagnant well. ²⁷Just as eating too much honey is bad for you, so is seeking too much recognition. ²⁸A man without self-control is like a city without walls for protection.

26 Praising a fool is as out of place as snow in summer or spring rains during harvest. ²Undeserved curses will not harm you; they are like fluttering sparrows or darting swallows that do not land. ³Sometimes a horse needs a whip, a donkey a bit, and a fool sharp correction. ⁴Don't lower yourself to the level of a fool, or you'll look as foolish as he does. ⁵If a fool asks a silly question, don't take it seriously, or he will think that he's smart. Consider the occasion and who you're talking to, and answer accordingly. ⁶You might as well cut off both

your feet as to ask a fool to deliver an important message. ⁷A fool can use a proverb to help himself about as well as a crippled man can use his legs. ⁸Praising someone who is stupid makes as much sense as tying a stone in a slingshot. ⁹A fool trying to make use of a wise saying is like a drunkard trying to get a splinter out of his hand. ¹⁰A man who hires any fool who comes along is like an archer who shoots arrows at random, expecting to hit the target. ¹¹Like a dog going back to lick its vomit, so a fool repeats the same stupid thing. ¹²There is more hope for a fool than for someone who thinks he knows it all.

¹³A lazy man acts as if lions are outside roaming the streets. ¹⁴A lazy man turns over in his bed as a door swings on its hinges. ¹⁵Some people are too lazy to put food in their mouths. ¹⁶A lazy man thinks more of his own opinion than of seven wise men who give reasonable answers. ¹⁷Getting involved in a quarrel that's none of your business is like grabbing the ears of a vicious dog. ¹⁸Like a madman who wildly shoots deadly arrows, ¹⁹so is a man who deceives his neighbor and then says, "I was only joking."

²⁰Without wood, a fire goes out, and without gossip, quarreling ceases. ²¹As charcoal keeps the embers glowing and wood keeps the fire burning, so troublemakers keep an argument kindled. ²²Gossip is like a tasty dessert, devoured with relish. ²³Kind words from an evil heart are like a coat of shiny paint on cheap pottery. ²⁴A malicious man makes a pretense of friendship, but in his heart he remains unchanged. ²⁵Do not believe a malicious man whose speech is charming, because his mind is full of evil thoughts. ²⁶A malicious man might conceal his intentions with lies, but his wickedness will be seen by everyone. ²⁷A man who digs a pit for others will end up falling into it himself. A man who tries to roll a stone on someone will have the stone roll back on him. ²⁸A lying tongue has no regard for those

it hurts and a flattering mouth brings ruin to others.

27 Don't boast about what you're going to do tomorrow; you never know what might happen before tomorrow comes. ²Let other people praise you, even strangers, but don't praise yourself. ³Carrying a heavy stone or a load of sand is easier than carrying the troubles caused by a fool. ⁴Anger and hostility are cruel, but compared to jealousy, they are nothing. ⁵The wise admonition of a friend is a demonstration of love. ⁶A friend means well even when he rebukes you, but when an enemy puts an arm around you, watch out! ⁷When a man is full, even honey doesn't taste good, but when he's hungry, even something bitter tastes sweet.

⁸A man away from home is like a bird away from its nest. ⁹Perfume and pleasant-smelling oils bring joy to your heart, and good counsel from a friend is sweet. ¹⁰Don't forget your friends or your family's friends. Don't always go to your brother's house when trouble comes. A helpful neighbor nearby is better than a brother far away. ¹¹Be wise, my son, and you will bring joy to my heart. It will help me face the criticisms and insults that come in life. ¹²Sensible people will see trouble coming and avoid it, but a person who doesn't think will walk right into trouble and then regret it. ¹³Anyone foolish enough to cosign for a stranger will lose his shirt, and if he does it for a strange woman, he'll lose everything he has.

¹⁴To awaken your neighbor early in the morning with a loud blessing is as bad as waking him with a curse. ¹⁵A nagging woman is like a constant dripping on a rainy day; ¹⁶trying to stop her is like restraining the wind or gripping something with oil on your hands. ¹⁷As steel sharpens steel, so people who learn from each other sharpen their thoughts.

¹⁸If you take care of your fig tree, you'll have fruit to eat, and a servant who looks

out for his master will be honored. ¹⁹As a man's face is reflected in water, so a man's character is reflected in his actions. ²⁰Death and destruction never seem satisfied; neither are the desires of a man's heart. ²¹As silver and gold are tested and refined, so a man is proven by how he handles praise. ²²Even if you could grind up a fool like wheat in a bowl, you couldn't remove his foolishness from him.

²³Keep an eye on the condition of your flocks and give careful attention to your herds. ²⁴They could quickly perish and your riches would be gone. Wealth doesn't last forever and even a crown is not secure for future generations. ²⁵When hay is cut and new growth appears and grass on the mountains is gathered in, ²⁶then your lambs will provide you with food to eat and wool to make clothes, and you can sell some of your goats to buy land. ²⁷You will have plenty of goats' milk to feed your family and nourish your servants.

28 The wicked are scared and run when no one is chasing them, but the righteous are as fearless as lions. ²Many struggle for power when a nation rebels, but a leader with understanding will bring about order. ³A ruler who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that destroys crops. ⁴Those who forsake the law are ready to praise the wicked, but those who keep the law take a stand against them. ⁵Wicked people don't understand the meaning of justice, but those who love the Lord understand it fully. ⁶It is better to be poor and blameless than rich and dishonest. ⁷He who keeps the law is a wise son, but a member of a lawless gang is a disgrace to his father.

⁸He who gets rich by charging exorbitant interest on the money he loans will be punished, and his wealth will be given to those from whom it was taken. ⁹If anyone deliberately turns away from hearing the law, even his prayers will not be heard. ¹⁰He who leads others into sin will

be caught in his own trap, but those who are honest will be rewarded for what they do. ¹¹A rich man may be wise in his own eyes, but a poor man with insight can see right through him.

¹²When the righteous triumph, there is great elation, but when the wicked rise to power, good people go into hiding. ¹³He who conceals his sins will never prosper, but he who confesses and makes things right will receive mercy. ¹⁴The man who respects the Lord will be happy, but he who hardens his heart will have no end of trouble. ¹⁵A wicked king rules over poor people like a roaring lion or a charging bear treat their helpless prey. ¹⁶A king who lacks good sense is a tyrant, but a ruler who hates dishonesty will continue for a long time. ¹⁷A man guilty of murder will be a fugitive for the rest of his life; don't feel sorry for him and take him into your house. ¹⁸Whoever is honest will be safe, but he who is dishonest will suddenly become entangled.

¹⁹The farmer who works his land will have plenty to eat, but he who ignores his land and chases useless dreams will suffer poverty. ²⁰Honest people will live a full and happy life, but those in a hurry to get rich will be punished. ²¹For judges to show partiality is not right, yet some will do just that when offered a bribe. ²²Selfish people who are in a hurry to get rich don't realize that poverty might be around the corner.

²³He who corrects another will gain more favor in the end than he who flatters. ²⁴He who robs his father and mother and says it's not wrong is no better than a common thief. ²⁵A greedy man causes no end of trouble, but he who trusts the Lord will prosper. ²⁶He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who trusts in the Lord is wise. ²⁷He who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who closes his eyes to others' needs will be cursed by those who know him. ²⁸When wicked men rule, good people go into hiding, but when the wicked fall, the righteous increase and do well.

29 The man who stubbornly resists correction will one day find himself beyond help. ²When the righteous rule, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan. ³A son who loves wisdom brings joy to his father, but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth. ⁴A good king brings stability to a country, but a greedy ruler who accepts bribes will lead his country to ruin. ⁵He who flatters people is building a trap for himself. ⁶A wicked man will be caught in his own sin, but a good man can freely sing and be glad. ⁷The righteous seek justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.

⁸Those who laugh at the law throw the city into turmoil; those who are wise bring about calmness. ⁹If a wise man takes a fool to court, the fool will scoff at him, and there will never be peace. ¹⁰Bloodthirsty men hate those who are honest and will try to kill the innocent who stand in their way. ¹¹A fool loses his temper and vents his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control. ¹²If a ruler listens to lies or stoops to lying himself, soon all his officials will do the same.

¹³The poor man and his oppressor have this in common: The Lord gives the light of life to both. ¹⁴If a king judges his people with fairness, he will rule for a long time. ¹⁵Correction and discipline impart wisdom to a child, but a child left to himself will bring shame to his mother. ¹⁶When evil men are in power, crime increases, but the righteous will see their downfall.

¹⁷Discipline your son and life will be peaceful; he will be a delight to have around. ¹⁸Where there is no word from God, people cast off restraint; peace and contentment come to those who listen and keep God's commandments. ¹⁹A servant cannot always be disciplined by words alone; though he understands, he may not respond. ²⁰Do you see a man who is hasty with words? There is more hope for a fool than for him. ²¹If you give a servant everything he wants from his youth, he'll act as if everything you own

is his. ²²A man with a quick temper causes nothing but trouble, and an angry man commits many sins. ²³A man's pride will eventually bring him low, but a humble man will be honored.

²⁴A thief's accomplice is his own worst enemy; if he's taken to court, he's afraid to say what happened, but if he doesn't speak up, he'll be charged with the crime. ²⁵Fearing man can be a snare, but trusting the Lord is always safe. ²⁶Many people want the good will of their ruler, but only from the Lord will a man receive justice. ²⁷Good people hate the dishonesty of the wicked and the wicked don't like those who are honest.

The Words of Agur

30 These are the words of Agur, son of Jakeh, spoken to Ithiel and Ucal:

²Sometimes I think I'm more like a dumb animal than a man because I don't have the sense that a man should have. ³I have not learned to be wise and I don't know God the way I should. ⁴Who has been in heaven and come down to tell us about God? Who is so strong that he can hold the wind in his hands? Who set the boundaries of the oceans and wrapped them around the earth like a garment? Who decided what size the earth should be and made it so? Who did all this? What is His name and the name of His Son? Surely you know!

⁵Every word of God is sure. He is a shield to all who come to Him for protection. ⁶Do not add to what He has said or take away from it as if you know more than He does. He will reprove you and show that you're a liar.

⁷Oh, Lord, I ask two things of you before I die, and please do not deny them. ⁸Keep me from lying and being dishonest. And don't make me either rich or poor, but do provide my daily bread. ⁹If I have too much, I won't realize my need of you. If I have too little, I might become desperate and steal, disgracing the name of my God.

¹⁰Never criticize a servant in front of

his master. His master will curse you and make you pay for what you have said.

¹¹There are those who curse their own fathers and hate their own mothers. ¹²There are those who are always pure in their own eyes without realizing how sinful they really are. ¹³Those who are righteous in their own eyes look down on others. ¹⁴Some people's teeth are like swords, and they take advantage of everyone they can, especially the poor and needy.

¹⁵Greed is like a leech; it has two daughters who keep saying, "Give me! Give me!" There are three things that are never satisfied and four things that never say, "Stop! It's enough." ¹⁶These are: The grave, the barren womb, the thirsty desert and a fire burning out of control.

¹⁷He who makes fun of his father and refuses to obey his mother will meet a violent death.

¹⁸There are three things that amaze me and four things at which I marvel. ¹⁹These are: The way an eagle soars, the way a snake glides across smooth rock, the way a huge ship sails on the sea, and the way a man falls in love with a woman.

²⁰A wife who is an adulteress comes home and sits down to eat as if nothing has happened.

²¹There are three things that people can't stand and four things they won't tolerate. ²²These are: A servant who makes himself king, a fool glutted with food, ²³a hateful woman who gets married and a servant girl who tries to take the place of her mistress.

²⁴Four things on earth are small, yet they are extremely wise. ²⁵These are: Ants, though they are so small, they are wise enough to store up their winter's food during the summer; ²⁶rock rabbits, though they are frail, they know enough to make their homes among the boulders; ²⁷swarms of locusts, though they have no king, they advance in formation; ²⁸and lizards, though they are easily caught, yet you will find them living in palaces.

²⁹There are three things that are im-

pressive when they walk and four things that have a stately bearing. ³⁰These are: A lion, which is mighty among beasts and afraid of nothing, ³¹a strutting rooster in front of hens, a he-goat facing a challenger and a king surrounded by his troops.

³²If you've been foolish enough to brag about yourself, put your hand over your mouth and be quiet. If you've been foolish enough to plan evil, stop and think before you act. ³³Just as surely as churning milk produces butter and hitting someone in the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger will bring on trouble.

A Mother's Advice to a King

31 Following are words of wisdom which King Lemuel's mother taught him:

²"Oh, my son, the son of my womb, you are the answer to my prayers. Listen to what I have to say! ³Don't give all your strength to women or spend all your energy on sex. That has ruined many a king.

⁴Listen to me, Lemuel. Kings should not drink or develop a craving for alcohol. ⁵When they drink, they forget the law and deprive people of their rights.

⁶Alcohol is to be used only as medicine for those who are dying or in great pain.

⁷It should be given only to those who are suffering intensely to help them cope with their misery and pain.

⁸Speak up for those who can't speak for themselves and for the rights of those who are destitute. ⁹Speak up for your people and judge them fairly. Protect the rights of the poor and needy."

A Virtuous Wife

¹⁰Who can find a wife of noble character? She is worth more than the costliest jewels. ¹¹Her husband has confidence in her abilities. He will never be poor. ¹²All her life she will do him good and will never do anything to harm him. ¹³She supplies her house with wool and linen and does her work eagerly. ¹⁴She supplies her home with food brought by ships from all over the world. ¹⁵She rises

while it is still dark to lay out the day's food for the family and plan the day's work for her servant girls.

¹⁶She looks at some land and buys it; with her earnings she plants a vineyard. ¹⁷She works with energy and puts all her strength into her tasks. ¹⁸She knows the value of what she sells and often works late into the night.

¹⁹She spins her own thread and weaves cloth with her own hands. ²⁰She gives generously to the poor and helps those who are in need. ²¹She doesn't worry about her family in winter. They have double garments for warmth. ²²She makes her own curtains and bedspreads; her clothes are tasteful and beautiful. ²³Her husband is respected

because of her and is chosen to sit with the city officials. ²⁴She markets beautiful clothes and belts, and sells them to the merchants.

²⁵She's respected in her own right and is not afraid of the future. ²⁶She speaks words of gentle wisdom and teaches kindness to others. ²⁷She is never lazy and watches over the affairs of her family. ²⁸Her children respect her and say so, and her husband praises her, saying, ²⁹"Many women do wonderful things, but you surpass them all."

³⁰Charm is deceptive and beauty disappears, but a woman who honors the Lord will be praised. ³¹Reward her for what she has done. Let her works be praised by everyone in the city.

ECCLESIASTES

Nothing Ever Changes

1 These are the words of Solomon the teacher, son of David and king of Israel in Jerusalem.

²When you look at this earthly life only, futility is written on everything a man does. The efforts of generation after generation will pass away. In fact, life itself is futile, for it doesn't last. ³A man works hard all his life, laboring every day in the hot sun, but when his life work is over, what has he accomplished that will last? ⁴One generation comes and another goes, and the earth simply keeps spinning in space as if nothing has happened.

⁵Look at nature. The sun rises and the sun sets; as soon as it reaches its height in the sky, it seems to hurry to return to where it came from. ⁶The wind blows toward the south and again toward the north. It swirls in a circle one way; then it turns and swirls the other way. ⁷The rivers of the earth find their way to the sea and keep flowing into it, yet the oceans never fill up. In turn, the oceans supply the rivers with water and the cycle begins all over again. ⁸Everything is in motion but nothing is ever finished. The eye is never satisfied by looking and the ear is never filled with hearing.

⁹The things that have happened will happen again and what has been done before will be done again. There's nothing new under the sun. There is no permanent change about the way things go. ¹⁰Someone says, "Look at that! That's never happened before!" But it has and, in fact, long before our time. ¹¹Somehow people don't remember or learn from what happened before, and things that will happen in the future won't be remembered or serve as a lesson to those who follow. Each generation has to learn life's lessons all over again.

Knowledge Does Not Bring Happiness

¹²I'm talking to you as your teacher

and king. I want to tell you about life and the things I have done right here in Jerusalem. ¹³One day I decided to get as much out of life as possible. So I studied all the things that are done in this world to find out what life is all about. When I finished, it seemed to me that God has given man a lot of work to do, none of which will really last. ¹⁴I looked into almost everything that man does on earth and it seems that man is just chasing the wind. A man's life begins and ends, and in spite of all his efforts, he doesn't really make a change in the natural order of things. ¹⁵Man can't straighten out things that are all twisted up, and while he knows that something is missing, he can't account for it.

¹⁶One day I said to myself, "Look, I've become a great man in Jerusalem. I'm wiser than anyone who has ruled before me, and I have much insight and knowledge." ¹⁷So I decided to find out what the real difference was between knowledge and ignorance, wisdom and foolishness, righteousness and sin. ¹⁸I've found out that the more knowledge you have, the more concerns you have about things, and the more insight you have, the more sensitive to pain you are.

Pleasure Does Not Bring Happiness

2 So I decided to enjoy myself. I wanted to be happy and not worry—to be free from responsibilities. But I soon found that if all you do is live to enjoy yourself, life has no meaning. ²¹I also discovered that incessant laughter and pursuit of a good time turns you into a fool. When the party is over, the fun is gone. ³¹I tried it. I decided to cheer myself with wine and still do my work, letting my wisdom guide me. I wanted to see if this was the best way for people to enjoy themselves while they lived.

⁴¹I also decided to see if doing great things would bring happiness. I built palaces and developed acre upon acre of

vineyards. ⁵I built orchards and filled them with every variety of fruit trees. I developed parks and filled them with all kinds of ornamental trees. ⁶Then I constructed huge dams with reservoirs to water those trees. ⁷I bought talented slaves, both men and women. There were also numerous slaves born in my household. I owned more cattle than anyone who had ever lived in Jerusalem. ⁸I collected silver and gold as taxes from the colonies I ruled and put it all into the royal treasury. I employed men and women singers. My harem was bigger than that of any other king. I had all the women a man could want.

⁹I was greater than anyone in Jerusalem and felt good about it. In all of this I still had wisdom. It seemed to work. ¹⁰I denied myself no pleasure. Whatever I wanted, I got. I felt good about everything I had accomplished and felt that pleasure was the legitimate reward for my hard work. ¹¹Then one day I looked at all my achievements and realized that none of it would last. In that sense, all my work was futile. It was as useless as chasing the wind. Everything I had done had in one way or another been tried by other kings. In all my attempts I had discovered nothing new.

Wisdom Is Better Than Foolishness

¹²So I decided to give my energies to philosophy and learning, examining the questions of life. Also, I thought about what the next king could do that I had not already done. ¹³It was obvious that wisdom is better than foolishness, just as light is better than darkness. ¹⁴A wise man looks ahead and knows where he's going, while a fool can't see beyond the nose on his face. Yet, both their lives end the same way. ¹⁵Then I thought to myself, "If the same destiny awaits a fool that awaits me, no matter how wise I am or how much I've accomplished, what's the use?" ¹⁶After the wise and the foolish die, who keeps drawing attention to what they've done? In that sense both are the

same and will not be long remembered. There's really no difference between the wise and the foolish. In the end they both will die. ¹⁷So I hated life because of its futility. A man works diligently and struggles with problems throughout his life to accomplish his goals, but when it's over, what has he done that really lasts and is never forgotten? It's like chasing the wind.

¹⁸That's why I hated everything I had worked for here on earth, not to mention all the trouble and headaches that searching for happiness and pleasure had given me. I told myself, "Before I know it, I'll have to die and leave everything to my successor. ¹⁹Who knows whether the next ruler will be wise or foolish and whether he'll build up or tear down everything I've done. I won't be around to see it or to know whether I was wise or foolish. In that sense, my work has been useless and without meaning."

²⁰Then I began to feel depressed. The more I thought about how hard I had worked and that nothing would last, the more discouraged I became. ²¹A man may work wisely and skillfully, he may look ahead and plan carefully, but in the end he has to leave everything to those who never worked for it. So what's the use? ²²What does a person really get out of life? What does he receive for all his work, anxiety and stress? ²³A person who works hard all his life goes through a lot of pain and grief to accomplish what he wants, but for what? There are nights when he can't sleep because so much is on his mind, but what good does it really do?

²⁴I decided that the most rewarding things in this life are satisfaction in your work and enjoyment of your food. These simple pleasures are gifts from God. ²⁵We wouldn't even live to enjoy these without Him. ²⁶God is the source of all knowledge as well as all joy. He gives wisdom and happiness to those who please Him and takes it away from those who keep on sinning. Evil men work hard to store up riches which one day will be given to those who please God. All that man does

to accomplish great things or to gain riches is useless. I concluded that life without God has no more purpose than chasing the wind.

Everything Has Its Time

3 There are other things I've learned about life. There are times to do specific things and different seasons in which to do them.

²There is a certain day when you're born and then comes a certain day when you die. There is a time to plant and a time to harvest what was planted.

³There are times when we must let animals die, and there are times to try to bring about healing. There are times to tear things down and times to build.

⁴There are times in life when we need to cry and other times when we need to laugh. There are times of sorrow and times of joy.

⁵There are times to get rid of stones and times to use them. There are times to hug and times not to hug.

⁶There are times to look for things and times to stop looking for them. There are times to keep things and times to throw them away.

⁷There are times to tear things apart and times to sew together. There are times to speak and times to keep silent.

⁸There is a time to love and a time to hate. There are times to go to war and times to make peace.

God Knows What Is Best

⁹So what do we get from all our efforts and labor? ¹⁰In this life hard work is given to us by God. ¹¹But this was not His original plan. In the beginning He made everything beautiful and created man in His own image. He put in man's heart a sense of destiny, but man will never fully understand what God does, for He sees things from beginning to end. ¹²There is nothing better in life than for man to do good, which will bring him happiness as long as he lives. ¹³God wants man to enjoy his life and be happy, to find satisfaction in his work. ¹⁴Everything that God does lasts. There is nothing man can do to add to it

or take away from it. Whatever God does, He does to help us love and reverence Him even more. ¹⁵Whatever happens in a man's lifetime has happened before. And God takes into account those things that have occurred in the past.

Evil Has Swept Aside Justice

¹⁶Now there is another thing I've learned about life: Wickedness has taken the place of fairness, and evil has swept aside justice. ¹⁷When I saw this, I said to myself, "God will have to step in to straighten things out. When He does, He will judge the actions and motives of the righteous and the wicked and will take into account the time and place of their actions." ¹⁸So I concluded that God needs to discipline man to let him see that he has no more hope within himself than does an animal. ¹⁹Man without God is no better off than an animal. The same destiny awaits both. As one dies and turns to dust, so does the other. Man's life without God is meaningless. ²⁰All life ends the same. We all came from dust and will return to dust. ²¹Who can prove that the spirit of man lives on after death while the spirit of an animal disappears? ²²I concluded that there is nothing better than for man to enjoy his work. Because he will die and who's going to bring him back from the grave to see what has happened since then?

4 Next, I took a careful look at all the injustice and oppression that goes on in this world. Those who are oppressed cry out for help but no one pays attention. They cannot change their situation because power is on the side of their oppressors. ²When I saw this, I realized that those who have died are better off than those who are living. ³Looking at it another way, I concluded that those who haven't been born yet are even better off than those who have died or those who are still alive, because they've never seen the injustice and op-

pression that goes on in this world.

Success Is Never Satisfied

⁴Another thing I noticed is that man's drive to succeed usually comes from wanting to have what his neighbors have. This, too, is useless. It's like chasing the wind. ⁵A fool sits around with folded hands, more willing to starve than to work and get ahead in life. ⁶It is better to have a little and be content than to have much and never be satisfied. ⁷I've noticed something else in life that's hard to understand. ⁸I saw an old man who lived alone. He had no brothers or sisters and no sons or daughters. He was always working, yet never seemed content with what he had. He never asked himself, "Why am I working so hard? Why don't I slow down and enjoy life?" This, too, is sad and senseless.

Two People Are Better Than One

⁹Two people are always better off than one because they can work together and enjoy each other's company. ¹⁰If one of them falls, the other can help him up. But I pity the man who walks alone, because when he falls, he has no one to help him. ¹¹When two people sleep together, they can keep each other warm, which is better than if each one sleeps alone and is cold. ¹²Two can resist an attack better than one trying to do it alone. A rope made from three strands is much stronger than a rope made from one.

Popularity Doesn't Last

¹³A poor young man who is wise is better off than an old king who is foolish. ¹⁴A teachable young man will overcome his obstacles and could become king, even if he was born in poverty or had once spent time in prison. ¹⁵As I carefully considered the matter, I realized that though a young man like that could become king, someone could later come along and replace him. ¹⁶At first many might follow him, but he could be rejected by a

new generation wanting a different leader. So fame and power are like chasing the wind.

Keep the Vows You Make to God

5 Be humble and teachable when you go to the house of God. It is better to come to listen than to offer the sacrifice of fools. They don't recognize when they're doing wrong. ²Think before you speak and don't make rash promises to God that you can't keep. God is in heaven and owns the whole universe. Recognize your place, be humble and let your words be few.

³Overwork and worry cause bad dreams. Many words come from a fool. The more you talk, the more likely you'll end up saying something you'll wish you hadn't said.

⁴When you promise God that you'll do something, don't put it off or you might forget it. He's not pleased with people who make foolish commitments. Do what you promise Him you will do. ⁵It's better not to make a promise than to make a promise and not keep it. ⁶Don't let your emotions lead you into making promises hard to keep. Don't tell the priest afterward that you've made a mistake. Don't play games with God or displease Him with your foolishness. He can't bless such actions and you might even lose what you have worked for.

⁷Empty promises are like a dream; they accomplish nothing. Show your respect for God by being careful what you promise Him.

Money Doesn't Bring Happiness

⁸If you see an official oppressing the poor, perverting justice or denying people their rights, don't be surprised. Remember that he has someone above him, and he above him, and over them all is the king.

⁹People forget that everyone is accountable to God for what he does. He's the One who gives us the food we need. Even the king depends on God for food.

The fields produce their crops and the king and the people divide the profits.

¹⁰It's the same with money. Anyone in love with it never has enough, no matter how much he has, and he's never satisfied no matter how much he makes. All the effort that goes into making money just to keep on getting more is senseless.

¹¹As a person's money increases, so do the friends that consume it. The only benefit he receives is to know that he has it.

¹²A working man may have little or nothing and barely enough food to feed his family, but at night he sleeps well. A rich man has more than he needs but worries so much about his wealth that it robs him of sleep.

¹³There's another terrible thing I have noticed about life. People work hard to accumulate money and do so to their own physical and spiritual loss.

¹⁴When there is a bad turn of events and all the money is gone, the children are the ones who suffer. ¹⁵When a baby is born, he comes into this world with nothing. When he dies, he leaves exactly as he came in. Regardless of all his hard work, there is nothing he can take with him. ¹⁶There's another terrible thing I've noticed. A man comes into this world with nothing and slaves away all his life to get ahead, and what does he get from all his work? It's like chasing the wind. ¹⁷Much of what he gets out of life is stress and frustration, and often sickness, worry and resentment. After he dies, what good will his money do him?

¹⁸It's good if a man enjoys his work each day and the fruits of his labor during the few years that God gives him. ¹⁹When God gives a man wealth, possessions and health, there's nothing wrong with it. They are gifts from God. ²⁰A man should not brood over the past or worry about how long he's going to live, but take each day as a gift from God and be thankful.

6 There is still another terrible thing I've noticed in life that weighs people down. ²God allows a man to become wealthy, to own property and to be honored so that he has everything his heart desires, but God does not let him live beyond his years. So his descendants or even strangers end up enjoying his money. This is the kind of thing that makes life so unfair and useless. ³Even if a man has a hundred children and lives many, many years, if he doesn't enjoy what he has, a stillborn child is better off than he. ⁴A baby who dies at birth is like one coming out of darkness and going into another. It's gone. ⁵The baby who never sees the sun or learns what life is all about and rests is better off. ⁶If a man lived two thousand years and failed to enjoy life, he's no better off than a baby born dead. They both ended up in the grave.

⁷Much of what a man does goes into keeping himself alive. He works continuously for his food. He never stops eating, so he has to keep on working. And that's the way it is. ⁸Does a wise man have an advantage over a fool? What advantage does a poor man have? At least he has come to grips with life and taught himself to be content with what he has. ⁹A man might as well learn to appreciate what he has, rather than always longing for something more. It's like chasing the wind. Nothing in this life really lasts.

¹⁰Things that happen to a man are already known. Man was made out of dust and there's nothing he can do about it. How can he contend with God who is so much more powerful than he is? ¹¹The more you argue about it, the more useless your argument becomes. No matter how much you talk about it, you can't solve the problem. Death is a part of life, and words won't change it. ¹²Who really knows what's good for man during the few years of life he has? His life is like a passing shadow that moves slowly across the landscape and then disappears. Man can't really plan for the future because he has no

way of knowing what will happen after he's gone.

Above All Else, Choose to Be Wise

7 A good reputation is better than fine perfume. The end of life with a good name is better than the day of birth. ²Everyone needs to think about the end of life because everyone will die. It's better to reflect on life's serious matters than only go to parties. Everyone needs to think about the end of life. ³Sorrow is better than laughter because sorrow teaches things that laughter can't. ⁴A person who laughs his way through life is a fool. A wise man thinks about the end of his life as well.

⁵It's better to have a wise man rebuke you than to have a fool tell you how great you are. ⁶When a fool laughs, it's like a crackling fire. It doesn't mean a thing. ⁷When a wise man cheats, he's acting like a fool. If he takes a bribe, he pays for it with his reputation. ⁸The end of something is better than its beginning because you know where you've been. Patience is better than pride because pride can't be trusted. ⁹Don't let your frustration turn into anger. Getting upset or holding a grudge is foolish.

¹⁰Don't keep wondering why the former days were better. Only fools live in the past. ¹¹Wisdom is like an inheritance; it's only useful to those who receive it. ¹²Wisdom is like a shelter in a storm; it gives greater security than money. Wisdom is better than knowledge because it protects those who have it.

¹³Stop and think about what God has permitted to happen. ¹⁴When things go right, be glad and thank God. When they go wrong, go to God for help. Only He knows what tomorrow will bring.

¹⁵In this life I've noticed two things that are hard to understand: A righteous man suffers and dies before his time, and a wicked man lives a long life of sin. ¹⁶Don't be smugly righteous and don't act like you know it all. ¹⁷Don't be a fool and live a life of sin. Don't overwork and

die before your time. ¹⁸Don't go to extremes on anything. Make God the center of your life and you'll be content.

¹⁹One wise man can do more for a city than ten government agencies. ²⁰There is no one alive who does everything right. There is no one alive who never makes a mistake.

²¹Don't try to listen to everything everyone says. You might hear your own servants saying bad things about you. ²²Remember that you've also said things about people in public or private that should not have been said.

²³I have tested everything I'm saying, and this is what I've decided: Above everything else in life I would choose to be wise, but I finally realized that wisdom is not something you can earn. ²⁴Whatever wisdom is, it's hard to define and hard to grasp. Where can you go to buy it and how do you find out where it is? ²⁵I decided to study and research to understand how things work and to learn as much as I could about everything. Maybe then I would be wise. The first thing I discovered was the stupidity of wickedness and the folly of playing with sin. ²⁶The next thing I discovered was that to be caught by the charms of a scheming woman is worse than death. She can bind a man like a chain. Her love is like a trap in which a man is caught and can't get out. ²⁷When I put together everything I had learned, I was hoping to find some meaning to life, but found none.

²⁸I also looked for other answers but found none. I found only one man in a thousand who was truly good, but a good woman was even harder to find. ²⁹The one thing I have learned is that God made man to walk uprightly and to live an honest life. But man has misused his freedom and thought of many ways to do evil.

8 Who then is wise? Who understands what everything means? Still, it is wisdom that makes a man happy and puts a smile on a sad face.

Be a Good Citizen

²Listen to your king because you promised before God that's what you would do. ³Don't act as if you're in a hurry to leave when you're in the presence of the king. Don't stand for an evil cause, for the king has the authority to do whatever he pleases. ⁴The king's word is supreme in the land. No one can challenge him. ⁵As long as you keep the king's laws and are a good citizen, you'll not be punished. A wise man knows how to do the right thing at the right time. ⁶There is a right time and a right way to do things, even though we can't always see the full purpose in it. ⁷No one knows what's going to happen tomorrow. No one can tell us. ⁸No one has the power to keep himself from dying. Life's battle has no winner. Death will not release her prisoners, neither will wickedness release those who practice it. ⁹The other thing I discovered when I studied life was that when some men have power, innocent people suffer because of it.

Man's Common Destiny

¹⁰I have seen wicked men being buried, and on the way back from the funeral people talk about them and their wickedness as if they were heroes. They become legends in the very city where they committed their crimes. This, too, makes no sense. ¹¹Whenever the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people feel safe doing wrong. ¹²Even though a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and gets away with it, things are still better for a good man who respects God and does what is right. ¹³Generally, life does not go well for the wicked. A criminal usually dies young and his life is gone as quickly as a shadow.

¹⁴Now there's something else that happens in life. Good things happen to bad people and bad things to good people. The righteous and the wicked don't always get what they deserve. This, too, doesn't make sense. ¹⁵A man should be happy and enjoy his family,

his friends and his food. These will cheer him in his work through all the days God has given him.

¹⁶When I studied to become wise, I discovered that a man can work at it day and night, hardly ever sleeping, and still not be wise. ¹⁷No matter how hard a man tries, he can never fully understand why things happen the way they do or why God permits certain things and not others. Even if a wise man says he understands, he cannot really comprehend it all.

9 So I concluded that no matter what a good man knows, his future rests in the hands of God. No one knows whether good times or bad times await him. ²The end of life is no different for the righteous or the wicked, the good or the bad, for those who are religious and those who are not, for those who sacrifice for the cause of God and those who do not. When it comes to dying, a good man is no better off than a sinner and a man who keeps his word has no advantage over one who doesn't. ³The great evil in the world is that the same destiny awaits everyone, the righteous and the wicked alike. Men's hearts are full of evil and devoid of reason, then afterward, they die. ⁴But there's one thing in life that doesn't change—that is hope. Even a live dog is better than a dead lion. ⁵Yes, the living know that someday they will die, but the dead know nothing. They are no longer rewarded here for what they have done and gradually they fade from memory and are forgotten. ⁶Their love, hatred, and jealousy are all gone and buried. Never again do they have a part in anything that's happening here on earth.

⁷So enjoy life with your family and friends. Eat with them and be happy. God designed it that way. ⁸Dress in clean clothes so that you look nice; use a little oil if necessary to groom your hair. ⁹Enjoy life with your wife whom you love and with your children, family and friends as long as you live. Life by itself is

a meaningless round of activities, and without some happiness it's not worth living. ¹⁰Whatever you do, do your best and enjoy it. Once you die, there's no activity, thought, knowledge, or wisdom in the grave where you'll eventually go.

¹¹There's something else I've noticed about life. The fast runners don't always win the race, and the brave don't always win the battle. Wise men don't always make the right decisions for their families; capable ones don't always rise to the top, and brilliant ones don't always make the most money. Time and chance are factors that affect them all. ¹²No one knows when he's going to be faced with evil times or even death. It will happen when he least expects it. It's like birds that are hopping along the ground looking for food but unexpectedly become entangled in a snare, or like schools of swimming fish that are suddenly trapped in a net.

Words of Wisdom

¹³There was one thing that happened which greatly impressed me about the power of wisdom. ¹⁴There was a little city with very few people in it, and a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and was ready to break down its walls. ¹⁵In that city lived a poor man who was wise. He saved the city by his wisdom, but after he died, they all forgot about him. ¹⁶When I saw this, I decided that wisdom is better than strength, but no one thinks of a poor man as being wise or having much sense, so no one pays attention to him.

¹⁷It's better to listen to the quiet words of a wise man than to a loud-mouthed leader of fools. ¹⁸Wisdom does more good than weapons of war, yet one sinner can cause a lot of damage and undo a lot of good.

10 Just as a few dead flies can make a whole bottle of perfume smell bad, so a little stupidity here and there

can spoil a reputation for wisdom and honor. ²Just as it's natural for a wise man to do the right thing, so it's natural for a fool to do the wrong thing. ³A fool lacks common sense and shows his stupidity even as he walks along the road. ⁴If your boss becomes angry with you over a mistake you've made, don't get upset and quit. Listen quietly to what he has to say, then go back and do things right, and your mistake will soon be forgotten.

⁵I've noticed that there is another injustice in life caused by leaders and rulers. ⁶They give stupid people positions of authority that they should never have, while those who have the ability to do the job are given less important ones. ⁷I have seen servants favored, riding on horses, while princes were stripped of their dignity and made to walk.

⁸Whoever digs a pit as a trap for someone else takes the risk of falling into it himself, and he who breaks down stone fences takes the risk of being bitten by a snake. ⁹Whoever works in a stone quarry takes a risk of being hurt by falling stones. Whoever works in the woods takes a risk of being hurt by a falling tree. ¹⁰If the ax is dull and you don't sharpen it, you'll need more strength to do the same amount of work. So it's wise to think things through before you do them. ¹¹What good does it do a man to know how to charm a snake if the snake has already bitten him?

¹²A wise man speaks graciously and is honored, but a fool destroys himself by his own words. ¹³A fool starts out with silly talk and ends up saying such stupid things, it is pure madness. ¹⁴A fool talks on and on and doesn't know when to stop. No one knows the future, much less a fool. ¹⁵A fool talks so much that he gets lost and then wears himself out trying to find his way to town.

¹⁶A country is in trouble when its king is very young and its leaders feast into the wee hours of the morning. ¹⁷Blessed is that country whose king is mature and whose officials eat for strength, not just

for pleasure or to get drunk. ¹⁸When a man is too lazy to fix his roof, it will continue to leak. Eventually the wood will rot and the whole roof will come down on his head. ¹⁹Feasting makes people happy and drinking cheers them up, but if you have money, you can buy anything. ²⁰Don't criticize the king in private or curse the rich even in the privacy of your bedroom, because a little bird might tell all you said.

Be Diligent and Grateful

11 Give what you can to help those in need. It will come back to you in blessings untold. ²Invest your money in seven places, or even eight, because you don't know what will fail and what will succeed. ³If clouds are dark and full of water, it will rain. Once a tree falls, whether it falls toward the north or the south, it won't move. Only things like these are certain. ⁴Whoever waits for perfect weather will never plant, and he who worries about every cloud will never reap.

⁵Just as you don't know everything about the wind or about a baby in its mother's womb, so you can't know everything about God.

⁶Get started on your day's planting in the morning and keep going until evening, because you don't know which plants will do well, whether one kind or another. ⁷It feels good to be alive to enjoy the light of a new day and the pleasantness of a sunny afternoon. ⁸Let a man be grateful for every year God gives him because no matter how long he lives, he will die, and the years he spends in the grave will be years of inactivity and silence.

⁹Young people, enjoy life while you can. Be happy and let your heart bubble over with joy. Follow your heart's desire, but remember that every deed has its consequences, either good or bad, for God will one day judge you for everything you have done. ¹⁰Don't do things that will hurt your body, because the joys of

youth pass quickly, and old age and pain come soon enough.

Give God the Best While You're Young

12 Remember your Creator while you're still young and give Him the best of your life. The years pass quickly, and soon you'll be old and will say to yourself, "I surely don't enjoy life like I used to." ²When those days come, your eyesight will grow dim, and you will see little difference between a bright sunny day and a moonlit night. The stars will fade from your view, and each day the sky will seem overcast and dark, filled with clouds of rain. ³Your arms that were so strong and quick to protect you will shake and tremble. Your legs will grow weak. Your teeth will fall out, and it will be hard for you to chew. Your eyes will be looking through half-drawn shutters. ⁴Your ears will not pick up the noise on the streets, and you will barely hear the mill as it grinds out the wheat or the singing of birds in the morning. The music of young girls will be stilled.

⁵You'll be afraid of heights and of falling in the street. Your hair will turn as white as the blossoms of an almond tree, and you'll drag yourself along and rest after each step like an old grasshopper rests after each hop. Your desire for everything in life will fail. You'll be heading for your last resting place. People will mourn for you just as they mourned for others before you, and there will be no turning back.

⁶The silver chain that holds you to your loved ones will finally break, and the golden lamp of life will go out. The rope on the pulley of life's well will finally snap, and the pitcher full of the water of life will fall and break. ⁷Your body will decay and return to dust, and the spark of life which God gave you will go back to Him. ⁸Life is futile because what you do doesn't last. Let me say it again: Life is futile because what you do doesn't last.

The Whole Duty of Man

⁹When I carefully considered this, I decided that there is nothing more important for me than to be a teacher and pass on to others what I have learned. So I have given serious thought to life and have written out many proverbs that others may learn. ¹⁰I searched diligently for just the right words, and what I wrote is honest and true.

¹¹The words of wise men are like sticks that shepherds use to prod their sheep, and the words of scholars are like nails driven in well which were given to them

by the Shepherd of Israel. ¹²So be careful, my son, about other teachings. There's no end to new books, and too much study will wear out your body.

¹³After all is said and done, there is only one thing that really matters: Reverence your heavenly Father and do what He says. That's the only thing that has meaning and lasts. So love God and keep His commandments. He loves you and has told you all you need to know.

¹⁴One day He will judge everything we have done in this life, including every secret thing, whether it was good or bad.

SONG OF SOLOMON

1 This is one of the most beautiful songs that Solomon wrote, a song about a bridegroom and his bride.

The Bride Speaks

²Bride to Young Women: I dream of the day when my lover will kiss me again and again. Surely, his love will be more delightful than wine. ³There is a fragrance about his presence, and the mention of his name is like the scent of sweet perfume. No woman could keep from loving him.

⁴Bride to Groom: Draw me to you! Be my husband and king and take me to your palace. There we will be happy together. Then we will lose ourselves in each other's love. You are so strong and kind, no wonder the women of Jerusalem adore you.

⁵Bride to Young Women: Daughters of Jerusalem, I am dark but lovely. I may be as dark as the tents of Kedar or the tent curtains of Solomon, but I am still beautiful. ⁶Don't stare at me! I've been out in the sun. My brothers were angry with me and made me take care of the vineyards. I had no time to care for myself.

⁷Bride to Groom: Tell me, my love, where will you take your flock to graze? Where will you take them to rest in the shade? Tell me, so I don't have to look for you among the other shepherds and their flocks.

⁸Groom to Bride: Don't you know where I'll be, lovely one? Follow the tracks of my sheep and then graze your goats beside my tent. ⁹Your beauty attracts men as a beautiful mare attracts the stallions which pull Pharaoh's chariots. ¹⁰Your hair is lovely as its braids fall around your neck like a string of pearls.

¹¹Young Women to Bride: We will make you ornaments of gold studded with silver.

¹²Bride to Young Women: While my king was reclining at his table, my perfume filled the air with fragrance. ¹³My

lover is like a sachet of sweet-smelling myrrh as he rests his head between my breasts. ¹⁴My lover's scent is like a cluster of wild flowers brought from the slopes of Engedi.

¹⁵Groom to Bride: How beautiful you are, my love. Your eyes glow with love for me.

¹⁶Bride to Groom: How handsome you are, my dear. You delight me with your strong presence. Let the green grass be our bed, ¹⁷the cedars of Lebanon the beams of our house and cypress trees our roof.

2 Bride to Groom: I am only a country flower. The palace is too big for me. I am just a wild flower from the field of Sharon, a small lily from the valley.

²Groom to Bride: When I compare you to other women, you are beautiful, a pure lily-of-the-valley. You're a rose blooming among plants of thorns.

³Bride to Groom: When I compare you to other men, you are like an apple tree blossoming in the forest. Your fruit is sweet to my taste and I love to sit in the shade of your presence.

⁴Bride to Young Women: He invited me to a banquet at the palace and told everyone there that he loved me.

⁵Bride to Groom: Restore my strength with cakes of dried raisins and refresh me with apples for I am faint with love.

⁶Bride to Young Women: He put his left hand under my head and with his right hand he held me tight. ⁷Daughters of Jerusalem, promise me and swear to the deer and gazelle in the field that you will not encourage our love until the proper time.

⁸Stop! I hear my lover's voice. Look! Here he comes! He's running across the mountains, bounding over the hills. ⁹He runs like a gazelle, like a young stag. Look! There he stands beside the wall! Now he's gazing through the window,

looking for me through the lattice.

The Groom Speaks

¹⁰Groom to Bride: Come, my love, my fair one, come with me. ¹¹The winter is over, the rains have come and gone. ¹²Spring is here, the flowers are in bloom and the cooing of doves is heard in the land. ¹³The figs are beginning to ripen and the fragrance of blossoming vines is in the air. Come, my love, my fair one, come with me. ¹⁴You are like a dove that hides itself in the rocks and cliffs on the mountainside. Look at me again and let me hear your voice. It is sweet and your face is beautiful. ¹⁵Come, let's go and catch the baby foxes that are knocking off the blossoms in our vineyards.

¹⁶Bride to Herself: My lover is mine and I am his. He feeds his flock among the lilies of the field. ¹⁷I will dream of him until morning breaks and shadows flee. Return again, my darling, like a gazelle, like a stag bounding across the mountains.

A Troubled Dream

3 Bride to Young Women: The other night when I was asleep, I dreamed of the one I love. I looked for him but could not find him. I called, but he did not answer. ²I searched the whole city, walking down every street and around every square. I looked for the one I love but couldn't find him. ³The watchmen making their rounds stopped me. I told them who I was looking for and asked them if they had seen him. But they hadn't.

⁴I had barely left them when I saw my lover. I ran and held him and wouldn't let him go. I took him to my mother's house, to the place where I was born. ⁵Promise me, daughters of Jerusalem, and swear to the deer and gazelle in the fields that you will not excite my feelings of love until the proper time.

The Bridegroom Comes for His Bride

⁶Young Women to Bride: Look! Who is this coming in from the desert? A column of dust is rising in the air around

him. He will be perfumed with myrrh and frankincense sold by the best city merchants. ⁷It's Solomon! He's coming in his royal carriage surrounded by sixty of the finest troops in Israel. ⁸They are all wearing swords. All are experienced fighters. Each has his sword by his side ready to do battle for the king even against an onslaught of his enemies by night. ⁹Solomon's carriage is made of the finest wood from Lebanon. ¹⁰Its posts are covered with silver and its base is covered with gold. Its cushion is purple, lovingly crafted by the daughters of Jerusalem.

¹¹Bride to Young Women: Come, daughters of Zion, let's go out to meet the king! He's wearing the crown his mother placed on his head for his wedding day. Truly this day brings joy and gladness to the heart of the king of Israel.

4 Groom to Bride: How beautiful you are, my darling! Your eyes are gentle like the eyes of a dove; your hair shines like the fur of goats bounding down the hills of Gilead in the evening sun. ²Your teeth are as white as sheep that have just been shorn and washed. They are pearls standing in a row, beautifully matched. ³Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon. Your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks glow like the ripened pomegranates. ⁴Layers of expensive jewelry will cover your neck, as eye-catching as the Tower of David, which is decorated with golden shields from a thousand warriors. ⁵Your breasts have the grace and beauty of twin fawns feeding in a field of lilies. ⁶Until morning comes and shadows disappear, I will stay on the nearby mountain of myrrh, the hill of incense. ⁷How beautiful you are my love! How perfectly beautiful!

⁸Come with me to the mountains of Lebanon, my love. Come with me to the heights of Lebanon. Climb with me to the top of Mount Amanah, to the top of Mount Senir, to the top of Mount Hermon where the young lions and leopards love to

play.⁹The sparkle in your eyes is like the sparkle of precious jewels. You have truly stolen my heart with one wink of your eye.¹⁰Your love, my sweet, delights me. It's better than the most costly wine and more fragrant than the most expensive perfume.

¹¹Your lips give sweetness as the honeycomb gives honey. Milk and honey are under your tongue. Your clothes have the fresh smell of the mountains, the fragrance of the cedars of Lebanon.¹²My sweetheart, you are a virgin, like a beautiful garden that has been carefully kept, an untapped spring of fresh water.¹³You are like an orchard full of pomegranates, like a garden of spices filled with henna, nard,¹⁴saffron, calamus and cinnamon, as well as with myrrh and aloe and the most fragrant perfumes.¹⁵You are as refreshing as a mountain stream, a brook gushing down from the heights of Lebanon.

¹⁶Bride: Wake up, north wind! Come, south wind! Blow on my garden and carry its fragrance everywhere! Let my lover catch the scent of my perfume and make my garden his own as he tastes its choicest fruits.

5 Groom to Bride: I have come to your garden, my love, to gather spices and myrrh, to eat honey from the honeycomb and to drink milk and the juice of the grape. God's Benediction: Eat, young lovers, eat and drink with your guests and celebrate your marriage.

The Bride Longs for the Bridegroom

²Bride to Young Women: Some days ago while sitting in my garden I fell asleep, yet my heart was awake. I dreamed that my lover was at the door. He spoke and said, "Darling, let me come in. Let me come in, my sweet, my dove. My head is covered with dew and my hair is wet with the dampness of the night."³I said to him, "I have taken off my robe. Why should I put it on again? I have washed my feet. Why should I soil them again?"

⁴My lover put his hand on the door and my heart began to pound in love for him.⁵I arose, put on my robe and went to let him in. My hands were covered with myrrh and it was dripping from my fingers as I grasped the handle of the door.⁶I opened it, but he was gone. My heart sank. I ran outside into the streets calling him, but there was no reply.⁷The watchmen patrolling the city found me. They hit me and bruised me and took away my robe.⁸I went to my friends, the young women of Jerusalem, and asked them to help me find him and when they find him to tell him that I love him with all my heart.

⁹Friends to Bride: Most beautiful maid, what makes your lover more handsome than others? What makes him so wonderful that we should go looking for him?

¹⁰Bride to Friends: My lover is handsome and strong. He is one in ten thousand.¹¹His face is ruddy and golden; his hair is wavy and black as a raven.¹²His eyes are as innocent as doves cooing by a bubbling fountain. They are like sparkling pearls floating in milk.¹³His cheeks are like a garden of spices. His lips are like lilies wet with myrrh.¹⁴His arms are like rods of gold inset with chrysolite. His body is as smooth as polished ivory studded with sapphires.¹⁵His legs are like pillars of marble set in foundations of gold. His appearance is as majestic as the cedars of Lebanon.¹⁶His nature is gentle and sweet. Everything about him enchants me. This is what my lover, my friend, is like, daughters of Jerusalem.

6 Friends to Bride: Most beautiful one, where has your lover gone? We will help you look for him.

²Bride to Friends: My lover has gone back to his garden, to the terraces of spices. He has taken his flock to pasture and to gather lilies.

³Bride to Young Women: My dream ended and I found myself sitting in my garden among the lilies. Yes, my lover is mine and I am his.

The Bride's Beauty

⁴Groom to Bride: My darling, there you are! You are more beautiful than the lovely city of Tirzah, more important to me than Jerusalem and more breathtaking than a parade of troops with banners. ⁵Don't look at me so lovingly. Your eyes excite me; they hold me captive. Your hair shimmers like the hair of goats descending the hills of Gilead at sunset. ⁶Your teeth are as white as a flock of sheep just shorn and washed, and are perfectly matched. ⁷Your cheeks are the color of a pomegranate.

⁸Friends to Groom: There are sixty queens, eighty concubines and countless beautiful young women. Why is the Shulamite so special?

⁹Groom to Men: My dove, my perfect one, is the only one I truly love—her mother's only daughter, her father's favored child. The young women saw her and called her blessed. Queens and concubines praised her. ¹⁰Who is she? Her presence is as fresh as the dawn, as romantic as the moon, as lovely as the stars, as bright as the sun and as regal as an army with banners.

¹¹Groom to Bride: I went down to the almond trees in the valley to see the blossoms, to see if the vines have budded and the pomegranates are in bloom. ¹²Before I knew it, my desire for you was as strong as an eager chariot driver longs for battle.

¹³Young Women to Bride: Come back, come back, young woman of Shulam. Let us look at you once more.

Bride to Young Women: Why would you want to look at a young woman of Shulam? Why do you keep gazing at me as if I were dancing before an army?

Their Mutual Love

7 Groom to Bride: How beautiful are your sandaled feet! Your gracefully curved legs are the work of an artist. ²Your navel is lovely as a goblet filled with fresh wine. Your hips are as shapely as the mounds of new-mown

hay in a valley of lilies. ³Your breasts are like two young fawns, twins of a gazelle. ⁴Your neck and shoulders are as smooth as carved ivory. Your eyes glisten like the pools of water in Heshbon. Your nose is as lovely as the little tower of Lebanon looking toward Damascus.

⁵You hold your head high like Mount Carmel. Your braided hair shines like the finest satin, and when combed out, it's like royal tapestry made for the king's palace. ⁶How beautiful and pleasing you are! How pure are the delights of your love! ⁷You are as graceful and tall as a palm tree. Your breasts are like clusters of dates. ⁸I will climb the palm tree and take hold of its fruit. May your breasts be to me like clusters of grapes, the smell of your breath like the fragrance of ripened apples, and your lips like the taste of fresh grapes.

⁹Bride to Groom: Let the love of my lips flow out to my lover. Let it flow freely over his lips and teeth. ¹⁰I belong to you and I know that you love only me. ¹¹Come, darling, let's go out to the country and spend the night in the fields. ¹²We will rise early and go to the vineyards to see if the vines have budded and the blossoms have opened. We will see if the pomegranates are in bloom, and I will show you again how much I love you. ¹³The fragrance of mandrakes is in the air, and just outside my gate are all kinds of pleasant fruit. I have saved them for you, both old delights and new.

8 If only you had been my brother. If only my mother had nursed you at her breasts. Then, if we walked outside and I kissed you, no one would mind. ²I could bring you to my mother's house and there we could talk freely and be at ease. I would serve you the juice of fresh grapes or nectar from my mother's pomegranate tree.

³Bride to Young Women: His left hand is under my head and his right hand

holds me tight. ⁴Daughters of Jerusalem, promise that you will not arouse our love until the proper time.

A Love That Never Ends

⁵Young Women to Bride: Who is this coming back from the fields arm-in-arm with her lover?

Groom to Young Women: She slept under the apple tree and I awakened her. I took her to the house where she was born.

⁶Bride to Groom: Keep your heart and love only for me. Hold no one else in your arms. True love is stronger than death and as unyielding as the grave. Love is a flame given to us by the Lord. ⁷Water cannot put it out and floods cannot drown it. All the wealth in the world cannot buy it because true love is never for sale.

⁸Brothers of the Bride: We had a little sister. She was young and her breasts were not yet those of a woman. We protected her when young men came and made advances. ⁹She was like a wall of solid gold to us, and we built silver towers

to guard her. She was like a door etched in gold, and we enclosed her with cedar.

¹⁰Bride to Brothers: Now I am precious to my husband. I am like a wall of solid gold with silver towers against the advances of others. In his love I have found contentment and peace. ¹¹You know that Solomon has a beautiful vineyard in a place called Baal Hamon. He has leased it out to tenants who pay him a thousand pieces of silver.

¹²Bride to Groom: The thousand silver coins are for you and twenty percent of the harvest is for the tenants who work the land. I also have a vineyard, and it is mine. But I have given it to you. I am now your vineyard; my darling, I am yours.

¹³Groom to Bride: Let me hear you speak, my love, from the garden. My friends are waiting to hear you speak, to hear the loveliness of your voice.

¹⁴Bride to Groom: Come to me, my love. Come running to me like a gazelle, like a young stag bounds along the spice-laden mountains.

ISAIAH

1 This book contains the visions that Isaiah had and the messages he gave during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. His ministry extended over nearly sixty years.

The Wickedness of Judah

²The Lord said, "Listen to me, O heavens, and open your ears, O earth, to what I'm saying. The children I nourished, brought up and made my own have rebelled against me. ³The ox recognizes its master, and the donkey the man who feeds it, but the children of Israel don't know me and don't want to understand. ⁴Woe to a sinful people, a nation loaded with guilt, a seedbed of evil given over to corruption. You have forsaken the Lord. You have rejected the Holy One of Israel and turned your backs on Him.

⁵"Why do you persist in rebelling against me? Why should you continue suffering and destroying yourself? Your head is diseased and your heart is sick. ⁶You are covered from head to foot with wounds, bruises and open sores, none of which have been cleansed and bandaged or soothed with oil. You are a sick country, in a world that is spiritually sick.

⁷"Your cities have been burned with fire by invading armies and devastated by angry troops. Your fields have been stripped of grain in front of your eyes and your country lies in ruins, destroyed by your enemies. ⁸Jerusalem is a city under siege. It is as defenseless against the approaching army as an empty shelter in a vineyard or a hut left in the middle of a cucumber field.

⁹"Unless the Lord of heaven had stepped in, there would be no survivors. You would all be dead like the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. ¹⁰I am the Lord! Pay attention to what I'm telling you. Your rulers are like those of Sodom and your people like those of Gomorrah.

¹¹"What are all these sacrifices for? Do you think I need burnt offerings of sheep

and other fatted animals to hear your prayers? I'm tired of all your ritual sacrifices that have no meaning. Do you think I delight in all this blood? ¹²Who told you that the more animals you drag in and sacrifice, the more I'll do for you? Is this what the Temple is for? ¹³Stop bringing me meaningless offerings! I detest the smell of your incense. I can't bear to watch the way you keep the new-moon festivals, the Sabbath and your self-appointed feasts. They're all corrupted by your sins. I can no longer give the appearance of consent by my silence. ¹⁴I don't like what I see you doing to yourselves. I hate the evil that you're caught up in. The way you worship has become a heavy weight on me.

¹⁵"When you raise your hands in prayer, I will cover my eyes. Even if you pray day and night, I will not listen to you because your hands are covered with the blood of those who are innocent. ¹⁶Wash your hands and make yourselves clean. Put away your evil deeds. Take them out of my sight. Stop doing wrong and ¹⁷learn to do what is right! See that justice is done in the land. Help those who are oppressed. Come to the defense of the fatherless and plead the case of the widow.

¹⁸"Come, sit down and let's reason together. Though your heart is crimson with sin, it can be washed as white as snow. Though it is stained the deepest red, it can be made as white as wool. ¹⁹If you're willing to listen and do what I say, I will once more bless your land. It will recover and your tables will again be full of good things to eat. ²⁰But if you persist in doing evil and rebelling against what I have told you, your land will come to ruin, and your country will be devoured by violence and the sword. I, the Lord have spoken."

Jerusalem's Disloyalty

²¹Then Isaiah said, "Just look at what has happened to this once faithful city!

She has become a prostitute. She was once full of justice; righteousness was everywhere. But now she is full of crime and murderers go free. ²²You once were like polished silver, but now you've become tarnished. Once you were as delightful as fresh juice from the vine, but now you taste like polluted water. ²³Your leaders are rebels at heart and companions of thieves. They love gifts and bribes and don't hesitate to take them. They're not interested in defending the cause of the homeless and orphans, or taking the case of widowed mothers.

²⁴"Listen to what the Lord, the mighty God of Israel, says: 'You have turned against me as if I were your enemy. I have no choice but to defend myself and discipline you. ²⁵I will remove the dross and impurities and restore you to be like polished silver. I will make you as delightful to the taste as the fresh juice of the grape. ²⁶I will give you leaders and advisers like those you had before. Once again you'll be called, The City of Righteousness, The Faithful City.'

²⁷"Because the Lord is good, He will do what is right and restore the city and redeem everyone who comes back to Him. ²⁸But rebels and sinners will be destroyed, and those who forsake the Lord will perish. ²⁹They will feel ashamed of having worshiped idols in sacred gardens. They will feel disgraced for having practiced those disgusting rituals. ³⁰They will be as an oak with dying leaves, as a garden that hasn't been watered. ³¹The strong will be like dry wood. They and their works will burn up like straw in a fire that will not be quenched, and no one will be able to stop it."

The Lord's Plan for Jerusalem

2 This is the message that the Lord gave Isaiah, son of Amoz, in a vision concerning the future of Judah and Jerusalem: ²The Lord's plan for Israel is that the mountain on which the Temple

now sits will become the most important mountain in the world and that all nations will come there to worship the God of heaven.

³If Israel fulfills the Lord's plan, people from everywhere will say, "Come let's go to Jerusalem to the house of the Lord. Let's go to see the God of Jacob. He will teach us what we need to know so we can walk in His paths." That's when the law will go out from Mount Zion and the word of the Lord will come from Jerusalem. ⁴The Lord will rule the nations. They will turn their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning shears, and there will be no more war. If Israel fails, the Lord will still carry out His plan. He will create new heavens and a new earth to be the home of the righteous.

Don't Put Your Trust in Men

⁵So come, O house of Jacob, let's walk in the way of the Lord. His promise is sure. ⁶The Lord has distanced Himself from His people because the land is full of superstitions and false worship from the East. They practice witchcraft and do the same things the pagans do. ⁷The land is full of silver and gold, yet there is no end to their pursuit of treasure. The country is full of horses, yet there is no end to their production of chariots. ⁸The land is also full of idols. People worship their own creations and what their own hands have made. ⁹So everyone will be humbled and brought low. The Lord will not overlook their sin. ¹⁰Then they will run to the mountains to hide from your power and the splendor of your majesty. ¹¹Human pride will be brought low, the arrogance of man will be humbled. In that day the Lord alone will be exalted.

¹²The Lord, the Mighty One of Israel, has appointed a day in which all the proud of the earth will be humbled and the powerful will be brought low. ¹³He will destroy the huge cedars of Lebanon and all the oaks of Bashan. ¹⁴He will level the towering mountains and flatten all the high hills.

¹⁵He will destroy the tall towers and lay waste every strong fortress. ¹⁶He will sink the largest and most powerful ships. There will be no defense strong enough against Him. ¹⁷The arrogance of man will be brought low, the pride of man will be humbled, and God alone will be praised. ¹⁸All idols will be destroyed and disappear. ¹⁹Men will run to caves in the rocks or to holes in the ground to escape from the Lord and from the glory of His majesty when He comes to shake the earth.

²⁰In that day men will throw to the rodents and bats their gold and silver idols which they made and worshiped. ²¹They will flee to caves in the mountains or hide in holes in fear of His majestic splendor when He comes to terribly shake the earth. ²²Stop putting your confidence in men who have no more lasting power in them than the breath in their nostrils. Why put your trust in them?

Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem

3 The Lord Almighty is ready to take away from Jerusalem and Judah everything the people depend on for support. This includes food and water, ²national heroes and men of war, judges and false prophets, fortune-tellers and men of wisdom, ³generals and those of rank, counselors and craftsmen, and those who claim to tell the future.

⁴The Lord will let boys become your leaders. The young will be elected to office and rule the land, and all government restraint will be removed. ⁵People will oppress each other. No one will trust another. Man will be against man and neighbor against neighbor. The youth will rise up against those who are older and those who are mean against those who are honorable.

⁶The time will come when men will take one of their own and say to him, "You still have something decent to wear and will look good as a leader. You take over during these trying times." ⁷But he will cry out, "I don't have a solution for all this. I can't feed and clothe you. I

don't have experience in government. Don't make me your leader!" ⁸This will happen because Jerusalem has stumbled and Judah has fallen. Their words and deeds are against the Lord. They defy His counsel and despise His presence.

⁹Look at them! Their faces testify against them. They parade their sins as openly as the people of Sodom. They have no intention of sinning in secret. They don't care who sees it. And they have brought it on themselves. ¹⁰But all will be well with those who are doing right. They will be rewarded for what they had done. ¹¹The evil ones are doomed. There is no turning back. What they have done to others will now be done to them. ¹²Youth roam the streets and oppress my people, and scandalous women control the politics of the nation. They are leading you astray and turning you from the Lord your God and away from the path of righteousness.

The Lord's Case

Against the Women of Zion

¹³The Lord is ready to take His place in court. He's ready to rise up and take action. ¹⁴The Lord brings His case against the elders and leaders of the land. He says to them, "You have ruined my vineyard. Your houses are full of what you have taken from the poor. ¹⁵What makes you think you can exploit and crush my people? Why do you think you have the right to push the face of the poor into the dirt?" The Lord Almighty demands an answer!

¹⁶The Lord also brings His case against the women in Zion. They're haughty, self-absorbed and proud. They walk with their heads in the air. They flirt with suggestive body language and wink with their eyes. They mince along, jingling ornaments on their ankles and feet. ¹⁷Therefore, the Lord will step in and take action. He will allow sores to break out on their heads; their hair will fall out, making them bald.

¹⁸The Lord will take away from these women everything they're so proud of.

He will take away their finery, the ornaments they wear on their legs, on their heads and around their necks. ¹⁹He will take away their earrings, their bracelets and their scarves. ²⁰He will take away their decorated hats, their ankle chains, their sashes, their perfumes and their magic charms. ²¹He will take away their rings and nose-jewels. ²²He will take away their robes, their gowns, their capes and their purses. ²³He will take away their many mirrors, their revealing garments, their embroidered handkerchiefs and the long veils thrown over their heads.

²⁴In place of fragrance and perfume, a foul odor will come from their heads because of their sores. In place of fine clothing, there will be sackcloth. In place of a sash, there will be a rope. In place of well-set hair, there will be the cropped head of a slave. In place of beauty, there will be shame. ²⁵The young men of the city, even the strongest of them, will be killed in battle. ²⁶The city of Zion will weep and mourn. She will be like a woman left destitute, sitting on the ground with no one to care for her.

4 When that day comes, as many as seven women will take hold of one man, any man that's left in the city, and say to him, "We will buy our own food and clothes, but take us as your wives and be our husband so we won't have to bear the shame of not bearing children."

A Promise of Restoration

²But the day will come when things will change and the Branch of the God of Israel will make things right and the land will be beautiful again. Every kind of tree imaginable will be there and will bear fruit. The people will be glad, and the land will again be the pride and glory of its inhabitants. ³In that day everyone who is left, who has chosen to belong to the Lord in Zion, will be called holy. ⁴The Lord will do what is right for Jerusalem.

He will wash away the filth of sin from the people of Zion and the bloodstains from the streets of Jerusalem. By judgment and fire, the Spirit of the Lord will purify the land. ⁵The Lord will establish Mount Zion and as in days of old, His presence will be like a cloud by day and a flaming fire at night. The canopy of His glory will be over each one. ⁶His presence will be as a pavilion of shade from the heat, a refuge and shelter from storm and rain.

God's Disappointing Vineyard

5 Now let me sing to you about my Friend and His vineyard: "My Friend has a vineyard on a very fertile hill. ²He dug the soil, cleared it of stones and planted it with the finest vines. He built a stone wall around it, a watchtower to guard it and a winepress to squeeze the grapes. Then He waited and looked forward to a harvest of good grapes, but it only yielded bad fruit—every grape was sour.

³"My Friend says, 'You who live in Jerusalem and you men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴What more could I have done for my vineyard than I have done for it? Yet when I looked for good grapes, all I got was worthless ones.

⁵"Let me tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will burn down the hedge around it, break down its stone wall and let the animals come in, trample it down and eat its vines. ⁶I will let it overgrow with weeds. I will not prune its vines. I will let it grow as it will. I will not hoe the ground or fertilize its soil, nor will I root out the briars and thorns. And I will forbid the clouds to water it.'

⁷"The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the leading men of Judah are the vines. The Lord expected the people to do what was good. He looked for justice and mercy but saw only bloodshed and oppression. He looked for right-doing but heard only cries of distress and pain from their victims."

Wickedness Abounds

⁸Listen to me! If you people in Jerusalem and Judah don't change, if you keep on building your large estates, you're doomed. In covetousness, you keep adding house to house and field to field until all the farmland will be gone and you'll be the only ones left. ⁹The Lord Almighty said, "All these fine houses will soon be empty and the beautiful vineyards will be trampled underfoot. ¹⁰What's left of the vineyards and fields will produce little. A ten-acre vineyard will produce only six gallons of juice, and six bushels of seed will produce only a half-bushel of grain."

¹¹Woe to those who, first thing in the morning, must have their drinks. Woe to those who stay up late at night and hour after hour drink wine. ¹²They love to have harps, flutes, lyres and tambourines at their parties as they drink wine hour after hour. They don't remember what the Lord has done for them, nor do they respect the work of His hands.

¹³So the Lord has no choice but to remove His protection from His people. Their country will be invaded and they will be taken into exile. The leading men will die of hunger and the common people will die of thirst. ¹⁴The grave with its ravenous appetite will open its mouth to receive them. It will swallow up leaders and people, and all who love their wine. ¹⁵Everyone in Jerusalem will be brought low, and the arrogant will be humbled. ¹⁶The Lord will be exalted in the eyes of the nations for executing justice. He will be vindicated for holding up His standards. ¹⁷When it's all over, sheep will again graze in their owner's pasture, lambs and kids will frolic in the fields once owned by the rich, and foreigners will move in and settle in the ruins of the city.

¹⁸Woe to those who tie themselves to sin with cords of deception, who are drawn by sin as a wagon is pulled by ropes. ¹⁹Woe to those who sit and say, "Let God hurry and speed up His work so we can see something happening. Let the

Holy One of Israel spring into action so we can know if His word is true." ²⁰Woe to those who call a little bad good and being good bad. Woe to those who mix error with truth, darkness with light and bitter with sweet. ²¹Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. ²²Woe to those who are champions at drinking, and heroes at mixing drinks, ²³who let the guilty go for a bribe and deny justice to innocent victims.

²⁴Therefore, just as surely as fire licks up dry grass and straw, so the roots of the wicked will dry up and their blossoms fade and blow away. They have walked contrary to the commandments of the Lord and rejected the word of the Holy One of Israel. ²⁵The Lord is not pleased with the behavior of His people. His hand is raised in discipline. The mountains will shake and the bodies of those who die will be left to rot in the streets. This will not be the end of it; He will discipline still more.

²⁶He will signal for distant nations to come. He will whistle for their troops and they will come swiftly for the attack. ²⁷No one in their army is old or weak; no one is tired or stumbles along. They will not come to rest or sleep in your city. They are not ready to loosen their belts or take off their shoes. ²⁸Their arrows are sharp and their bows are in their hands ready to shoot. Their horses' hooves are hard, and their chariot wheels spin like a whirlwind. ²⁹They roar like lions ready for attack. They growl like young lions carrying off their prey. No one will attempt to rescue their captives. ³⁰They will sweep over Israel like the waves of the sea. Darkness and distress will engulf the land, and the sky will be darkened by clouds.

Isaiah's Call to the Prophetic Ministry

6 The Lord called me to function as a prophet the same year that King Uzziah died. One day while I was worshipping in the Temple, I had a vision of the heavenly Sanctuary. There I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and

His presence filled the place with glory. ²Above Him and all around Him stood angels, each with six wings. With two they covered their face, with two they covered their feet and with the other two they hovered in space and flew. ³The angels were singing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts. The earth is full of His glory." ⁴At the sound of their voices the doors and the pillars shook, and the Temple was filled with the smoke of incense. ⁵I cried out, "I'm gone! There's no hope for me! I am a man of unclean lips. I have sinned. My own nature can't be trusted and I live among a sinful people. I am doomed, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel."

⁶Then I saw one of the angels take a burning coal from the altar of incense in the heavenly Sanctuary, fly down to where I was and touch my lips with this live coal. As he did so, he said, "This coal represents God's grace. Atonement has been made for your sins and your guilt has been removed." ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send to my people? Who will go for me and be my messenger?" With my heart overflowing in gratitude, I said, "Here am I, Lord. Send me."

⁹He said, "Then go and give my people this message: No matter how much you listen to me, you do not understand. No matter how much you look, you can't see what's happening to you. ¹⁰Your sins are hardening your heart. You no longer sense what is good. You don't want to see, to hear or to understand because you don't want to change and be healed." ¹¹Then I said, "Lord, how long will things like this go on?" He said to me, "Things won't change until all their cities lie in ruins, until their houses are destroyed and their vineyards are trampled in the dust, ¹²until they've been taken captive and carried into a foreign country, and the land will be left nearly empty. ¹³And though a tenth of the people remain in the country, if they attempt to refurbish the Temple, I will let their

enemies come back, invade the land and burn the Temple down. But as the stump of the oak brings forth new shoots when it's left in the ground, so the time for a new beginning will come to the remnant of my people, for the Holy Seed will be the strength of the remnant of Israel."

Isaiah Sent to See Ahaz

7 After Ahaz, grandson of Uzziah, became king of Judah, war broke out. Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, became allies and agreed to attack Judah and capture Jerusalem. But they never did succeed. ²When word reached Ahaz, king of Judah, that the armies of Syria had arrived in the Northern Kingdom to join them in attacking Judah, the hearts of the people shook with fear as the trees of the forest shake before a strong wind.

³Then the Lord said to me, "Take your son Shear-Jashub with you, whose name means A Remnant Will Return, and go talk to Ahaz. Meet him on the road to Washerman's Field which is at the end of the city's aqueduct supplying water for the Upper Pool. ⁴Tell the king not to be alarmed but to stay calm. Tell him not to be afraid of King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Israel. Their armies are no more dangerous than the smoke from two smoldering sticks of firewood about to go out. ⁵Syria and Israel have plotted your ruin and have said to each other, ⁶'Let's invade Judah and terrify the people of Jerusalem with our massive armies. They'll give up and join our side, and we'll be able to use them to stage a coup. Then we can put Tabeel's son who supports us on the throne of Judah in place of Ahaz.'

⁷"But I, the Lord God, decree that this will not happen; it will not take place. ⁸Why? Because the whole country of Syria is no stronger than the city of Damascus, and Damascus is no stronger than its king, and he will soon die. As far as Israel goes, sixty-five years from now, the Assyrians will come and destroy

Samaria. ⁹The Northern Kingdom is no stronger than the city of Samaria, and Samaria is no stronger than its king, and he will soon die. So stand firm in your faith in the Lord your God, or you'll be unable to stand at all."

A Sign of the Coming of the Messiah

¹⁰Then the Lord sent another message to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹"Ask the Lord your God for a sign to confirm what I've said, whether it be a sign in the heavens or in the depths of the earth." ¹²Ahaz said, "I'm not going to ask for a sign because I'm not going to put the Lord's word to the test." ¹³Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, O royal house of David! It's not good to try the patience of God by not taking hold of His prophetic word. What are you afraid of? Maybe you don't really believe what He said He would do for you. ¹⁴Therefore, the Lord will give you a sign: The young woman who is still a virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name Him Immanuel, meaning God Is with Us. ¹⁵By the time He can make His own decisions and tell right from wrong, the people will be eating the riches of the land, milk and curds and honey as their ancestors did. ¹⁶Because before then, the countries of Rezin and Pekah, the two kings you fear so much, will be invaded by foreign armies. ¹⁷The Lord will also allow those armies to come against you, your ancestral house and your people. There will be a time of trouble such as never has been since the ten tribes of Israel separated from Judah to form their own kingdom.

¹⁸"The Lord will whistle for the Egyptians and the Assyrians, and they will come. The Egyptians will stream in like flies and the Assyrians will swarm in like bees. ¹⁹They will come into the valleys and into the mountains. They'll be behind every thorn bush and in every pasture. ²⁰The Lord will use the king of Assyria from beyond the Euphrates River to humble you. He will let him shave your heads, your legs and your beards, and

march you away as prisoners.

²¹"During that time a farmer will be fortunate to save one cow or two goats for himself. ²²He and other farmers who survived will at least have milk, curds and honey to eat. ²³When that time comes, every vineyard, even those with a thousand vines worth a thousand pieces of silver, will become nothing but briars and thorns. ²⁴Men will only go there to hunt game with bows and arrows because the thorns and briars are so thick. ²⁵The hills where crops once stood will be so overgrown with briars and thorns that no one will go there except to turn their cattle loose and let their sheep run."

Assyria Will Conquer the Northern Tribes

8 The Lord said to me, "Take a large piece of writing material and write on it in large letters: MAHER SHALAL HASH BAZ, meaning The Spoiler Speeds, The Plunderer Hastens. This way everyone who goes by can read it. ²Get two reliable men, the priest Uriah and the layman Zechariah, the son of Jeberekiah, to witness what you write." ³When my wife, the prophetess, became pregnant and gave birth to a son, the Lord said, "Call him Maher Shalal Hash Baz, the same thing you wrote on the sign. ⁴Before your son is old enough to say, 'Father' or 'Mother,' Israel and Syria will be invaded and conquered, and their wealth will be carried off by the Assyrians."

⁵Again the Lord spoke to me, saying, ⁶"Because this people refused my message of assurance, gentle as the softly flowing waters of Shiloah near Jerusalem, and asked the violent king of Assyria to protect them against Rezin, king of Syria, ⁷I, the Lord, will permit the fearsome armies of Assyria to come against the kings of Israel, and like the mighty Euphrates overflowing its banks, they will overflow the land. ⁸They will spill over into Judah and like a flood, reach up to the people's necks. The king of Assyria will spread out his

wings and cast a shadow over the whole country."

But God Is Still With Us!

⁹Go ahead, you nations, and give the battle cry. Listen, you distant parts of the earth. Get ready to fight, but don't forget who's on the side of Judah. Prepare for battle, but be fearful, because your armies will be defeated. ¹⁰Go ahead and plan your strategy, but it won't work. Talk all you want to, but it's useless, because God is on our side.

The Lord Warns Isaiah

¹¹Again the Lord spoke to me, this time strongly, and warned me, ¹²"Don't support a peace treaty that the people want the king to make with the powerful nations around them. Don't be afraid of what's coming or dread what they dread. ¹³The Lord Almighty is the One to respect. Let Him be your fear and dread. ¹⁴He will be a sanctuary in time of need to those who trust Him. However, He will be a stumbling block to the unbelieving of Israel, like a rock that makes them fall. To the people of Jerusalem He will be a trap, where their sin of not trusting Him will be exposed. ¹⁵When the king of Assyria comes, many of my people will be killed and many others will be captured and taken away."

¹⁶People, listen to me. Those of you who love the Lord, help me to seal what is written in the law and to preserve the testimonies among my people. ¹⁷I will not support a treaty with other nations, but will wait on the Lord. Yes, He is hiding His face from the descendants of Jacob, but I will trust Him and put my hope in Him. ¹⁸Here am I together with my wife and the children whom the Lord has given us. The Lord Almighty, whose throne is in Zion, has chosen us to be signs and symbols of His grace to the people of Israel.

¹⁹When people tell you to consult mediums and spiritualists who do nothing but chirp and mutter about the fu-

ture, why do you go and listen to them? Shouldn't God's people go to their God for help? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? The dead know nothing. They can't help you. ²⁰You need to pay attention to the law and the testimonies God has given you. If anyone speaks contrary to these, it's because that person has no light in him. ²¹The time is coming when distress and hunger will sweep through the land. When this happens, people will become angry and will curse their king and their God. ²²When they look around, they will see nothing but darkness, distress and gloom.

A New Day Is Coming

9 But the time is coming when there will be no more darkness and gloom. Even though the Lord humbled the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, He will bring honor to the land from the Mediterranean in the west to the land beyond the Jordan in the east, including Galilee to the north where Gentiles now live. ²The people who once walked in darkness will see a great light. Those who lived in a land of spiritual darkness will be flooded with the light of a new dawn.

³The Lord will enlarge our nation and bring us great joy. The people will rejoice before the Lord as people do at the end of a large harvest, as men of war do when they divide the spoils. ⁴Lord, you have taken the yoke from their shoulders and broken the rod that beats them. You defeated the nation that took them captive just as you defeated the forces of Midian so long ago. ⁵The boots of the invading troops and their bloodstained garments are destined for burning. They'll be fuel for the fire.

⁶For unto us a Child will be born, to us a Son will be given, and the government will rest on His shoulders. He will be called The Wonderful Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the increase of His government there will be no end. He will sit on David's throne and rule the king-

dom. He will do what is right and just from the time He takes the throne and forever. The great God of heaven and earth, the Lord Almighty Himself, will do this.

Samaria Punished

⁸But for now, the Lord has sent a message to the sons of Jacob, a message against the nation of Israel. ⁹All people of Israel and those who live in the capital of Samaria will know it's from the Lord. Right now they're arrogant and proud and in their hearts they're saying, ¹⁰"If our brick buildings are destroyed, we'll replace them with dressed stone. If our sycamore trees have been cut down, we'll build with cedar brought in from the mountains."

¹¹The Lord will allow their enemies to come against them and their king. ¹²He will allow Syria to come against Israel from the east and Philistia from the west, and they will devour the land. Still, the Lord's discipline will not stop ¹³because the people have not returned to Him, nor have they sought the Lord Almighty. ¹⁴The leaders of Israel and their people will be struck down by their enemies. God will allow Israel's head and tail to be cut off in one day. ¹⁵The leaders in government are the head, and the self-appointed prophets who flatter them with lies are the tail. ¹⁶Those who are supposed to guide the people have misled them, and those who follow these false guides are destroying themselves.

¹⁷The Lord is not pleased with Israel. He will not let the young people escape the consequences of their wrongdoing, nor will He protect the widows and orphans. All of them are godless and have become very evil. Every time they open their mouths, out comes wickedness. Because of this, His hand is still upraised for discipline. ¹⁸Wickedness is like a forest fire which destroys everything in its path. It sets every bush and tree ablaze and sends columns of smoke into the air.

¹⁹The Lord Almighty will let the land be invaded and set ablaze. When that

happens, the people will turn on each other, even a man on his own brother. ²⁰People everywhere will be hungry, to the right and to the left. They'll snatch every bit of food they can find. Some will even kill and eat their own newborn babies. ²¹The tribes of Israel will turn against each other. Manasseh will turn on Ephraim, then together they'll turn on Judah. Yet in spite of all this, His hand is still upraised for discipline.

10 Woe to those who make unfair laws and issue oppressive government orders. ²Woe to those who deprive the poor of their rights, rob the people of justice, prey on the elderly and take from the fatherless what belongs to them. ³What will you do when the day of justice comes, a day of destruction by an army from a far country? Where will you go for help? What will you do with all your accumulated money? ⁴Without the Lord you have no choice but to be killed in battle or to bow low and let them carry you away. Yet in spite of this, His hand is still upraised to discipline more. Your captivity will not be short.

Assyria, God's Instrument

⁵But woe to Assyria. The Lord says, "I will use them to discipline for me. ⁶I will let them attack a nation that has become godless, a people who have turned away from their own God. I will let the Assyrians plunder and loot and step on my people like dirt in the streets. ⁷But the king of Assyria has his own ideas. He wants to do more than that. He plans to completely destroy my people and put an end to them. ⁸He says to himself, 'Every commander of mine is like a conquering king. ⁹Have I not taken the cities of Calno and Carchemish? Have I not taken the cities of Hamath and Arpad? Will Samaria in Israel and Damascus in Syria be able to stand up against me? ¹⁰I have stretched out my hand against nations and destroyed kingdoms with more gods than those in

Jerusalem and Samaria. ¹¹So why should I be afraid to attack and destroy them?"

¹²But the Lord said, "I will let the king of Assyria carry out his plans against Samaria, but not against Jerusalem. Then I will discipline the king of Assyria for his pride and arrogance and for the haughty look in his eye." ¹³The king of Assyria boasts and says, "By the strength of my own hand have I done all this. By my wisdom have I carried out these plans. I changed the boundaries of nations. I plundered their treasuries. Like a mighty bull I trampled their people down like dirt in the streets. ¹⁴As simply as one reaches into a nest, so I reached out and took the wealth of nations. As easily as men collect eggs, I collected whole countries. Not one country flapped its wings at me to scare me away or opened its beak to scream at me." ¹⁵But the Lord says, "Can an ax raise itself up against the one who swings it or a saw speak out against the one who's using it? Does a rod stand up by itself as if it were alive? Yet this is what the king of Assyria is doing to me. ¹⁶Therefore, I will send a disease on those sturdy warriors. Their bodies will waste away and burn as if on fire. ¹⁷The Lord, who is the light of His people, will become a devouring fire. In one day He will destroy the pride of the Assyrian army as easily as a forest fire burns thistles and thorns. ¹⁸Fires will destroy their splendid forests and fruitful fields as disease destroys a man's body until he wastes away. ¹⁹The remaining trees will be so few that a child can count them.

A Remnant Will Return

²⁰"Then those of my people who are left, the survivors of Jacob, will no longer be tempted to rely on the strength of great nations to protect them from their enemies, but will put their trust in the Lord and rely on the Holy One of Israel. ²¹A few people will return to their homeland, a remnant of Jacob will turn to the mighty God of Israel. ²²Though my people are many and look like sand on the

seashore, only a few will survive and come back home." The Lord has ordered destruction for His people and it is fully justified. ²³The Lord, the mighty God of Israel, will let it happen. He will see to it that it's carried out. Destruction will be upon the whole northern country. ²⁴But this is what the Lord the Sovereign God says to those who live in Jerusalem, "Don't be afraid of the Assyrians who will come against you to beat you with a rod and try to oppress you as the Egyptians did to your forefathers. ²⁵When my discipline of Judah ends, my discipline of Assyria will begin." ²⁶The Lord Almighty will stir up troubles for them and defeat them just as He defeated the Midianites for your forefathers at Oreb. He will raise His rod over Assyria as He did over Egypt when He closed the Red Sea over their armies. ²⁷The Lord says, "In that day I will free you from the burden of Assyria. The yoke on you will be broken and the burden will be lifted from your shoulders."

²⁸Already the Assyrians are on their way. Their armies have captured Aiath. They have taken Migron and stored their supplies at Michmash. ²⁹They have crossed the pass and are camping overnight at Geba. The people in the city of Ramah are terrified. The people in Saul's hometown of Gibeah have fled. ³⁰Cry out you people in Gallim! Listen, inhabitants of Laishah! Answer, those of you who live in Anathoth! ³¹The people of Madmenah are fleeing. The people of Gebim are hiding. ³²Today the enemy troops will be in Nob, and soon they'll shake their fist at Mount Zion and the city of Jerusalem.

³³But the Lord Almighty will bring down the enemy as easily as trimming branches from a tree. Those thought to be important will fall to the ground, and the proud will be humbled. ³⁴The Lord will cut the enemy down as easily as forest undergrowth is cut with a sharp ax. Lebanon and its giant cedars will come crashing down as if cut by a mighty woodsman.

The New Kingdom

1 The royal line of David is like the stump of a tree. It's the plan of the mighty God of Israel that from its roots a new Branch will someday sprout and bear fruit. ²The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him as soon as He is born. The Spirit will guide Him and give Him wisdom and understanding, counsel and power, knowledge and respect for the God of Israel. ³This King will delight in obeying the Lord. He will not judge what He sees with human eyes, nor decide by what He hears with human ears.

⁴He will judge rightly and uphold the case of the needy. With justice and equity He will defend the rights of the helpless. He will smite the earth with His mouth. By the breath of His lips the wicked will be slain and there will be no more evil. ⁵He will rule His people with equity. Righteousness will be His belt, and faithfulness will be the sash around His waist.

⁶The wolf and the lamb will live side by side. The leopard will lie down next to the young goat. The calf and the lion will feed together, and a little child will play with them both. ⁷The cow will feed alongside the bear, and their calves and cubs will lie down and sleep together. The lion will eat grass as does the ox. ⁸Babies will sit and play next to a cobra, and a young child will feel free to pick up an adder. ⁹There will be no harm or hurt in all of God's kingdom, for the earth will be as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the sea is full of water.

¹⁰It is God's plan that in that day the Root of the house of David will bring in righteousness and justice. People from every nation will come to inquire of Him. They will rally around Him and come to His royal city to honor Him. ¹¹In that day the Lord will reach out to reclaim the faithful remnant of His people, those who are scattered throughout Assyria, Egypt, Babylon and the islands of the sea.

¹²His presence will be a signal to the nations to let the whole world know that He

is gathering together His people from the four corners of the earth. ¹³There will be no more jealousy among His people, nor will there be between tribes. All hostility between Israel and Judah will be gone.

¹⁴Even now, the Lord would help His people if they were to turn to Him. They would be able to sweep down on the Philistines to the west and overrun their enemies to the east. They could conquer the Edomites, the Moabites and the Ammonites, and these people would trouble them no more. ¹⁵The Lord would dry up rivers for His people as He did for their fathers when they came out of Egypt. He would sweep His hand over the great Euphrates River and dry it up so that only seven small streams would be left, over which anyone could walk. ¹⁶The Lord will make a way back home from Assyria and Babylon for the remnant of His people. They will travel safely through the wilderness just as their fathers did when they came out of Egypt.

A Hymn of Praise

12 When that happens the people of God will sing, "We praise you, Lord! You were displeased with us, but now you're comforting us and making us happy again. Your discipline is over and we can see that it was for our own good. ²Surely you are our God, our salvation, our hope. We will trust you and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord God, is our strength and our Redeemer. He is our song and our redemption."

³With joy we will draw water from the wells of His salvation. ⁴When that happens, God's people will sing, "Give thanks to the Lord! You can always call on Him to help you. Make known to the nations what He has done and proclaim His name throughout the whole earth.

⁵"Sing to the Lord, for He has done great and marvelous things. Let the whole world know what He has done. ⁶Let everyone who lives in Zion shout aloud and sing for joy! The Holy One of Israel is in your midst!"

God Will Destroy Babylon

13 Here is the first in a series of visions that Isaiah had concerning the Lord's dealings with those nations which threaten the children of Israel, beginning with Babylon: ²On the top of a barren hill a battle flag will be raised. A commander will shout to his men and raise his arm as a signal to attack Babylon. ³The Lord has chosen His warriors and called on those committed to fight to carry out His plans to bring down that proud nation.

⁴Listen! There's noise on the mountains, the noise of a great multitude. Listen! There's an uproar among the kingdoms against Babylon. Nations are gathering together; the Lord is mustering His army for war. ⁵Some are coming from different countries. They are coming from faraway lands. They will carry out the Lord's displeasure against Babylon and destroy the city.

⁶Cry out in pain for the day of the Lord is near when the mighty God of Israel will destroy proud Babylon. ⁷The hands of the strong will go limp and every man's heart will melt with fear. ⁸Terror will seize them; agony will take hold of them. They will twist in pain like a woman in labor. They will grimly stare at each other, their faces filled with horror as if on fire.

Babylon Typifies the World

⁹The day of the Lord is coming, not only on Babylon, but someday on the whole world. It will be a cruel day, filled with turmoil and terror. The whole earth will become a wilderness and all those who do wickedly will be destroyed. ¹⁰The stars of heaven, including the constellations, will not give their light. The sun will be darkened and the moon will not shine. ¹¹The Lord says, "I will discipline the world for its evil doings and the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the proud and will humble those who are haughty. ¹²The righteous will be few, but they will be more precious to me

than fine gold, more precious than the gold of Ophir. ¹³I will make the heavens tremble; I will shake the earth and move it out of its place. On that day they will see my anger against wickedness. ¹⁴They will scatter like deer being chased by hunters. They will be as helpless as sheep without a shepherd. They will run to their own people for help and look to their leaders for protection."

The End of Babylon

¹⁵Concerning Babylon, those who are captured and surrender will be killed, and those caught escaping will be thrust through by the sword. ¹⁶Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their homes will be looted, and their wives will be raped. ¹⁷The Lord will stir up the Medes and the Persians against the kingdom of Babylon. They will not care about her silver, nor will they be attracted to her gold. ¹⁸They will strike down her youth, show no mercy for her infants and have no compassion for her children. ¹⁹Babylon will be crushed. She will be destroyed as surely as God stepped in and destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. ²⁰The great city of Babylon will never be inhabited again. No Arab will pitch his family tent there; no shepherd will bring his sheep to graze there. ²¹Only desert animals will live there. Her houses will be inhabited by owls. Ostriches will live there, and wild goats will climb on her ruins. ²²Hyenas will howl inside her walls and jackals will make their dens inside her palaces. The days of Babylon have been marked, and her time is almost over.

The Captives Will Return

14 The Lord loves His people and will have compassion on the descendants of Jacob. He will bring them back to their own land from captivity in Babylon, and aliens will become part of the family of Jacob. ²Nations will help them return to their homeland and people everywhere will come and serve

them. Israel will preside over her captors and over those who oppressed her.

The King of Babylon Will Fall

³In that day the Lord will relieve His people of their suffering and pain. He will give them rest from their turmoil and troubles, from their bondage and slavery. ⁴When the Lord does this, His people will sing of their release and freedom from their captors in Babylon. They will sing to the Lord and say, "The king of Babylon has fallen! Our oppression has ended! We are free! The great city rules us no more! ⁵The Lord has broken the rod of wicked rulers. ⁶He struck them down with unceasing blows. With fury He subdued nations and no one could stop Him." ⁷The nations are at rest and at peace. Near and far they will rejoice and break into singing. ⁸Even the fir trees and the cedars of Lebanon will rejoice and break forth into singing, "The king of Babylon is no more. Their woodsmen no longer come to cut us down." ⁹The grave is getting ready to receive the body of the king of Babylon. The sleeping ones are waiting for him. The bones of the kings of the earth will welcome him. The skeletons will be there to honor him. ¹⁰They will call out to him and say, "You have fallen as we did. Now you have become one of us. ¹¹All your pomp is gone. You were entertained and honored with the music of harps, but now you're among the dead. Maggots are eating your body and worms are crawling all over you."

The Fall of Lucifer

¹²How could this degradation happen to the great king of Babylon? The same way it happened to Lucifer, the son of the morning, who was cast out of heaven and down to earth. This same attitude caused the mighty king of Babylon to fall who once laid low the nations. ¹³Lucifer was full of pride and said to himself, "I will set my throne in the heavens. I will take charge of the stars of God. I will sit next to God on the sacred mountain in

the north from which He governs the universe. ¹⁴I will dwell in the highest heaven far above the clouds. I will be like the Almighty, the Most High God."

¹⁵But he was cast out of heaven and is destined for the fiery pit. He was extremely proud and will be brought down to the realm of the dead. ¹⁶People will say, "Is this the man who shook the nations and made them tremble? ¹⁷Is this the one who turned the earth into a wilderness, who overthrew whole cities and refused to let go of God's people?"

Babylon Destroyed

¹⁸While the kings of the earth lie buried, each in his own royal tomb, ¹⁹the king of Babylon will be cast out on the ground. The slain will be all around him. His body will be trampled underfoot. He will be thrown into a common burial pit together with the others who were killed. ²⁰Because he destroyed his own land and killed his own people, he will not be buried like other kings. His descendants will never be honored again. ²¹His sons will be slaughtered and reap the consequence of the sins of their fathers. They will not inherit the land nor cover the earth with their cities. ²²The Lord declares, "I will be against them. I will cut off the name of Babylon. I will cut off her offspring, her descendants and her survivors. ²³I will make her palace fit for owls and places for stagnant water. I will sweep her cities with the broom of destruction. I, the Lord Almighty, have spoken."

A Prophecy Against Assyria

²⁴The Lord has also spoken against Assyria, saying, "As I have planned it, so will it be. As I have purposed it, that's how it will stand. ²⁵I will crush the Assyrian army which has come into my land and slaughtered my people. I will chase them into the mountains and trample them down. I will take the Assyrian yoke from off my people and they will carry this burden no more. ²⁶The day is coming when I will do this for my people

around the world. I will stretch out my hand against the nations because they are after my people to slaughter them.”

²⁷The Lord Almighty will do this and who can stop Him? When He stretches His hand out against the nations, who is strong enough to pull it back in?

A Prophecy Against Philistia

²⁸Here is the message that was given to me in the year that King Ahaz died:

²⁹“Don’t rejoice, Philistia, because the Assyrian rod that beat you is broken. When one snake dies, another one is produced, and the next one is worse than the first. ³⁰The Lord will watch out for His people and lead them to green pastures as a shepherd leads his sheep. There they will be safe. But He will bring a famine into your land and it will slay those who survived the Assyrian yoke.

³¹Howl and cry for help, you Philistine cities, because a cloud of dust will come down from the north. The Babylonians have defeated the Assyrians and will come and overrun your land. There is not a weak man in their ranks.”

³²What answer should God’s people give to the messengers from Philistia? They should say, “We will not be threatened by you, nor will we seek your help against our enemies. The Lord has established Zion and in Him will God’s people find safety.”

A Prophecy Against Moab

15 This is the message the Lord gave me concerning the future of Moab: The cities of Ar and Kir will be destroyed and brought to silence in a single night. ²The people of Dibon will go up to the high places and into their temples to weep before their gods. They will weep over the cities of Nebo and Medeba. They will shave their heads and beards in grief. ³They will walk the streets in sackcloth and wail in the public square. They will weep aloud from roof tops and prostrate themselves in pain. ⁴The people of Heshbon and Elealeh will cry out

and their voices will be heard all the way to Jahaz. The armed men of Moab will tremble and their hearts will faint.

⁵From what the Lord has shown me, my heart goes out to Moab. Her people have become fugitives and have fled as far as Zoar and Eglath Shelishiyah. Some are fleeing to Luhith, weeping as they go. Others are on the road to Horonaim, grieving over their country’s destruction.

⁶I saw that the waters of Nimrim have dried up, the grass has become like hay and vegetation is withered away; nothing green is left. ⁷The people are crossing the Brook of Willows trying to escape, carrying with them their most precious possessions. ⁸Everywhere along the borders of Moab the wailing of the people can be heard—from as far as Beer Elim and Eglaim. ⁹The Arnon River near Dibon is red with blood. But the Lord will not step in to stop the slaughter. Lions will attack those who escape from the city as well as those who remain in the land.

The End of Moab

16 From the city of Sela in the desert the people of Moab sent a lamb as a sign of tribute to the king of Judah in Jerusalem, which is the daughter of Mount Zion. ²The women of Moab are like fluttering birds driven from their nests as they move aimlessly back and forth along the banks of the Arnon River. ³They say to the people of Judah, “Let us know what you decide. Be fair and just with us. Take us in as refugees and hide us so our enemies can’t find us. Like a tree that casts a friendly shadow and protects people from the heat of the sun, shade us from the heat of war, and let us come and rest in the cool of your land. ⁴Let us stay with you. Protect us from those who want to destroy us.” The people of Moab don’t know this, but the war will end, and the aggressor will leave their land. Destruction will stop and oppression will cease. ⁵The people of Moab don’t know that someday a Descendant from the royal house of David will rule

over all the land. His throne will be a throne of love. In faithfulness He will govern the people and see that justice is done. His scepter will be a scepter of righteousness.

⁶The daughter of Zion answered the people of Moab, "We've heard all about your nation's pride, arrogance and boasting. Now we see that your boasting was only empty threats. We have no strength to protect you or room to take you in." ⁷Then the people of Moab will weep for their country. They will weep as they remember the life they lived and the fine raisin cakes they ate in their cities. They will wail over their misfortune and be driven to despair.

⁸The orchards of Heshbon have been destroyed. The vineyards of Sibmah have been trampled down by the invaders. These vineyards once produced the best of wines. They spread across the countryside as far as the city of Jazer. Their vines extended toward the desert and reached all the way to the Dead Sea. ⁹I weep for the people of Moab as the people of Jazer weep for the vineyards of Sibmah, as the people of Heshbon and Elealeh weep over having no harvest. ¹⁰Joy and gladness are gone from the farmlands. No one sings in the orchards. No one is squeezing the grapes to make wine. The shouts of joy are gone. ¹¹My heart goes out to Moab. My inmost being responds to the woes of the people of Kir Hareseth.

¹²The people of Moab go to their high places of worship. They wear themselves out going through sexual rituals to excite their gods to give them fertile fields. They pray and shout, but there is no answer. ¹³This is what the Lord had said would happen to Moab. ¹⁴Now the Lord says, "In three years' time, the years of a contract worker, Moab's splendor and wealth will be gone. Her people will be despised, and those who survive will be few and feeble."

A Prophecy Against Syria and Israel

17 This is a message from the Lord concerning Syria: "Damascus will be destroyed and become a city of rubble. ²The cities of Syria will be deserted. Sheep and cattle will wander through the streets and no one will be there to drive them away. ³The Northern Kingdom will be left defenseless because no power will come from Damascus to protect her. The Syrians who survive will be as destitute as the people of Israel. I, the Lord, have spoken.

⁴"In that day the wealth of Israel will be gone and her glory will come to an end. The descendants of Jacob will be like a man whose body is sick and wasting away. ⁵Israel will be like a field that has been harvested after the wheat is in the hands of the reapers. It will be as bare as the fields in the Valley of Rephaim after the people glean the fallen heads of grain. ⁶Yet some fallen heads of grain will remain, just as some olives cling to the branches when the tree is shaken, or two or three berries are left on the highest bough after picking, or four or five pieces of fruit still hang on the branches after harvest. I, the Lord, have spoken."

⁷When that day comes, people will turn to their Maker for help. They will look to the Holy One of Israel for protection. ⁸They will no longer go to worship at altars they have built for their gods. They will no longer bow to the wooden pole of Asherah, the mother of harvests, and offer incense to her. ⁹In that day their strong, protected cities will be as deserted and desolate as a wilderness.

¹⁰You have forgotten that the true God is the only one who can save you, the only One who is your Rock and your strong fortress. Instead you make sacred gardens for yourselves, put the statues of your gods there and then worship them. ¹¹Even if you plant your vineyards and your gods could make them grow and bud the same day, they are not able to stop the harvest of grief and pain that's coming your way. ¹²Nations at war

will rush against each other like raging waves of the sea. They will crash like the roaring ocean. ¹³Although powerful armies rush toward each other, crashing together like the waves of the ocean, the Lord will rebuke them, and they will retreat and vanish from the horizon as waves disappear into the sea. Their people will flee into the hills as tumbleweed driven by a strong wind. ¹⁴During the night they will experience sudden terror, and before morning, their armies will be gone. This is what will happen to those who invade our land, take our goods and plunder our people.

A Prophecy Against Ethiopia

18 Woe to the land beyond the rivers where the large-winged locusts live. Woe to the Ethiopians who now rule Egypt. ²You send messengers to Judah and down the Nile in papyrus boats to form an alliance with other countries against Assyria. Your nation is strong and powerful; it is a land divided and watered by rivers. You are an aggressive people, tall and smooth skinned, respected and feared wherever you go.

³Look this way, all you who dwell on the earth! You will see a flag raised on a mountain. You will hear the blast of a ram's horn. ⁴This is the message the Lord has given me: "I have been quietly watching things on earth from my dwelling place in heaven, as quietly as the sun rises in the noonday sky. I will walk through the land at night as quietly as falling dew. ⁵Before the grape harvest, after the blossoms have fallen, while the grapes are ripening, the Lord will cut down the Assyrian forces that have invaded Judah as easily as a sharp knife cuts branches from a vine. ⁶Their troops will fall, and their bodies left to the birds of prey and animals that come down from the mountains. Birds will feed on their bodies all summer, and wild animals will eat what's left all winter."

⁷At that time the Lord will welcome the tall, smooth-skinned people whose

land is divided by rivers who were once feared, an aggressive nation. These people will come to Zion bringing gifts. They will come to worship the Lord, to thank Him for what He has done.

A Prophecy Against Egypt

19 This is the message the Lord gave me concerning the Ethiopians ruling Egypt: "I will visit the land of Egypt, riding on a swiftly moving cloud. The idols in Egypt will tremble before me and the hearts of the Egyptians will melt within them. ²I will bring about a civil war in Egypt. Brother will fight against brother, neighbor against neighbor and city against city, as rivals for the throne struggle for power. ³The Egyptians will lose their enthusiasm for war. Their plans to conquer will be forgotten. They will seek help from their idols and through mediums will consult the spirits of the dead. ⁴I will let a tyrant rule over Egypt; a cruel and fierce king will be their master. I, the Lord, have spoken.

⁵"I will lower the waters of the Nile. They will slowly recede until the riverbed becomes parched and dry. ⁶The waters in the canals will stagnate and soon will begin to stink. Other streams will slowly dry up; reeds and rushes will rot away. ⁷Crops planted along the banks of the Nile will dry up and die and be blown away by the wind. ⁸The fishermen will groan and their families will cry. Their hooks and nets will be useless. ⁹Those who work with flax will despair, and weavers of linen will lose all hope. ¹⁰Garment workers will be sick at heart and wage earners will feel rejected.

¹¹"Their officials are fools. The advice they gave the king makes no sense. How can they say, 'We are wise, the disciples of ancient scholars and students of the history of kings'? ¹²Where is their wisdom? Let them tell the king how to avoid what is coming to Egypt. Let's see what they can do."

¹³The officials in Zoan and Memphis are deceived. They cannot be trusted.

They have led the nation and her people astray. ¹⁴The Lord has confused their thinking so that they reason in circles. They make Egypt dizzy with their advice until she walks like a drunk staggering down the road slipping on his own vomit. ¹⁵There is nothing any of the Egyptians can do to change the Lord's plan against them, whether they're rich or poor, managers or workers.

¹⁶The time is coming when the mighty warriors of Egypt and Ethiopia will be as timid as women in war. Even their best troops will shake with fear when they realize that the Lord has raised His arm against them. ¹⁷The people of Egypt will be terrified at the mention of the name of Judah because they will remember what the God of Israel did to Assyria.

Egypt and Assyria Will Serve the Lord

¹⁸When that time comes, people will gladly learn the language of Canaan. In five of their cities (including Heliopolis, the City of the Sun) they will swear allegiance to the God of Israel. ¹⁹An altar will be built to the Lord in the very heart of Egypt, and monuments will be erected to His glory along its borders. ²⁰These will witness to the fact that people have turned to the Lord for help. When they do this, He will send them a Savior and Defender to deliver them from their enemies. ²¹The Lord will make Himself known to them, and in that day they will accept Him as Lord. They will worship Him and bring their sacrifices and offerings to Him. They will make vows to the Lord and keep them. ²²The Lord will smite Egypt with a plague, but then He will heal them. They will turn to Him, and He will hear their prayers and make them healthy again. ²³When that time comes there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Egyptians will go to Assyria and the Assyrians to Egypt. They will worship the Lord together. ²⁴When that happens, Israel, Assyria and Egypt will be a blessing to the entire world. ²⁵The Lord will say, "Bless you Egypt, you are my

people. Bless you Assyria, you are the work of my hands. Bless you Israel, you are my chosen ones."

A Sign Against Putting Trust in Egypt

20 In the same year that Sargon, king of Assyria, sent the commander of his army to attack the Philistine city of Ashdod, ²the Lord spoke to Isaiah in a vision, saying, "Take off your garment of camel's hair and the sandals you're wearing and walk around barefoot and partially naked." Isaiah did what the Lord told him to do as a sign of shame. ³The Lord spoke through Isaiah to the people, saying, "My servant has gone barefoot and half-naked for parts of three years as a sign of what I will let happen to Egypt and to the Ethiopians who live there. ⁴The Assyrians will invade the upper regions of Egypt and take away many captives, young and old, even those of royal seed. They will lead them away barefoot and partially naked, with uncovered buttocks, shaming them in the eyes of other nations.

⁵"Those who have put their trust in the power of Egypt will be disillusioned and their hopes will be shattered. ⁶In that day the people who live in Judah and along the coast of Philistia will be afraid and will say, 'Look at what happened to Egypt, the one country we depended on to protect us from the Assyrians. If the Egyptians couldn't stand up against them, how can we expect to survive?'"

A Prophecy Against Babylon

21 This is a message about Babylon: Like a whirlwind sweeping through the south, the rulers of Media will come sweeping across the desert striking terror in the hearts of the Babylonian people. ²In vision I saw terrible destruction, filled with cruelty and devastation. I heard the commanders shouting, "Media! Lay siege to the city!" God is about to use the Medes and Persians to put a stop to all the suffering that Babylon has caused. ³What I saw in vision filled my body with pain like that of a woman in prolonged

childbirth. I staggered from what I saw and was bewildered by what I heard. ⁴My heart pounded and I shook with fear. I had looked forward to a quiet evening, but now the coming darkness filled me with terror. ⁵In vision I saw a banquet. Couches were set, and thick rugs were spread out for guests to sit on. I saw them eating and drinking when suddenly I heard a command, "Officers! Get your shields and prepare for battle! It's time for war!"

⁶Then the Lord said to me, "Post a lookout on the walls of Babylon and let him report to you what he sees. ⁷If he sees horsemen coming in pairs and men driving chariots, or if he sees troops of riders on camels and donkeys, let him tell you what he sees. But he should stay fully alert and listen with great care." ⁸In vision I placed a sentry on duty, and he said to me, "Day after day I will stay at my post, and night after night I will listen for the enemy." ⁹Soon I heard him shout, "Look, here come horsemen in pairs and men driving chariots!" Then I looked and heard the riders shout, "Babylon has fallen, has fallen! All of their gods lie broken on the ground!" ¹⁰In vision I saw the people of Babylon crushed like wheat. I knew that what the Lord showed me would bring freedom to our people.

A Prophecy Against Edom

¹¹This is a message the Lord gave me about the country of Edom: Again I was taken off in vision and someone called from the direction of Edom, shouting, "Watchman! What of the night? How much time is left until the morning?" ¹²Then I heard the voice of a watchman, "The morning is coming, but also the night! You can ask me again, but the night for Edom is on its way."

A Prophecy Against Arabia

¹³This is a message from the Lord about Arabia: The people of Dedan are traveling in caravans and camping in the dark. ¹⁴People of Tema, bring water for

the thirsty and food for the refugees. ¹⁵They're fleeing south toward your city. They're fleeing from the swords of the Assyrians, from the drawn sword that kills. They're fleeing from the drawn bows ready to shoot and from the stress of battle. ¹⁶This is what the Lord said to me, "Within one year, according to a contract worker's time, the greatness of the Arabian tribes of Kedar will come to an end. ¹⁷Their bowmen are great warriors, but only a few of them will survive. The Lord, the God of Israel, has spoken."

A Prophecy Against Jerusalem

22 This is a message the Lord gave me about Jerusalem, a city on a hill surrounded by valleys: Why have the people gone up on their flat roofs to celebrate? ²Why is the city so full of excitement and revelry? Why are the people so blind to their danger? Your young men were not killed by the sword, nor did they die in battle. ³All your leaders ran away but they've been captured without using a single arrow. They were caught trying to escape before the enemy was near. ⁴I said, "I want to be alone to weep bitterly over the coming destruction of my people. Don't try to console me; just let me weep."

⁵The Lord has chosen a day of trouble for Jerusalem. Terror and tumult fill the valleys. It is a day of battering down the walls of the city and crying to the mountains for help. ⁶Troops from Elam serving Babylon come riding on horseback and in chariots, armed with bows and arrows. Warriors from Kir have uncovered their shields and are ready for battle. ⁷The fertile valleys of Judah are filled with chariots and troops. Their cavalry rides up to the gates of Jerusalem.

⁸All defenses in Judah have crumbled. You depended on your weapons in the palace arsenal to defend Jerusalem. ⁹You saw places in the walls of the city that needed repair. You decided to store water from the Lower Pool. ¹⁰You inspected all the houses in Jerusalem and

tore some of them down to fortify the city wall. ¹¹You quickly built a reservoir between the old and the new walls for the water from the Old Pool. But in all this, you paid no attention to the Lord your God. You didn't even show respect for the One who could have protected you and stopped all this from happening. But it's too late.

¹²The Lord wanted you to turn to Him for help. He wanted you to weep and mourn, to repent and wear sackcloth. He wanted you to turn from your sins and forsake your gods. ¹³Instead, you had wild parties; you laughed and celebrated. You slaughtered sheep and cattle for your feasts and drank wine to your liking. You said to each other, "Let's eat and drink; by tomorrow we'll be dead." ¹⁴The Lord spoke to me, and this is what He said, "Their sins cannot be forgiven because they are not willing to repent. They will die in their wickedness."

A Message for the Man in Charge of Finances

¹⁵Then the Lord told me to go to see Shebna, the one in charge of the finances of the palace, and give him this message, ¹⁶"What right do you have to take the people's money and do what you're doing? Why are you carving out a tomb for yourself in the mountains? Who gave you permission to build this monument to yourself? ¹⁷You may think that you're a mighty man and deserve to be remembered, but the Lord will pick you up and throw you away as easily as a strong man throws away a stone. ¹⁸He will pick you up like a ball and throw you into a distant country and there you will die. You will die beside the chariots you're so proud of. You're a disgrace to your master's house and to your country."

¹⁹The Lord also said, "I will remove you from office and relieve you of your position. ²⁰On that day, I will send for Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, who will be like me. ²¹I will put your robe and sash on him and give him your authority. He

will serve me and be like a kind father to the people of Jerusalem and Judah. ²²I will give him the key to the royal house of David. What he opens, no one can shut, and what he shuts, no one can open. ²³His words will be like nails in a sure place. He will bring honor and dignity to the throne of David. ²⁴The glory of the royal house of David will return when the people hang on what he says, as vessels and jars in a kitchen hang on pegs. ²⁵But the pegs and nails that the people are now using to hang their hopes on will not hold the weight of their burdens and everything they've depended on will give way. The Lord has spoken."

A Prophecy Against Tyre

23 This is a message the Lord gave me concerning the cities of Tyre and Sidon: Howl with grief, those of you who sail to Tarshish in Spain. Tyre will be destroyed and left without a harbor. When your ships return from Cyprus, they will hear the news. ²Be quiet, you who live in Tyre and you merchants of Sidon, whom the ship captains have enriched. ³You sent men by ship to Egypt and other places to bring back merchandise so your ports could become the marketplace of nations. ⁴Sidon, you are a fortress by the sea, but as a city, you are a disgrace. You should hang your head in shame. The sea and the oceans disown you. They say, "We have not given birth to you. Your people are not our sons and daughters." ⁵When the word reaches Egypt that Tyre has been destroyed, they will be stunned and dismayed.

⁶Weep with grief, you who live along the coast. Escape to Tarshish! Flee to Spain! ⁷Can this be happening to your joyful city, a city founded so long ago? Is this happening to the city that sent settlers across the seas to establish its own colonies? ⁸Who planned this against Tyre, the imperial city, whose merchants are treated like princes and are the most sought after on earth? ⁹The Lord Almighty is the One who planned it. He

needed to bring to an end the pride of Tyre and to humble the traders who are so honored. ¹⁰Till the land as they do by the Nile, you who have settled in Spain. No more ships will come and go from Tyre for her harbor is gone.

¹¹The Lord has stretched His hand over the land and the sea. He has ordered the coast of Phoenicia to be destroyed. ¹²He has said to Sidon, "O daughter of the coast, your happiness has ended. Your people will be crushed. Even if they flee to the island of Cyprus, they will not be safe."

¹³Look to the land of Babylon, to a people now of no account. They will become strong and attack your cities, tear down your fortifications and turn the palaces of Tyre into places for wild animals to live. What the Assyrians began, the Babylonians will finish. ¹⁴Weep, you men of the sea. The city you were so proud of has been destroyed. ¹⁵Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, the lifetime of one king.

At the end of seventy years, Tyre will sing the song of a prostitute: ¹⁶"I will take up my harp and walk through the city. I will not be forgotten. I will play my harp and sing my song and once again men will return to me." ¹⁷When the seventy years are over, the Lord will let Tyre recapture her old trade. Once again she will attract the kingdoms of the world and play the harlot for commercial gain. ¹⁸However, this will not last. Tyre will once more be destroyed and never rise again. But Judah will grow and expand and the trade of Tyre will be used to help the poor. The profits will not be stored or hoarded but will be used to feed and clothe those who serve the Lord.

The Lord Will Punish the Earth

24 Look! The time will come when the Lord will devastate the whole earth and turn it into a wasteland. He will turn it upside down and separate the people. ²It will be the same for everyone—priest and people, master

and slave, mistress and maid, buyer and seller, borrower and lender, debtor and creditor. ³The earth will be totally devastated and its cities will lie in ruins. The Lord has spoken and it will happen.

⁴The earth will dry up and wither. It will grow weak and decay. The exalted ones of this world will be brought low. ⁵The earth is morally polluted. The people have trampled God's law, ignored its teachings and broken the everlasting covenant. ⁶Therefore, a curse will destroy the earth and its people will bear their guilt. The inhabitants of earth will be burned up and few will be saved. ⁷The grapevines will wither and fail to produce wine. Those who were once happy will be no more.

⁸The guitar music will cease, the noise of the revelers will stop, and their drums will be silent. ⁹No longer will they drink and sing; no longer will the beer flow. ¹⁰Cities will lie desolate. People's houses will be no more. ¹¹The streets of the cities will cry out for wine and laughter, but joy will have turned to sorrow and happiness will be gone. ¹²The cities will lie in ruins. Their protective gates will be battered down and will lie splintered in pieces. ¹³This is what will happen all over the world. It will be like the end of the harvest when the olive trees are bare and the fields and vineyards are empty.

¹⁴Those who are saved will shout for joy. From the west voices of praise will come to honor the Lord. ¹⁵In the east they will give glory to God. The islands of the sea will exalt the name of the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. ¹⁶The whole earth will ring with joy and sing, "Glory and honor and power to the One who sits on the throne and to His Righteous One forever and ever."

I cry out in grief over what I have seen. My body is wasting away. Treachery and wickedness will get worse. ¹⁷O people of the earth, listen to me! Nothing but terror awaits you; pits and traps are in your path. ¹⁸Whoever tries to flee from the terror will fall into a pit, and whoever climbs

out of the pit will be caught in a trap. ¹⁹The earth will crack and split open. The whole planet will shake. ²⁰The earth will be as unsteady as a drunkard. It will sway back and forth in space like a straw hut in the wind. The guilt of its people is on it, and its cities will fall, never to rise again. ²¹In that day the Lord will carry out the sentence of death on the fallen angels of heaven and on the kings and people of the earth below. ²²They will be brought together like prisoners in a dungeon until the time of their annihilation comes. ²³When the Lord Almighty reigns as King in Jerusalem, the moon will cover its face and the sun will hide its rays, for the glory of the Lord will flood the city and His people will see His greatness.

A Hymn of Praise

25 O Lord, you are my God! I will exalt you and praise your name! You have done wonderful things. You have faithfully followed your plans, the ones you made so long ago. ²You have turned fortified cities into ruins to save us. These strongholds of our enemies will never be rebuilt. ³Ruthless nations will fear you. Powerful countries will praise and honor you. ⁴You have been a help in time of trouble, a refuge for the poor in time of storm. You have protected the weak during the heat of battle from the blast of the enemy against our walls. ⁵You have stopped the violent attack. You have silenced the shouts of warriors. As the shade of a cloud brings relief from the heat, so you stilled the passions of the ruthless and brought relief.

⁶The Lord Almighty will prepare a banquet on Mount Zion for His people from every nation in the world—a banquet of the finest food and the best of nature's drink. ⁷He will stand on this mountain and remove the cloud of heaviness and sorrow that has been hovering over the earth. ⁸He will destroy the enemy of death forever. He will wipe away all tears from our eyes. He will remove the disgrace His people have suffered through-

out the world from the beginning of time.

⁹In that day people will say, "This is our God! We have waited for Him and He has saved us. This is the Lord! Let us be glad and rejoice because He has rescued us from the evil one." ¹⁰The Lord will reign from Mount Zion and His enemies like those from Moab will be as straw trampled down in a dung pit. ¹¹They will reach out their hands for help as someone who is drowning, but the Lord will not rescue them, and they will withdraw their hands in despair. ¹²He will destroy the cities of all His enemies. He will bring them down to the ground and turn them into dust.

A Song for a New City

26 In that day this song will be sung by God's people in the land of Judah: "We have a new city! We have a strong city! God is our protection and our fortified wall! ²Open the gates and let the faithful of the nations enter, the people of the nations who have remained faithful and done what was right. ³You, our God, will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is centered on you and who puts his trust in you. ⁴Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord Jehovah is an eternal rock, the Rock of all ages. ⁵He humbles those who are high and mighty. He destroys their fortified cities and sends their walls crashing into the dust. ⁶Those who were once oppressed now walk freely on the land; the footsteps of the poor walk on the dust of the cities where they were once held captive. ⁷The Lord makes the way of the just smooth; the path of the righteous is made level."

⁸Isaiah said, "Lord, we long for that day. We want to walk in the way of your laws. We are eager to do your will. The honor of your name is the desire of our hearts because we love you. ⁹During the night our souls long for you, and in the morning our souls search after you. When you come to judge the earth and its people, the world will learn what righteousness is. ¹⁰Though you extend grace

to the wicked and are kind to them, they never seem to learn how important it is to do what's right. Even in a land where justice and righteousness are emphasized, the wicked continue doing evil and disregard your sovereignty and rule.

¹¹“O Lord, they don't seem to know that one day you will call them to account. Let them see your majesty through your people and make them ashamed of their wrongdoing. Let them know that their sins will bring on them the fire that consumes. ¹²Lord, you are the one who brought us peace. Help us to know that whatever has been accomplished, you have done for us. ¹³O Lord our God, others have ruled us besides you, but your rule alone is the one we accept. ¹⁴Those who ruled over us are now dead and will never attack us again. You have destroyed them and we will remember them no more. ¹⁵Lord, you have made us a nation. You have enlarged our country. You have vanquished our enemies. You have restored your honor and glorified your name.

¹⁶“You disciplined your people. Then they came to you in their distress and in anguish cried for help. ¹⁷As a woman cries out in pain when she's about to deliver her child, so we cried out to you, O Lord. ¹⁸We were in agony and pain, but we gave birth to nothing. We have not brought salvation to our land or to the people of the world. ¹⁹But those of your people who have died trusting in you will live again! Those who reside in the dust of the earth will wake up and shout for joy. As the sparkling dew refreshes the earth and brings forth fruit, so the Lord will shower the earth with grace and raise those who have long been dead.”

Hide from the Coming Judgment

²⁰Then Isaiah said to the people, “Go and enter your houses and shut the doors behind you. Hide yourselves for a little while until God's displeasure has passed by. ²¹The Lord is coming from His dwelling place in the heavens to vindicate

His name and to carry out justice. The murders that were committed in secret will be made known. The earth will no longer conceal the bodies of her slain.”

27 Isaiah continued, “In that day the Lord will use His powerful sword to destroy the deadly dragon, that twisting serpent of the sea, called the devil and Satan. ²Then God's people will sing for joy as people rejoice over a vineyard filled with grapes.”

Israel Restored

³The God of Israel says, “I care about my vineyard and will continue to water it. I will watch over it day and night. ⁴I am not angry, but I need to contend with my enemies. I will confront them and march against them in battle. Like briars and thorns that choke out a vineyard, I will set them on fire and destroy them. ⁵But if the enemies of my people come and make peace with me, if they come to me for safety, I will protect them from their enemies as I do Israel.”

⁶In the days to come, Jacob will take root again and Israel will blossom and bud. They will cover the earth with their offspring. ⁷The Lord has not been as hard on Israel as on those who fought against her. She has not suffered as much as the nations who have attacked her. ⁸He has disciplined His people by allowing them to be sent into exile. He has allowed them to be carried away by a strong nation as fallen leaves are blown away by a strong east wind.

⁹Israel will taste the consequences of her sins. She will repent and be forgiven. Her guilt will be removed. The Lord will crush her pagan altars of stone as if they were chalk. All the wooden poles of the goddess Asherah will be destroyed. ¹⁰The fortifications of Jerusalem in which she took such pride will be as nothing. She will be desolate and as empty as a desert. Cattle will graze there and strip the branches bare, then lie down to rest.

¹¹Trees will die and women will come and break off branches to build a fire. This will happen because the people are without understanding. He who made them will discipline them without showing favor or pity.

¹²After that day the Lord will thresh Israel's enemies all the way from the Euphrates in the north to Egypt in the south. He will separate the wheat from the chaff and gather out one by one those who are righteous. ¹³It will be a day of rejoicing and the jubilant sound of trumpets will be heard. Those of Israel who were about to perish in Assyria and Babylon and who were treated as outcasts in Egypt will return home to worship the Lord in Jerusalem on His holy mountain.

God Warns Ephraim and Jerusalem

28 Woe to the drunkards in Samaria. Woe to the people of Israel whose glory and pride is about to fade. Woe to the valleys where the wine flows freely. ²The Lord will permit a nation powerful and strong to attack them. Its troops will approach like a mighty wind followed by a terrible hailstorm. They will sweep into the land like a driving rain followed by a devastating flood. ³That city, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, will be trampled into the ground. ⁴The glory of Samaria will fade like a dying plant. The city will be like a ripe fig that a person eats and it's gone.

⁵The day is coming when the Lord's power will be the glory of His people. It will be like a diadem of beauty for them. The remnant in the land will see it and be glad. ⁶The Lord will give wisdom to him who judges in Jerusalem. He will be a source of strength and courage to all who are left in the land. They will look to the Lord for help, and He will turn back the Assyrians at the city gates. ⁷But even in Judah there are judges and leaders who hand down unfair judgments because of too much wine. Priests and self-appointed prophets claim to have visions and insight, yet

they make strange predictions because they're drunk. ⁸It's like tables covered with vomit without a clean spot left. ⁹"These are the ones who make fun of my prophets," says the Lord. "They say, 'Who is he trying to teach and explain his message to? What he is saying may be good for infants and little children, but not for us.' ¹⁰He's trying to teach us as you teach children, first letter by letter, then single words, finally a sentence or two, followed by a little rule here and a little rule there.' ¹¹If you won't listen to me through my prophets, and if you don't like the way I teach, then I will let foreigners come and take your land and teach you."

¹²The Lord offered to comfort you and give you rest and peace of mind, but you wouldn't listen. His way of teaching was beneath you. ¹³It seemed to you that the Lord was treating you as children because of the pride you take in your own learning. You don't like to be taught letter by letter, line by line, here a little and there a little. You don't like to be told what to do. You will end up being caught in your own trap. You will be captured and taken away.

¹⁴Hear the word of the Lord, you arrogant men who rule Jerusalem. ¹⁵You say, "Each of us has made a covenant with the spirits of the dead. Whatever disasters might hit the country won't touch us." But you are depending on lies for safety and have made falsehood your refuge.

A Tested Cornerstone

¹⁶The Lord Almighty said, "I am making plans to lay in Zion a tested Cornerstone on which to build a solid foundation, and those who put their trust in Him will not be disappointed. ¹⁷I will make truth and justice the measuring line for this foundation, and right-doing will be my plumb-line. Hailstorms will destroy the myths you depend on and floods will sweep away the foundation of lies in which you trusted. ¹⁸Your covenant with the spirits of the dead

means nothing. When disaster hits the country, it will crush you as well. ¹⁹It will strike you again and again. Morning after morning, by day and by night, it will sweep through the land. Your spiritual pride will not protect you.”

If you leaders understood the importance of this message, your pride would disappear and terror would fill your hearts. ²⁰When that day comes, you will be like the man in the proverb who tried to sleep in a bed too short for him and wrap himself in a blanket too narrow for him. ²¹The Lord will rise up against Israel as He rose up against the Philistines in the days of David, or as He did against the Amorites in the days of Joshua when the sun stood still. It will feel strange to Him to do this. It will be alien to His nature, but He will do what He needs to do. ²²So stop mocking His messages, or the ropes of your self-destruction will become even tighter. The Lord Himself, the God of Israel, has told me that destruction is decreed against all the land.

God's Wisdom

²³Now listen to me and pay attention to what I have to say. ²⁴After a farmer plows his field does he keep on plowing it? Does he plant the seeds and then keep on breaking up the soil? ²⁵After he has plowed the ground and smoothed the soil, doesn't he sow the seeds, cover them up and then let God take over? Doesn't he plant wheat in one place, barley in another, oats in still another and then rotate them the following year? ²⁶Who taught him to do this? Doesn't God instruct him and give him the insight he needs?

²⁷A man doesn't use a club to get a tiny seed out of its shell. He doesn't use the wagon wheel and drive over the shell to squeeze the seed out. He uses things of the proper size and shape to do that. ²⁸Once the wheat has been taken from its sheath, it needs to be ground into flour to make bread. The farmer doesn't keep on threshing it forever. He knows how to

use the threshing wheel to gently squeeze the wheat from its hulls. He doesn't throw it on the ground to let the hooves of horses grind it out. ²⁹All wisdom and insight comes from the Lord, who is a wonderful teacher and excellent in wisdom.

Jerusalem Not Without Hope

29 Woe to the city of Jerusalem, the city where David settled. You let the people continue having their pagan festivals undisturbed year after year, ²but the day of disaster will come. There will be weeping and wailing. The whole city will become an altar of sacrifice covered with blood. ³God will allow you to be surrounded, besieged and attacked. Your enemies will encircle you and set up siege works against your walls. ⁴When it's over, your voice will be muffled and weak as if you were speaking from a hole in the ground. Your voice will sound empty and ghostlike as if it were coming up from the grave.

⁵But your enemies will suddenly be gone, like dust blown by the wind. The ruthless will be blown away like straw. ⁶Suddenly the Lord Almighty will step in with thunder and lightning, with an earthquake and great noise and with windstorms and raging fires. ⁷Then all the armies that attacked the city where God's altar is, those armies that besieged her walls and brought such distress, will vanish as a dream in the night. ⁸Those who attacked Jerusalem will be like a starving man who dreams of food, only to wake up and find there is none, or like a thirsty man who dreams he's drinking from a cool spring only to wake up and find that it wasn't true. That's how it will be with all your enemies who dare to fight against Mount Zion to capture it. Their dreams of conquest will not become a lasting reality.

Warnings Unheeded

⁹Go ahead. Close your eyes to what the Lord reveals. Be blind. Get drunk on

your own ideas and trip and fall like a drunkard in the dark groping for light. ¹⁰The Lord has let you fall into a mental sleep. He has not shown your favorite prophets the future, nor has He honored your prophets by giving them visions.

¹¹He will not force you to see and understand truth; to you the visions will be just so many words written in a book. If you asked someone who can read to read it to you, he would say, "I can't make sense out of this." ¹²Or if you asked someone who couldn't read to read it to you, he would say, "I cannot read."

¹³The Lord said, "These people talk a lot about me with their mouths. They honor me with their lips. But their hearts are elsewhere. Their worship is made up of nothing but their own rules which they've memorized. ¹⁴I will shock them with one blow after another. The wisdom of their wise men will turn out to be nothing but wishful thinking, and all their intelligence will be useless.

¹⁵"There are those who go to great lengths to keep their plans secret, who do their work in the dark and tell themselves that no one will see them or know what they're doing. ¹⁶Then there are those who turn every truth upside down and treat the potter as if he's the clay and the clay as if it's the potter. Can the clay say to the potter, 'You're not the one who made me; I made myself?' Can the clay pot say to the man turning it, 'You don't know what you're doing'? Yet this is the way these people act toward me," says the Lord.

A Better Future

¹⁷Is it a small thing to turn all the forests of Lebanon into fields and the fields into forests? The Lord can destroy and He can rebuild, just as the potter can destroy the shape of the clay and then remold it. ¹⁸The day will come when the deaf will hear the word of the Lord, and the blind who have lived in darkness and gloom will be able to see and read. ¹⁹Then the meek will receive fresh joy from the

Lord, and the humble will rejoice in the God of Israel. ²⁰The ruthless will vanish and those who mocked the Lord will disappear. All who had an eye for evil will be destroyed. ²¹This includes those who with a single word declare an innocent man guilty and have him sent to prison, as well as those who pervert the law and protect the criminal who would lie to keep honest men from getting justice.

²²This is what the Lord, the God of Abraham says to the descendants of Jacob: "The time will come when Jacob will no longer be disgraced by such men; no longer will the faces of my people grow pale. ²³When they see their children once again among them, they will know it was my doing and stand in awe of the God of Israel. They will bow down and worship me in gratitude and will honor my name. ²⁴In that day those who erred in spirit will understand, and those who innocently found fault with what I said will be glad to be taught."

Military Aid From Egypt Useless

30 The Lord says, "Woe to those who rule Judah, who rebel against me and carry out plans I didn't make, who add sin to sin by signing treaties I did not approve. ²They go to Egypt for military aid without consulting me. They look to Pharaoh for protection and put their trust in Egypt's strength. ³But Egypt's protection will end in embarrassment, and Pharaoh's promises will bring disaster. ⁴Although your envoys have already arrived in the Egyptian cities of Zoan and Hanes, ⁵the people of Judah will regret they ever put their trust in another nation, in a people who can't really help them and will bring them only shame and disgrace."

⁶The Lord also said, "Your envoys travel south through regions inhabited by lions, poisonous snakes and vultures. They have loaded their camels and donkeys with rich treasures as gifts to Pharaoh and have braved these dangers to go to a nation that will not be able to help them. ⁷The help Egypt will give them

will be totally useless. Therefore, I have named her The Do-Nothing Empire.”

A Stubborn People

⁸The Lord told me to write all this down on a scroll, so in the days ahead the message will stand as a witness against my people’s stubbornness. ⁹Judah has become a rebellious nation, deceitful and unwilling to listen to what the Lord has to say. ¹⁰The people keep saying to me, “We don’t want you to have more visions. We don’t want to hear from you what is right and wrong. We want you to tell us something that’s fun to listen to and makes us feel good.” ¹¹We want you to get out of the way and stop blocking our path. We’re tired of hearing about the Holy One of Israel.” ¹²Therefore, this is what the Holy One of Israel says, “Because you have rejected my instructions and prefer to depend on your political lies and the power of evil nations, ¹³your plans will be like a high wall built for protection which will suddenly crack, bulge and collapse. ¹⁴Your hopes will shatter like a vessel of pottery that’s been hit with a hammer. They will shatter so completely that not one piece of any size will be left. There will not be a big enough piece to scrape up hot coals from a fireplace or to dip up a small amount of water from a pail.”

¹⁵The Lord, the Holy One of Israel, also says, “Your hope of salvation lies in repentance from sin, in changing your ways and in putting your trust in me. In quietness and trust is your strength, but you refuse to trust me. ¹⁶Instead you have made your own plans and are ready to escape from your enemies by using the fastest horses you can find. But the horses of your enemies will be faster. ¹⁷A thousand of you will flee at the sight of one enemy soldier, and at the sight of five, all of you will run. Nothing will be left of your army except the flagpole on top of the mountain and one lone flag fluttering in the breeze.”

God Will Be Gracious and Forgiving

¹⁸Yet the Lord is waiting to be gracious and forgiving to you. He wants to show you His compassion and the love He has for you. The Lord will always do what is right. Blessed are those who put their trust in Him. ¹⁹When the people of Jerusalem cry for help, the Lord will answer. They will stop crying because the Lord will hear them and be gracious to them and comfort them. He will hear and answer their prayers. ²⁰Although the Lord will discipline you, and you endure hard times and affliction, He will be beside you all the way. You will listen to His prophets and understand His teachings. ²¹If you start turning to the right or to the left you will hear a still, small voice saying, “Over here is the way; walk in it.” ²²Of your own free will you’ll take your idols that are overlaid with silver or gold and throw them away like a used menstruous cloth.

²³The Lord will send rain for your seed when you sow your land. He will make your crops grow and give you a rich and bountiful harvest. Your meadows will be lush, and your cattle will graze there in peace. ²⁴You will give shovels full of fodder to the oxen and donkeys that plow your fields. ²⁵Streams of life-giving water will flow down every mountain and hill. God will defeat your enemies. He will break down their strong towers of defense and you will be victorious over those who were against you. ²⁶When the Lord’s plan of restoration is complete, the moon will be as bright as the sun, and the sun will give seven times more light, like the light of seven days. The Lord will bind up the wounds of His people and heal those who are bruised.

God Will Punish Assyria

²⁷The power of the Lord will be seen from afar. His presence is a burning fire. He carries a heavy burden of concern for His people. When He speaks, His word is a consuming fire. ²⁸His breath is like a roaring stream that floods everything in its path. He shakes nations as women

shake flour through a sieve. He puts a bit in the mouths of the wicked.

²⁹His people will sing when the Lord speaks. They will celebrate and be happy when the Lord takes action. The hearts of His people will rejoice with flutes as they come to the mountain of the Lord, to the Temple of the God of Israel, to the Rock of their salvation. ³⁰The Lord will cause His majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of His mighty right arm to be seen. There will be thunder, fire and hail. ³¹The voice of the Lord will shatter the power of Assyria, and with His glorious scepter He will strike them down. ³²Every stroke of punishment by the Lord will keep time with the music of tambourines and harps. The Lord Himself will battle the Assyrians and fight against them with His own right arm. ³³The place of burning in the Valley of Hinnom is already there, waiting for the king of Assyria. The valley is deep and wide with an abundance of fire and wood, and the breath of the Lord will set it ablaze.

The Foolishness of Trusting Egypt's Might

31 Those who go down to Egypt for help against the Assyrians, who rely on Egypt's military might, on their horses and chariots, but who don't look to the Holy One of Israel for help, are doomed. ²The Lord is wise. He knows just what to do. He will discipline by permitting disaster and will not change His mind. He will rise up against the wicked, against all those who do evil. ³The Egyptians are only human beings, not God. Their horses are flesh, not spirit. When the Lord stretches out His arm, those nations who help and those who need help will perish together.

God Will Protect Jerusalem

⁴This is the message that the Lord gave me: Just as a great lion growls to protect his catch against a band of shepherds and is not frightened by their

shouts, so the Lord is not frightened by the taunts of nations, but will come down to protect Mount Zion and go to battle for it. ⁵The Lord will hover over Jerusalem as a bird hovers over its nest to protect it. He will pass over it and deliver it.

⁶"Return to me," says the Lord. "Return, you who have rebelled against me, and I will forgive and protect you. ⁷Return to me and throw away your idols overlaid with silver or gold which you have made with your own hands.

⁸"The Assyrians will fall, but not by a human sword. They will be destroyed, but not by a sword made by mortal hands. The battle-hardened troops will flee, and the young and inexperienced will be caught and put to forced labor. ⁹Their king will hear the news and be terror-stricken. The commanding officers will panic and leave their flags lying in the field." This is the message the Lord gave me. He whose presence in Zion is a living fire and whose word is a fiery furnace about Jerusalem is the One who spoke to me.

The Righteous King Will Reign

32 According to the Lord's plan, the day will come when the Righteous King will reign in Jerusalem, and the governors serving under Him will rule with justice. ²The King will be a shelter from the wind, a place to hide in the time of storm. He will be a stream of water in the desert and a mighty Rock for shade in a hot and thirsty land. ³The eyes of those who saw things dimly will be opened. The ears of those who could not hear what was said will be unplugged. ⁴Those who were rash will have sound judgment, and those who stammered will speak clearly and distinctly. ⁵No longer will the fool be honored and called noble, nor will the scoundrel be treated with respect. ⁶The fool speaks folly and plots ways to practice ungodliness. He utters nonsense concerning the Lord. He refuses to feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty. ⁷The scoundrel is no better.

His ways are wicked. He's constantly coming up with new scams to take advantage of the poor and to rob the needy. ⁸But the man who is noble plans to do noble things and stands by his deeds. He lives honorably and treats others justly and with respect.

Warnings Against Complacency

⁹You women who have no worries and are complacent, listen to me. You daughters who love your carefree lives, hear what I have to say. ¹⁰In little more than a year your carefree lives will be gone. The grape harvest will fail and the fruit harvest will not come. ¹¹You need to be concerned and tremble over what is coming. Strip off your finery and put sackcloth around your waists. ¹²Shed tears and beat your breasts in anguish, for pleasant fields and fruitful vines will be no longer. ¹³Weep for your land because it will soon be filled with thorns and briars. Mourn for the joyous houses and the jubilant city. ¹⁴Your country's fortifications will be empty and your cities deserted. Wild donkeys will roam the city, and sheep will find pasture by the empty houses and watchtowers which once guarded your city.

Security and Safety Forever

¹⁵But the Lord will once more pour out the Holy Spirit on His people and blessings on the land. The dry place will become a fertile field, and the fruitful field with standing grain will look like a forest. ¹⁶Justice will return, and righteousness will stretch from the deserts in the east to the mountains to the west. ¹⁷The fruit of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever. ¹⁸God's people will live in peaceful places and their homes will be secure and safe. ¹⁹Though hail has flattened your vineyards and forests, and your houses and cities were destroyed, ²⁰the Lord will return and pour out His Spirit on His people and blessings on the land.

His people will be able to sow next to every stream, and the ox and donkey will roam free.

A Prayer of Distress

33 Woe to Assyria whose armies boast of their power to destroy. Woe to the traitors in Israel who have not yet been caught. Soon you will stop destroying and will be destroyed. Soon you will stop betraying and will be betrayed.

²O Lord, be gracious to us. We long for you. Be our strength every morning and save us in times of trouble. ³At the sound of your voice, people will flee; when you stand up, the nations will scatter. ⁴The wealth of our enemies will be taken from them as if eaten by locusts. ⁵The Lord is mighty, for He rules the whole universe. He will fill Israel with righteousness and justice. ⁶He will be our sure foundation, our redemption and our source of wisdom and knowledge. Loyalty to the Lord is our greatest treasure.

⁷Our envoys and ambassadors who tried so hard to bring about peace and stabilize the nation will weep bitterly. Our brave men will call for help. ⁸Our highways will be deserted; no one will travel. Treaties will be ignored and agreements broken. Witnesses will be despised; no one will be respected. ⁹The fields will lie idle and be deserted. The forests of Lebanon will wither, and the Valley of Sharon will be like a desert. In Bashan and on Mount Carmel, trees will drop their leaves.

Warning to the Sinners in Zion

¹⁰But the Lord says to our enemies, "I will yet be exalted. I will yet bring honor to my name. ¹¹Your plans are meaningless. They will go up in smoke. Whatever you do will burn up as chaff in the fire. ¹²Your armies will crumble like rocks ground up to make lime. You will burn like thornbushes that have been set ablaze. ¹³Everyone far and near will hear what I have done and will acknowledge my power."

¹⁴Lord, the sinners in Zion are finally afraid; terror has gripped the goddess. They say, "Who can live in the midst of a devouring fire and survive? Who can live in the sight of God and not be consumed?" ¹⁵But those who do what is right, who don't use their positions of power to take advantage of the poor, who refuse to be bribed, who don't close their eyes to murder and who don't join those who are plotting evil, ¹⁶they will be kept by the power of God. Their refuge will be the fortresses of the mountains. Their bread will be supplied and their water will be sure.

The Righteous King

¹⁷They will see the Lord, the righteous King, in all His beauty. They will see Him rule over a land that stretches in all directions, a kingdom that takes in the whole world. This is the Lord's plan for Israel. ¹⁸They will look around and say, "Where are the officers? Where are the foreign troops?" ¹⁹In that day you will not see any foreign armies occupying your country, nor any tax collectors coming to collect your taxes, speaking a language you can't understand. ²⁰Zion will once more be filled with festivals, and Jerusalem will be at peace. The land will be transformed and will be as secure as a tent whose stakes can't be pulled up and whose ropes can't be cut. ²¹The Lord will show us His glory. The land will be a place of broad rivers and streams. No oceans with sailing ships will be there with men in slave galleys pulling the oars. ²²The Lord will be the judge. The Lord will be the lawgiver. The Lord will be our king. He will rule over us for He is the One who saved us.

²³No enemy ships will be there securing their masts or spreading their sails. No one will plunder and loot, and there will be an abundance in the land. Everything will be divided fairly. ²⁴No one will say, "I'm sick." And the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven.

Judgment on the Nations of Earth

34 Come and listen, all you nations of earth. Come and pay attention, all you people. Let the earth and everyone in it hear what the Lord has to say. ²The Lord is displeased. The time is coming when He will show His displeasure with all nations. He has doomed them and given them over for slaughter. ³Their bodies will not be buried, but will lie there rotting, and the ground will be soaked with their blood. ⁴The stars of heaven will not give their light, and the sky will be rolled up as a scroll. The stars will fall like dead leaves from a vine or withered figs shaken from the tree by a mighty wind.

⁵The Lord has already prepared His sword. It will come upon the land of Edom whose people have displeased Him. ⁶The sword of the Lord will be covered with blood as the sword of the priest is covered with the blood of lambs and goats. He will bring just such a slaughter to Bozrah and to the land of Edom. ⁷The people will be slaughtered by the enemy like cattle. The earth will be soaked with their blood and with the blood of wild oxen and prize bulls they kept for sacrificing to their gods.

⁸The Lord will uphold the cause of Zion. There will come a time of retribution which will fall on all her enemies. ⁹The rivers of Edom will look as if they have turned into pitch, as if her dust has become sulphur, because the whole land will be ablaze and will burn like a furnace. ¹⁰The fire will not go out. It will burn day and night. Its smoke will rise up until all is consumed. The land will be a wasteland and no one will travel there again. ¹¹Owls and ravens will take over because the Lord has measured the land of Edom with His plumb-line and found it crooked. ¹²No king will ever again rule over the land. Her nobles and princes are gone. ¹³Thorns will overrun her strongholds and jackals will roam through her city streets. Her palaces and buildings will become the habitation of owls. ¹⁴Desert

creatures and hyenas will be there, and wild goats will climb over the rubble. The night creatures will come there to find rest.

¹⁵Owls will build their nests in her cities. They will lay their eggs, hatch them and raise their young there. Vultures will make their home there, each with its mate. ¹⁶Search the Book of the Lord and read what it says. The Spirit of the Lord will carry out His word and bring the animals together. Not one will be without its mate, and they will fill the land with their offspring. ¹⁷It is the Lord who orders them to come and fill the land and the ruined cities, giving each animal its share. They will live there year after year.

The Glory of the New Land

35 The time will come when the wilderness and the solitary place will be glad and the desert will blossom as a rose. This is God's plan for Israel and for the whole world. ²The desert will sing and shout for joy. The earth will be covered with the majesty of the cedars of Lebanon, the splendor of Mount Carmel and the beauty of the plains of Sharon. Everyone will see the glory of the Lord and the splendor of our God.

³It's time to strengthen the feeble hands and steady the weak knees. ⁴Say to those of fearful hearts, "Be strong! Don't be afraid! Our God will come and save us. He will come with power and glory and will destroy our enemies."

⁵He will open the eyes of the blind and unstop the ears of the deaf. ⁶The lame will leap like a deer and the dumb will shout for joy. Water will break forth in the wilderness and streams will flow in the desert. ⁷The hot sands will bubble with water and the thirsty ground will be filled with lakes. Where the jackals once lived, grass and bushes will grow.

⁸Also a broad highway will be there, called The Highway of Holiness. Sinners will not travel on it because they will not be there. It's only for those who have

walked in His way. No one will ever go astray again. ⁹No lion or any other ravenous beast will be stalking to kill. No ferocious beasts will be there, but the re-deemed will be, and they will be safe. ¹⁰The ransomed of the Lord will come home with singing. They will enter Zion with shouts of joy. Their heads will be crowned with gladness, and sorrow and sighing will be gone forever.

The Assyrians Invade Judah

36 In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, took his army and invaded the land of Judah. He came against all the fortified cities and captured them. ²Then he sent a large military force from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem to demand a full surrender. The commander in charge stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool on the road that leads to Washerman's field. ³Three Judean officials came out to meet him. They were: Eliakim, palace administrator; Shebna, the royal secretary; and Joah, the royal recorder in charge of the archives.

⁴The commander said to the Judean officials, "The king of Assyria wants to know what makes Hezekiah so confident that he can stand up against the Assyrian army? ⁵Do you think your words of confidence can take the place of strategy and military strength? On whom do you depend who makes you think you can rebel against Assyria? ⁶Are you leaning on the flattery of so-called friends and expecting Egypt to come to help you? Egypt is like a splintered walking stick. If you lean on it too hard, it will break and pierce your hand. ⁷Or will you tell me that you're depending on the Lord your God? Didn't Hezekiah order the Lord's altars throughout the land destroyed? Didn't he tell the people of Judah to bring their sacrifices only to the one altar in Jerusalem? How can he shortchange the Lord and then go ask Him for help? ⁸Come, I'll make you an offer to see where your confidence is. I'll give you two thousand horses if you can

find that many fighting men to ride them. ⁹If you don't have that many fighting men, how do you expect to repulse an Assyrian attack? It shows how weak you are when you have to depend on Egypt to help you with horses and chariots. ¹⁰Besides, I haven't come to attack you just for the fun of it. It was your God who said that we should come against Israel and destroy it, which we did. Now we're in Judah."

¹¹Then Eliakim, Shebna and Joah said, "Please speak in Aramaic. We understand it. Don't talk in Hebrew, because the people sitting on the wall can hear what you're saying." ¹²The commander said, "I wasn't sent just to speak to you and your king, but also to the people. Those sitting on the wall need to know that if you resist and we conquer you, we will make you and your people eat your own dung and drink your own urine."

¹³Then the commander shouted loudly in Hebrew, "Listen, people! Hear the words of the great king of Assyria! ¹⁴This is what the great king says: 'Don't let King Hezekiah deceive you! He can't save you! ¹⁵Don't let him tell you that your God will stop the Assyrian army from conquering your city when He hasn't done it for any of your other cities! ¹⁶Don't listen to Hezekiah! The king of Assyria is asking you to come out and surrender. Then every one of you will eat from his own vine and fig tree and drink water from his own well ¹⁷until the king can resettle you in a land much like your own, with vineyards for wine and rich wheat for making bread. ¹⁸Don't let Hezekiah mislead you by saying that the Lord will deliver you. Has any god been able to deliver his people from the hand of the king of Assyria and from the hand of our god? ¹⁹Where are the gods who were supposed to protect the cities of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods who were supposed to defend the city of Sepharvaim? Did your God protect Samaria, the capital of Israel? ²⁰Who of all the gods of these cities and countries

has been able to save his people from our king? Then what makes you think that your God can save Jerusalem?'"

²¹But the people who sat on the wall were silent. They didn't answer the Assyrian because King Hezekiah had told them not to. ²²Then Eliakim, Shebna and Joah tore their robes in grief and went and told Hezekiah what the Assyrian had said.

God Promises Deliverance

37 When Hezekiah heard the report, he tore his robe, put on sackcloth and went to the Temple to pray. ²He sent Eliakim, the one in charge of the palace; Shebna, the royal secretary; and the senior priests, all wearing sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet. ³They said to him, "This is what King Hezekiah wants you to know: Today is a day of distress and shame. Judah is like a woman who is having a baby but is just too weak to deliver it. ⁴The king of Assyria sent his field commander to demand a surrender. In the process he insulted and ridiculed the living God as if He were a regional god our people had decided to make their own. The Lord our God has heard all this. So pray that those who are still loyal to God will survive."

⁵When Isaiah heard this, he sent this message back to Hezekiah: ⁶"Tell the king this is what the Lord, the God of Jacob, says: 'Don't be afraid of the Assyrians or be troubled at the words of their commander. Don't listen to his threats or believe that the Lord cannot save you. The king of Assyria has publicly challenged me and I will respond. ⁷I will cause him to hear of a plot back home to take his throne. He will return to his own land and there he will die by the sword.'"

The Assyrian Threat and Hezekiah's Prayer

⁸That same day the field commander got a report that the king of Assyria had left Lachish and gone to fight against the city of Libnah. So he went there to consult with him. ⁹While Sennacherib heard

that the Egyptian army under Tirhakah, the Ethiopian ruler of Egypt, was coming to help Judah, he decided to stop him at the city of Libnah. He also decided to have part of his army quickly conquer Jerusalem and then come and help him fight the Egyptians. So he sent his field commander back to Jerusalem with this letter: ¹⁰“To King Hezekiah from the king of Assyria: Don’t let your God whom you depend on fool you into believing that He will deliver Jerusalem and not let it fall into my hands. ¹¹I’m sure you’ve heard what the Assyrian army has done to all the other cities which have resisted me and how I destroyed them. Do you think that somehow this won’t happen to you? Did the gods of these cities deliver them? ¹²My predecessors destroyed such powerful cities as Gozan, Haran, Rezeph and the people of Betheden in Telassar. ¹³What happened to the kings of Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah who stood up against me?”

¹⁴When Hezekiah received the king of Assyria’s letter from the field commander and read it, he took it to the Temple and spread it before the Lord. ¹⁵Then Hezekiah prayed, ¹⁶“O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, seated between the cherubim, you alone are the living God and the ruler of all the kingdoms on earth. ¹⁷Listen, O Lord. Give ear and hear. Open your eyes and see. Listen to the things Sennacherib is saying. He’s insulting you in front of all the people. ¹⁸It’s true, O Lord; the Assyrians have conquered all the cities and countries that he mentioned. ¹⁹They have destroyed these cities and thrown their gods into the fire, but only because those gods were not real. They were nothing but wood and stone. ²⁰O Lord God, deliver us from the hands of Sennacherib. Vindicate your name so all kingdoms will know that you alone are the living God, the God of Israel.”

God Answers Hezekiah’s Prayer

²¹Then the Lord gave Isaiah the prophet this message for Hezekiah: “This

is what the Lord God of Israel says: Because you have prayed to me and asked me for help, ²²this is my response to the king of Assyria: Jerusalem, the virgin daughter of Zion, is scorning you. She is tossing her head in laughter as you turn and run from her. ²³Whom have you insulted? Whom did you challenge and raise your voice against? You have used your field commander to defy the Holy One of Israel. ²⁴Through your field commander you have insulted the God of Israel. You boast about how with your chariots you have conquered the heights of Lebanon, how your troops have penetrated the deepest forests and cut down the tallest cedars and choicest cypress trees. ²⁵You boast about how you have dug wells and tasted the water of many lands and how the marching feet of your troops will dry up all the rivers of Egypt.

²⁶“Haven’t you heard? Don’t you know that you could not have done all this without my permission? Long ago I planned for you to do this for me. You’ve conquered the fortified cities and turned them into piles of rubble, but only because I gave you the power to do so. ²⁷The people who still live there are now helpless. They are as weak as young plants in the field, as wilted as new grass scorched by the summer sun.

²⁸“I know what you’ve done, where you’re camped and what your plans are. I know your rage against the city of Jerusalem and against me. ²⁹I have heard your insults, and your arrogance has not gone unnoticed. I will accept your challenge. I will come and put a hook in your nose and a bit in your mouth and lead you back the way you came.”

³⁰Isaiah said, “This is the word of the Lord to Hezekiah and his people: This year you will eat what grows in the field of itself. Next year you will eat what springs from that. But the third year your fields and vineyards will produce a rich harvest, and your people will eat what they have grown. ³¹Those who are left in the land will survive the Assyrian inva-

sion and will once again take root and flourish. ³²Jerusalem will survive and in Judah a remnant will be left. The Lord will not let His people be destroyed.

³³"The Lord your God is giving you this promise: The king of Assyria will not enter this city nor will he shoot one arrow against it. He will not surround it nor will he build a ramp against its walls. ³⁴He and his troops will return home by the same way they came. He will not set foot in this city. I, the Lord, have spoken. ³⁵I will defend this city and save it for my sake and for the sake of my servant David."

The Assyrians Defeated

³⁶Then the angel of the Lord went out that night and struck down one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrian troops. The next morning, when the people of Jerusalem got up, the Assyrian army lay dead. ³⁷When the news about this disaster reached Sennacherib, he withdrew the rest of his forces from the city of Libnah in Judah and returned home to Ninevah. ³⁸Later, as he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his own sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer, killed him with their swords and escaped to the land of Ararat. So Esarhaddon, another son, became king in his father's place.

Hezekiah's Sickness

38 About the time Sennacherib first invaded Judah, Hezekiah got sick and was at the point of death. Isaiah the prophet went to see him and said, "This is the message the Lord gave me for you: Put your affairs in order, because you will die. You will not recover." ²Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, ³"O Lord, remember how I walked with you? Remember how I faithfully followed you with all my heart and soul, and how I tried to do what was right? Please hear my prayer and heal me." And Hezekiah began to cry. ⁴The Lord spoke to Isaiah before he got out of the palace courtyard and said, ⁵"Go back and tell Hezekiah that this is what the

Lord, the God of his ancestor David, says, 'I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I have decided to heal you and add fifteen years to your life. ⁶I will continue to protect this city and defend it against the Assyrians. ⁷I will give you a sign to let you know you can depend on my word. ⁸I will make the long shadow cast by the setting sun shorten by ten steps on the stairway that Ahaz built.'"

⁹Then Hezekiah, king of Judah, recovered from his illness. After he did, this is what he wrote: ¹⁰"I said to myself, 'Do I have to go through the gates of death in the prime of life and be robbed of the rest of my years? ¹¹Will I no longer live with those I love? Will I no longer enjoy my friends or see the hand of the Lord in the land of the living?' ¹²Like a shepherd's tent my life was being pulled down and taken from me. It was being cut off as a piece of cloth is cut from the loom. I knew I would die. ¹³All through the night I cried. I felt as if all my bones had been broken. I knew that God was ending my life.

¹⁴"My voice became weak. I moaned until daylight. My eyes grew dim as I looked at the starry heavens. I cried and asked the Lord to help me. ¹⁵What can I say? The Lord has done it! He has healed me! I will walk humbly before Him the rest of my life and will never forget what He has done for me.

¹⁶"'Lord, I promise to live for you and you alone. My spirit will find life in your service. You have restored me to health and let me live. ¹⁷You have turned my suffering and bitterness into good. You have forgiven my anger, and in love you have healed me. You have put all my sins behind your back. ¹⁸In the grave I won't be able to speak to you. When I die I can't sing praises to you. Those who go down to the pit can no longer place their trust in your faithfulness as they did when they were alive. ¹⁹Only the living can praise you as I praise you today. Only a living father can tell his children how faithful you are.' ²⁰The Lord has healed

me. I will play the harp and sing to Him. I will go to the Temple and praise Him all the days of my life.”

²¹Isaiah the prophet had told Hezekiah to show his faith in the Lord’s healing power by making a paste of figs and putting it on his boil. Hezekiah obeyed and the Lord healed him. ²²Before this, Hezekiah had asked for a sign to know whether or not he would ever worship the Lord in the Temple again. The Lord gave him a sign that people everywhere could see and know that the God of Israel is the God of heaven and earth.

The Babylonian Delegation

39 About this same time, Merodach-Baladan, the king of Babylon who had been driven into exile because of his resistance against the occupation of his country by the Assyrians, heard about Hezekiah’s victory over Sennacherib and also how his God had healed him. So he wrote a letter to Hezekiah and sent envoys to him with a gift congratulating him on his victory and on his recovery. ²Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and felt honored that they had come to see him. He showed them the riches of Jerusalem, the storerooms full of silver and gold, spices and fine oils, as well as all the military hardware in his armory. There was nothing in his palace or in his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them. But he did not tell them about his God and what He had done for him in answer to prayer. ³After the envoys left, the prophet Isaiah went to see Hezekiah and asked, “Where did those men come from and what did they say?” The king answered, “They represented the exiled king of Babylon and spoke very kindly to me.” ⁴Isaiah asked, “What did they see and what did you show them?” Hezekiah said, “I showed them everything. There’s nothing that I didn’t show them.”

⁵Then Isaiah said, “Listen to what the Lord says: ⁶‘The time will come when the Babylonians will rise up and conquer the Assyrians, and then they will come and

attack Jerusalem. They will not respect me as the God who shortened the shadow on the stairway, but will remember everything you showed them and will carry all the treasures of Jerusalem back to Babylon. Nothing will be left. ⁷Also, your descendants, your own flesh and blood, will be taken captive and carried away to become eunuchs to serve in the palace of the king of Babylon.’” ⁸Hezekiah listened sadly, but he was relieved that all this would happen in the future. He said to Isaiah, “The word of the Lord is good. There will be peace and safety in my days.”

God Comforts His People

40 “Comfort, comfort my people,” says our God. ²“Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and tell her what the future holds. Her years of captivity are at an end. Her sins have been forgiven. She has felt the just discipline of the Lord.”

³Then Isaiah prophesied, “The time will come when a voice from the wilderness will cry out, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord! Make a highway in the desert for our God! ⁴Raise the valleys! Lower the mountains! Turn the hill country into level ground! Make the rough roads smooth!’ ⁵The glory of the Lord will be revealed and all the people will see it! The Lord Himself has promised it!”

⁶A voice said to me, “Cry aloud! Proclaim the message!” I said, “What is the message?” The voice said, “Men are like grass and their glory is like the flowers of the field. ⁷Grass withers and flowers fade when a hot wind from the Lord blows over them. Men are no different. They fade away and are no more. ⁸Grass withers and flowers fade, but the word of our Lord will stand forever.

⁹“Go up on a high mountain and proclaim good news to Jerusalem! Call out with a loud voice and announce good news to Zion! Speak up! Don’t be afraid! Give the people of Judah the word of the Lord! Say to them, ‘Your God will come!’ ¹⁰The Lord will come and rule with

power. He will bring His reward with Him to give to each as he has done. ¹¹The Lord cares for His people as a good shepherd cares for his sheep. He carries the lambs in His arms and holds them close to His heart. He gently leads the sheep who are with young."

¹²Who understands how the Lord can control oceans simply by the wave of His hand? Who knows how He controls the heavens? The Lord holds this planet in His hand as easily as a man holds a cup. He weighs mountains as easily as a man weighs a stone. ¹³Who can understand the mind of the Lord or who can update Him on the latest knowledge? ¹⁴To whom has the Lord gone to be enlightened? Who taught Him the right thing to do? Who gave the Lord knowledge or showed Him the way to go? ¹⁵Whole nations are like a drop in a bucket to the Lord. To Him their weight is no more than a speck of dust on a scale. The Lord is all powerful. To Him islands are no more than the finest dust. ¹⁶All the animals in the forests of Lebanon are not sufficient to sacrifice to our God to honor Him. Its trees are too few for all the altars that should be lighted to praise His name. ¹⁷To Him, the greatest nation is nothing, and all the nations together are less than nothing.

¹⁸To whom should we compare our God? What god can we compare Him to? ¹⁹He's not like an idol that a craftsman makes from metal, which the goldsmith overlays with gold and sets on a base made of silver. ²⁰The man who can't afford silver or gold makes his idol from wood that will not rot. He finds a craftsman who will make it so it will stand up and not fall down.

²¹Do you people not know? Have you not heard? Weren't you told long before this? Haven't you heard how the world began? ²²God sits enthroned above the circle of the earth and to Him the people look like ants. He stretches out the sky above them like a piece of blue cloth and spreads it out like a huge tent for them to

live in. ²³He brings down powerful kings and reduces rulers to nothing.

²⁴No sooner are they planted and rooted than He sends a wind and they shrivel up. He sends a whirlwind and they blow away. ²⁵The Lord says, "To whom will you compare me? Who is equal to me?" ²⁶Look up to the heavens. Who created the universe and all the stars you see? Who guides them through space and calls them all by name? His power and mighty strength are so great, not one of them gets lost. ²⁷Why do you people complain? Why do you say, "The Lord doesn't notice us—He doesn't care about us and our troubles?"

²⁸Don't you know that the Lord our God is the everlasting One? Haven't you heard that He always was and always will be? He's the Creator of the universe! He never gets tired. He never gets weary. His understanding has no limits. ²⁹He gives strength to those who are weak and energy to those who are weary. ³⁰Even young men become weak and stumble and fall. ³¹But those who wait for the Lord and go to Him for help will have their strength renewed. They will soar like eagles. They will run and not be weary. They will walk and not faint.

God Assures Israel of Help

41 The Lord God said, "Be quiet and listen to me, all you lands! Get up your courage, come forward and speak. Present your case before the court of the universe and let's see who is right.

²"Who raised up Cyrus and gave him victory over other nations? Who called him to subdue other kings? Who gave Babylon into his hand? Who gave him strength to make nations bite the dust and be blown away as straw? ³Who conquered them and helped Cyrus move fearlessly forward into places where he had never gone before? ⁴Who made this happen? Who decided that history should take this turn? It was I, the Lord—the first and the last. I am He!"

⁵The coastal lands have seen the Lord

at work and fear Him. The people of distant lands tremble when they hear His name. So they decided to pull together. ⁶Each helps the other and says to his brother, "Be strong and take courage!" ⁷The craftsman encourages the goldsmith, and he who holds the metal helps him who hammers out the idol. He says, "That's good! It's now ready for the fire!" Then they make a base for the idol to keep it from falling. They think their idols will save them.

⁸The Lord says, "You, O Israel, are my servants and I am your God. You are the descendants of Jacob whom I have chosen and the children of Abraham, my friend. ⁹I was the One who called you. I brought you out of Egypt. I said to you, 'You are my people.' I have chosen you. I have not rejected you. ¹⁰So don't be afraid. I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will hold you up with the right hand of my righteousness. I will send Cyrus to deliver you.

¹¹"The nations which depend on their idols and rage against you will be put to shame. They will be dumbfounded at your strength. Those who oppose you will be as nothing. They will perish. ¹²You will look for them and not find them. Your enemies will be as nothing at all. ¹³I am the Lord your God. I will strengthen you and hold your hand, so do not be afraid."

¹⁴The Lord says, "Don't fear, my children. I will help you. I myself, the Holy One of Israel, your Redeemer and Savior, will come and help you. ¹⁵I will make you as powerful as a threshing sledge with sharp new teeth. You will crush mountains of difficulty and turn the hills into chaff. ¹⁶You will toss them as dust in the air, and the wind will come and blow them away. You will rejoice in the Lord and glory in the Holy One of Israel.

¹⁷"When my people need water and there is none, when their throats are dry from thirst, I will answer their prayers and will come and help them. I will not

forsake them. ¹⁸I will make rivers flow down the hills and springs bubble up in the valleys. I will turn deserts into pools of water and dry ground into flowing springs. ¹⁹I will make cedars, acacias, myrtles and olive trees grow in the desert. I will make forests of pine, juniper and cypress grow in the wilderness. ²⁰People will see all this and know that I, the Lord, have done it, that the Holy One of Israel has made it happen."

God's Challenge to False Gods

²¹The Lord, the King of Israel, says to the nations, "Present your case. Let me hear your arguments. ²²Bring on your gods and let them tell us the future. Let them predict what will happen. Let them explain to us the meaning of the events of the past so we can know the outcome. ²³Let them tell us what the future holds and describe to us things to come so that we can know that they are real gods. Bring on your idols, and let them do something, good or bad, so we can see it and be filled with joy or fear. ²⁴But your idols can't move. They can't even see. And yet you worship them. That's an abomination.

²⁵"I have chosen a man from the east named Cyrus. He will attack from the north. He will trample on rulers as on mud. He will do it as a potter treads on clay. ²⁶Which one of the idols you worship predicted that this would happen? When it happens, who can say that he was the one who was right? Not one of them said a word about this; not one of them foretold it. ²⁷I was the first One to say it, to break the news to you. I sent a messenger to Zion to say to Jerusalem, 'Your people will soon be coming back from Babylon. They'll soon be coming home.'

²⁸"I looked, but your gods had nothing to say; not one of them said a word. Not one of them answered my questions. ²⁹All of your gods are useless. They can't do anything. Their images confuse your thinking and are nothing but hot air."

The Lord's Servant

42 The Lord said, "Behold my Servant, the One whom I uphold, my Chosen One in whom I delight. When He comes I will put my Spirit on Him, and He will bring justice to the nations. ²He will not shout, nor will He raise His voice. He will not give rousing speeches in the streets. ³He will be careful not to cut off one bruised branch or to blow out the flickering flame. In faithfulness He will bring forth justice and equity for all. ⁴He will not lose hope or courage, nor will He give up until He has established justice throughout the world. Even the islands will accept His law."

⁵This is what the God of Israel says, the One who created the heavens and stretched out the universe, who made the earth and everything in it, who gives life to all people and breath to those who walk here: ⁶"I, the God of heaven and earth, have called you to be my Servant, to come and live out my righteousness. Day by day I will take you by the hand and guide you. Through you I will confirm my covenant for all people. Through you I will bring light to all nations. ⁷You will open the eyes of the blind. You will set free those who are in prison. ⁸I am the Lord; that is my name. I will not give my glory to anyone else. I will not let gods and images share my praise. ⁹The things that I've predicted have come to pass and what I'm now predicting will take place. Before things happen, I will tell you."

A Song of Praise

¹⁰So let's sing a new song to the Lord! Let's sing His praise to all the world! Praise Him you who sail the seas! Sing, you distant lands and all who live there! ¹¹Let the desert and its towns praise God. Let all the settlements of Kedar praise His name. Let those who live in cities like Sela shout for joy. Let the mountains echo with songs of praise. ¹²Let those who live in distant lands give glory to God and praise His name.

¹³The Lord will soon march forth like a mighty warrior full of zeal. He will eagerly sound the battle cry and triumph over His enemies.

The Lord Promises to Help

¹⁴The Lord God says, "I have kept quiet for a long time. I have been silent and held back. But now I cry out like a woman in childbirth, ready to deliver. I will act. ¹⁵I will turn the mountains and hills of the enemy into wasteland. I will dry up their vegetation, their grass and trees. I will turn their coastal lands into deserts and dry up their pools of water. ¹⁶I will lead the blind along roads they have not known and guide them along paths that are new to them. I will turn their darkness into light and make the rough spots smooth. This is what I will do for them. I will not forsake them. ¹⁷But those who continue to place their trust in idols, who turn what their own hands have made into gods, will find only humiliation and disgrace."

¹⁸The Lord says, "Listen to me, you who are deaf. Look at me, you who are blind. Listen and look so you can hear and see! ¹⁹Is anyone more blind than my Servant? Is anyone more deaf than my Messenger? Who is as blind as the One fully committed to me? Who is as deaf as the One who serves me with all His heart? ²⁰He sees many things, but pays no attention to them. His ears are open to many sounds, but He does not hear them. ²¹I, the God of Israel, will be pleased with His righteousness, for He will concentrate on the law to magnify it and make it honorable.

²²"My people have been robbed and plundered. They have been trapped in caves and locked up in prisons. They have become a prey with no one to help them. They have been plundered with no one to restore them."

²³Who is listening? Who is paying attention to what the Lord is saying? ²⁴Who has permitted Israel to become a prey? Who let Jacob be plundered? Was it not

the Lord against whom you sinned? You did not follow in His ways. You did not obey His law. ²⁵So He has allowed us to feel His displeasure through the violence of war. All Israel was engulfed in flames, yet you did not understand. The fires of war consumed you but you did not take what happened to heart.

God Will Redeem His Own

43 Listen, Israel! This is what the Lord says, the One who created you, the One who made you a people: “Don’t be afraid. I have redeemed you. I have named you. You are mine! ²When you walk through deep waters, I will be with you. When you pass through swollen rivers, they will not flow over you. When you walk through fire, you will not be burned, neither will the flames harm you. ³I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I will let Cyrus conquer Egypt, Ethiopia and Seba, but he shall set you free. ⁴Because you are precious in my sight and I love you, I will defeat entire armies to protect you. I’m willing to trade nations in exchange for your lives. ⁵So don’t be afraid. I am with you. I will bring your children home from distant parts of the East and from the West. ⁶I will tell the North to let them go and the South to give them up. I will bring your sons and daughters home from wherever they are, from the ends of the earth. ⁷You are my people. I created you. I called you out for my glory.”

⁸The God of Israel says, “Bring on those who have eyes, but can’t see, who have ears, but don’t hear. ⁹Tell me, out of all the nations, which gods can predict the future? Which of them can tell what will happen next? Let them bring in their witnesses and their evidence to prove that their predictions were right and that their words are trustworthy. ¹⁰O Israel, you are my witnesses, my evidence to the nations. You are my servant, the one I have chosen. I want you to believe in me and trust me. I want you to know that I

am the only God and there is no other—either before me or after me. ¹¹I am the Lord, and other than me, there is no one to save you. ¹²I told you ahead of time what would happen. When you needed me, I came to your rescue. No other god has done this. You are my witnesses that I am God. ¹³I have been God since the beginning. No one can change what I have decided to do. When I take action, who can stop me and deliver from my hand?”

¹⁴This is what the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, says, “To save you, I will send an army against Babylon. I will break her pride and destroy that in which she puts her trust. ¹⁵I am the Lord your God. I am your Creator, your King.” ¹⁶This is what the Lord says, the One who made a path for you through the Red Sea, who made a way for you through the deep waters, ¹⁷who destroyed the mighty Egyptian army with its horses and chariots, who snuffed them out like the flame of a candle: ¹⁸“Don’t just think of what I have done in the past and focus on what happened then. ¹⁹Watch for the new thing I’m going to do. It’s already beginning to happen. Can’t you see it? I will make a road through the wilderness and give you streams in the desert. ²⁰Wild animals, jackals and owls honor me for giving them water in the desert. I give water to my people. ²¹They are grateful for what I do for them and sing my praise.”

Pleading With His People

²²The Lord says, “You have not called on me, nor have you searched for me. You have become tired of me. ²³I did not demand that you bring me sacrifices and offer incense until you were tired. In fact, you have not worshiped me, nor have you honored me with heartfelt offerings, ²⁴nor did you freely bring me the best of your animals. You brought me sins instead of offerings and tired me with your endless wickedness.

²⁵“Yet I am willing to forgive you your sins because of who I am. I will blot out your transgressions and remember them

no more. ²⁶Let's argue your case in court. Let's review your past. Prove to me that you are innocent. ²⁷Your ancestors sinned. Your teachers transgressed. ²⁸Your leaders profaned my Sanctuary. Therefore, I allowed destruction to come on the land and let my own people be shamed."

God's Chosen People

44 The Lord says, "Listen to me, Jacob, my servant. You are my people. I have chosen you to be mine. ²¹I am the Lord who created you, who formed you in the womb. I will help you. Don't be afraid. You are my servant, my chosen people whom I love. ³¹I will give water to the thirsty land and make streams flow on the dry ground. I will pour out my Spirit on your children and my blessings on your offspring. ⁴They will spring up and grow like well-watered grass in a meadow, like willows next to flowing streams. ⁵One will say, 'I belong to the Lord.' Another will say, 'I am joining the Lord's people, and now I'm an Israelite.' Each one will write the sign of the Master on his hand and will become part of God's family."

There Is No Other God

⁶This is what the Lord, Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord God Almighty, says, "I am the first and the last; there is no other God but me. ⁷Who is like me? Let him speak up! Who could have told all that would happen from the beginning of time to the end? If there is such a one, let him make his claim and tell us what will happen. ⁸My people, don't be afraid. From ancient times I have told you what would happen, and it has come to pass. You are my witnesses. Is there any god beside me who can do this? I have never heard of one. There is no other Rock; no, not one."

Idolatry Ridiculed

⁹All those idols that people manufacture and worship are worthless. The

gods they make for themselves are useless, and those who worship them are blind. They are ignorant to their own shame. ¹⁰What good does it do to make a metal image to a god that doesn't exist and then to worship it? ¹¹Everyone who worships idols will be sadly disappointed. Those who manufacture these gods are only men, nothing more. Let them come and stand up for their gods. They will only suffer shame and defeat.

¹²Yet, how committed these men are! They work together and encourage each other. The metalworker takes a piece of metal and works with it in the coals. Then he pulls it out of the fire and with his strong arm swings a hammer and pounds it into shape. As he works, he gets hungry and thirsty and weak, but his idol can't help him. ¹³The carpenter does similarly. He measures the wood and makes an outline with a marker. He carves it out with his tools and makes it into the shape of a man in his glory and strength. Then he takes it and stands it up in his house. ¹⁴He gets his idol from a tree. From the forest he cuts down a cedar or an oak, or maybe a cypress. He planted a pine and the rain made it grow. This is how he gets his god. ¹⁵Men cut down trees, use part of the wood to warm themselves and another part for making an idol. With one part a man builds a fire to bake bread, and with another part he makes a god. ¹⁶With some of the wood he makes a fire to roast meat. He eats the meat and his hunger is satisfied. With another part of the wood he builds a fire to warm himself and says, "This is great! How relaxing it is to sit in front of a fire!" ¹⁷Then with the rest of the wood he makes an idol and worships it. He even prays to it, "You are my god. Protect me and save me."

¹⁸Such people don't understand what they're doing. Their eyes are shut so they cannot see. Their minds are closed so they cannot understand. ¹⁹The maker of idols doesn't stop to think or to say, "Wait a minute! Half the wood I used for

fuel. I used some of it for baking bread and roasting meat which I ate. Why should I make a dumb idol out of the rest of it? Why should I worship a block of wood? What am I doing?" ²⁰To bow down to a wooden god makes as much sense as eating ashes. Such worship leads a man to the point where he's beyond help. He can't untangle himself from this strange fascination by seeing what he's doing to himself. He can't seem to say, "Isn't this thing I'm holding in my hand a lie? It's actually controlling me!"

Israel, the Lord's Servant

²¹The Lord says, "Remember, O Israel, you are my servant and not someone else's. I have chosen you to be my servant and mine alone. I will never forget you or forsake you. ²²I have swept away your sins like a cloud; like a morning mist they are all gone. Come back to me, for I am the One who saved you." ²³Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has spoken. Shout for joy, you mountains and forests and trees, for the Lord has shown His love by saving His people and displayed His glory through the sons of Israel.

²⁴This is what the Lord your Redeemer, the One who formed you in the womb, says, "I am the Lord who made all things. I stretched out the heavens and made the earth, and no one was there to help me. ²⁵I frustrate the plans of false prophets and turn fortune-tellers into fools. I turn the words of the wise into foolishness and show their knowledge to be nonsense. ²⁶But when my servants make predictions, when I send my servants to prophesy and my messengers to tell you my plans, those plans will be carried out and those prophecies will come true. When I tell Jerusalem that people will live there again and that the cities of Judah will be rebuilt, it will happen. ²⁷I will say to the streams of Babylon, 'Dry up!' And they will dry up. ²⁸I will speak to Cyrus, the one whom I have chosen, and say to him, 'You are my shepherd and will carry out my plans.'

Then he will speak to Jerusalem for me and say, 'Your people will come back home and rebuild you. Your own people will lay the foundations of the Temple.'

Cyrus, God's Instrument

45 This is what the Lord said to Cyrus, "I have chosen you to be King of Persia. I will help you subdue nations and strip kings of their power. I will open city gates for you so when you arrive with your troops, the gates will not be shut. ²¹I will go before you and prepare the way. I will break down the gates of brass and cut through the iron bars. ³¹I will give you treasures hidden in darkness and riches stored in secret places. You will know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who has called you by your name. ⁴¹I have chosen you to help my people Israel. I have called you and honored you even though you haven't known me. ⁵¹I am the Lord and there is no other God beside me. I will help you and give you the strength you need even though you don't acknowledge me as your God. ⁶¹I'm doing this so that everyone from the East to the West will know that I am the Lord and that there is no other God beside me. ⁷¹I created light and darkness. I can bring peace and calamity. I, the Lord of heaven and earth, do all these things.

⁸¹I will send righteousness from above like rain. I will shower the earth with my salvation. Let the people of the earth open their hearts to receive it. Let righteousness and justice grow. I, the Lord, will do so. ⁹¹Woe to you who argue with your Maker. You are only a piece of pottery. Does a clay vessel argue with him who shapes it? Does the clay say, 'What are you doing to me?' Does a vessel accuse its maker of poor workmanship? ¹⁰¹Woe to him who blames his father for giving him life, who says to him, 'Why did you have me?' or to his mother, 'Why did you give birth to me?'

¹¹¹This is what the Lord, the One who shapes the future, says, "Do you think you have a right to question me about my chil-

dren or to tell me how I ought to train and discipline them? ¹²I am the One who created the earth and everything on it. I stretched out the heavens; the sun, moon and stars are under my command. ¹³I am the One who stirred up Cyrus and called him to carry out my righteous acts. I will make his paths straight. He will set my people free and help them rebuild my Temple in my own city. No one will pay or reward him to do this.”

The Only God and Savior

¹⁴This is what the Lord says to Israel, “The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of the Upper Nile will flow into your land, and the tall men of Seba will come and serve you. They will bow down at your borders and say, ‘Surely the God of heaven is with you. He alone is God and there is no other.’” ¹⁵Truly, the God of Israel loves His people and saves them. He is the God who cannot be seen because He hides Himself. ¹⁶All the makers of idols will be disgraced and shamed by the God of Israel whom they cannot see. ¹⁷Israel will be saved by the Lord and her salvation will be forever. She will not continue to be disgraced or remain ashamed.

¹⁸This is what the Lord says, the One who is God, the One who created the heavens, who formed the earth, furnished it and made it to be inhabited: “I am the Lord, and there is no other. ¹⁹Though I have not let you see me, I have not been silent. I have not spoken in secret nor have I kept my purpose hidden. I didn’t hide myself and then ask my people to go searching for me. I didn’t ask them to look for me in some desolate place to see if they could find me. I am the Lord who speaks the truth and decides what is right.”

²⁰The Lord says, “Come together, you survivors of nations, who worship idols, who carry around little gods of wood, who pray to gods who can’t save. ²¹Tell me, who foretold all this? Who predicted long ago what would happen to you? Was it not the Lord? No one else can do this.

Apart from me, there is no other god. I am the only God and Savior. No one is righteous but me. ²²Turn to me, all you of the earth, and be saved. I am God. There is no other. ²³I have taken an oath and sworn by my own name that I will end the captivity of my people. My promise is true and will not change. The time will come when every knee will bow before me and every tongue will confess that I am God and there is none else.

²⁴“They will say, ‘The Lord alone is righteous and powerful.’ All who became angry with the Lord will be ashamed. ²⁵But the Lord will rescue the descendants of Jacob, all those who love Him and put their trust in Him. They will be declared righteous and will burst forth in praise.”

Idols Are Lifeless

46 The Lord says, “The end has come for the idol gods of Bel and Nebo. People carry them or load them on their weary animals as they go into captivity. ²The animals bend low with their heavy loads. Bel and Nebo are unable to ease their burdens and are themselves carried away as prisoners.

³“Listen to me, O house of Jacob, and you who are left from the house of Israel. I cared for you when you were still in the womb, and I have carried you in my arms since you were born. ⁴I am your God and will take care of you until you’re old and your hair is gray. I am the One who made you and will continue to carry you. I will help you and rescue you. ⁵To whom will you compare me? Who is equal to me? Is there anyone else like I am? ⁶People open their pockets and purses and give their gold and silver to make a god. They hire a goldsmith to make it, and then they bow down and worship it. ⁷They pick it up, put in on their shoulder, carry it wherever they want to, set it down and it stays there. It can’t move from there. Yet people put their trust in it. They cry for help, but it doesn’t answer. They cry to be saved, but it can’t come to their res-

cue. ⁸Remember what I just said and take it to heart. Fix it in your minds so you won't forget it.

⁹"Don't forget what happened long ago. I am still God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is no one like me. ¹⁰I see the end from the beginning, and from ancient times I have known what would happen. I will do what I please and my plans will not fail. ¹¹I will call a man from the East to carry out my plan. He will come from a far-off land like a bird of prey. What I said is true. What I purposed will take place.

¹²"Listen to me, you willful people. Listen to me, those of you who think that your salvation is far away. ¹³The day of your salvation and the end of your captivity is near. My triumph over Babylon will not be delayed; it will come on time. I will free you from your captivity. I will save Jerusalem. I will bring honor and glory to Israel."

The Humiliation of Babylon

47 The Lord says, "Come and sit on the ground, virgin daughter of Babylon. Come down from your throne, lady of Babylon, and sit in the dust. You were once a virgin, a city unconquered, but you are no longer tender and delicate. You will be sold and become a slave. ²They will say to you, 'Turn that millstone! Grind that flour! Strip off your finery! Hoist those skirts! Cross those streams!' ³People will see you naked and humbled and shamed. I will take action against you. I will allow you to be taken captive. I will not spare you." ⁴Hear, O Israel. The Lord is our Redeemer, the One who will turn our captivity and set us free. He is the Lord Almighty, the Holy One of Israel.

⁵The Lord says, "Sit in silence and hide in the darkness, daughter of Babylon. For you will no longer be called the Queen of Nations. ⁶I was displeased with my people and let them be treated as if they were no longer mine. I gave them into your hand, but you

showed them no mercy. Even the old ones were treated harshly. ⁷You said, 'I am a queen forever!' You didn't give any thought to what you were doing nor did you reflect on what might happen to you.

⁸"Now listen, daughter of Babylon, you have given yourself to pleasure and bathed yourself in security. You have said to yourself, 'I am queen and there is no one like me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of my children.' ⁹But in a moment, in a single day, you will become a widow and lose your children. It will come on you in full measure like a sudden storm, in spite of all your sorceries.

¹⁰"You felt so sure of yourself in your wickedness. You thought that no one could hold you accountable. But your own wisdom and knowledge misguided you and led you to say to yourself, 'I am like the God of heaven. There is no one like me. There is no one as powerful as I am.' ¹¹But disaster will come on you in one day and none of your sorceries will be able to stop it. National ruin will come to you quicker than you can imagine, which you can't foresee.

¹²"Keep on practicing magic and sorceries which you've depended on since you were young. Maybe they will help you terrorize your enemies. ¹³But it won't really work. You're powerless in spite of all the advice you get from your astrologers and stargazers who map out the heavens and make their monthly predictions. Let them save you from what is coming.

¹⁴"Their advice is like straw thrown on a fire. They can't even save themselves. The fire that will sweep through the land will not be a fire that you sit by to warm yourself. ¹⁵You've consulted these astrologers all your life, but what good will they be to you? They will forsake you and each one will go his own way. Even if they stayed by you, not one of them could save you."

Only God Knows the Future

48 Now hear what I have to say, O house of Jacob. You who are descendants of Judah, listen to me. You take oaths in the name of the Lord. You invoke help from the God of Israel. You worship the God of Jacob. But you are not being honest because you don't mean a word you say. ²You call yourselves citizens of God's holy city and tell others that you depend on Israel's God, on the Lord who is mighty.

³But this is what the Lord says to Israel, "Long ago I predicted what would take place. I announced it through my servants the prophets; then I acted, and it happened as I said it would. ⁴I knew you would be stubborn and resist me. I knew you would stiffen your neck until it became as unyielding as iron. I knew you would make up your mind and set your forehead until it became as solid as brass. ⁵I told you these things long ago before they took place. I did this so you couldn't say, 'My idols made this happen!' Or, 'My wooden images and metal gods did this to me!' No, you did this to yourself.

⁶"Everything that I told you would happen has happened. You have to admit that my predictions were right. Now let me tell you of some new things that will happen, things you have not known about. ⁷Let me tell you the new plans I've made. Nothing like this has happened before. So you can't say, 'We already knew about this because it happened before.' ⁸Your ears have always been plugged up. That's why you never heard what I was saying. You have always been rebellious. I could never trust your loyalty.

⁹"For the sake of my reputation I will defer my justice and not cut you off. For the sake of my promise I will be patient and not destroy you in anger. ¹⁰I have tested you in the furnace of affliction and refined you as silver through captivity. ¹¹What I have done, I have done for my name's sake, so no one can say that the God of Israel winks at sin. I will not be

misunderstood any more, nor will I let my name be dishonored any longer. I will not give my responsibility to another or share my glory with someone else."

God Chooses Cyrus to Free Israel

¹²The Lord says, "Listen to me, Israel! Listen to me, sons of Jacob! I Am the I Am! I am God! I am the beginning and the end. I am always present. ¹³With my own hands I laid the foundations of the earth. With my right hand I spread out the universe. When I call to the creatures of earth or sky, they listen. They come at once and present themselves to me.

¹⁴"So listen to me! None of your idols could have told you about the man Cyrus whom I have chosen to conquer Babylon and set you free. But he will do it because I have chosen him to do it. ¹⁵I have called him; I have spoken to him, and he will succeed. ¹⁶Come close and listen to what I have to say. From the beginning I have never spoken in secret, but always openly. What I said would happen, I made happen." Then the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord gave me strength to deliver another message and to do so with power.

¹⁷This is what the Lord, the Holy One of Israel said, "I am the Lord your God, the One who teaches you what is right, who directs you in the way you should go. ¹⁸If you had only listened to me and paid attention to what I told you, your peace would have been like the gentle flow of still waters and your righteousness as powerful as the waves of the sea. ¹⁹Your descendants would have been as numberless as the grains of sand on the seashore, and I would have protected them to make sure they would not be attacked or destroyed."

²⁰The Lord will discipline you, but He will also set you free. You will be taken captive, but the time will come when you will go out from Babylon. Israel will rejoice in the Lord. They will proclaim their freedom with shouts of joy! Send this message to the ends of the earth, "The Lord has saved His people and set them

free!" ²¹When the Lord brought you out of Egypt and led you through the wilderness, He didn't let you die of thirst. He split the rock, and water gushed out for you and your children. ²²But the Lord said, "I will not provide safety for sinners to continue their sinning."

God's Servant, the Light of the World

49 Listen, all you people, all you nations who live far away. Listen to the One who is speaking! He says, "Before I was born, God called me to be His Servant and appointed me to be His Messenger. ²He made my words like a sharp sword. With His own hand He protected me. He made me into a polished arrow and put me into His quiver. ³He said to me, 'You are the embodiment of new Israel. You are my Servant through whom I will display my splendor.' ⁴Then I said, 'I worked hard, but accomplished little. I spent my strength, seemingly for nothing. The God of Israel will defend my cause and decide what my work is worth.'

⁵"The Spirit of God formed me in the womb. The God of Israel appointed me to be His Servant and chose me to bring salvation to Israel and the tribes of Jacob back to Him. He is the One who gives me strength to do it. ⁶He said to me, 'I have a great task for you. You will restore the people of Israel to greatness and bring to me those who have asked for help. Also, I will make you a light to the Gentiles to bring salvation to all nations.'"

⁷This is what the God of Israel says of His Holy One, "Once you were despised and hated by men and despised by rulers. But the time will come when kings will see you and rise to their feet. Princes will bow down to honor you. This is because I, the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, have chosen you to be my Servant."

⁸This is what the Lord says, "In the time of my favor I will hear your prayers for my people. In that day of salvation I will help you. I will protect you. Through you, I will fulfill my covenant for all people. I will restore the land and give them their inheri-

tance. ⁹Say to the captives for me, 'Go free!' and to those in darkness, 'Come out into the light!' The people will come out and I will feed them along the way. They will be my sheep and I will lead them to green pastures. ¹⁰They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun in any way harm them. He who is full of compassion will guide them and lead them beside springs of cool water. ¹¹I will make a way for them across the mountains and make a safe road for them to travel on. ¹²My people will come from far away. Some will come from the north, some from the west and some from the land of Aswan in Egypt where they had fled." ¹³Sing, O heavens! Shout for joy, O earth! Let the mountains burst forth in praise! The Lord comforts His people and shows mercy to His afflicted ones.

Engraved on the Palms of God

¹⁴But the people say, "The Lord has forgotten us. He has abandoned us." ¹⁵The Lord says to His people, "Can a woman forget the baby she feeds at her breast? Will she not have compassion for the new life that has come from her womb? Yes, it's possible that she may forget or abandon her offspring, but I will never forget or abandon you. You are mine. ¹⁶O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how can I forget you? I have engraved your name on the palms of my hands. You are always in my thoughts. How can I forget you? ¹⁷Your sons and daughters will return from captivity and rebuild you. Those who destroyed you will be gone. ¹⁸Lift up your eyes, Jerusalem, and look around you. Your sons and daughters are coming home! As surely as I live, you will see them and wear them like jewels, as a bride wears her wedding dress.

¹⁹"You were attacked, ruined and made desolate by your enemies. Your land was laid waste. But after your captivity your country will be too small for you and for all those coming to live there. And those people who destroyed you and left your cities in ruins will be gone forever.

²⁰When those born in captivity come home, they will say, "This country is too small for us. We need more room!" ²¹Then you will say, "Who bore all these sons and daughters for me? I was ruined and had lost all my children. I was taken captive and driven away. I felt like a widow who had been left all alone. So where did all these children of mine come from? Who bore them and brought them up?"

²²This is what the Sovereign Lord says to His people, "I will speak to the nations. I will lift up my hand and give the signal to the Gentiles to bring your children home. They will carry your sons and daughters in their arms and on their shoulders and bring them back to you. ²³Kings will be like fathers to you and queens like mothers. They will bow down before you and honor you. They will humble themselves before you and treat you with the greatest respect. Then you will know that I am the Lord and that those who put their hope in me and wait for my help will not be disappointed."

²⁴Listen, O Israel! Can loot be taken from soldiers, or captives be taken from warriors, without a fight? ²⁵Yet this is what the Lord says, "Yes, captives will be taken from warriors, loot will be taken from soldiers without a fight, and your children will come home. I will contend with him who is against you, and I will save your children. ²⁶Your enemies will turn on each other. They will be drunk with rage and kill their own kind. Then all the world will know that I am your Savior and King, that I am your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel."

The Lord's Servant

50 This is what the Lord says, "Did I send my people into exile to forget them? Did I send them away as an uncaring husband who divorces his wife, who feels no responsibility for her welfare? Which of my creditors forced me to sell my people to pay off my debt? It was because of your sins that I allowed you to be taken into captivity away from your

homeland. ²When I came to you, why didn't you respond? When I called, why didn't you answer me? Was I too weak to save you? Did I lack the strength to rescue you from your enemies? I can dry up the sea by just speaking to it. I can turn rivers into deserts and all the fish will die. ³I can make the sky turn black as if it were mourning for the dead."

⁴The Lord's Servant says, "The Sovereign God has taught me what to say to make the weak strong and to help those who are weary. He wakens me morning by morning and helps me to listen to Him like an eager student. ⁵He has given me understanding and insight. He has opened my ears and I have not rebelled, neither have I turned away from Him. ⁶I offered my back to those who beat me, my face to those who plucked out my beard. I did not retaliate, nor did I stop those who spit on me and insulted me. He will not let me be disgraced and shamed forever.

⁷"The God of Israel will help me and strengthen me. I have set my face like an arrow toward a target. I have chosen to follow the God of heaven, and He will not let me be put to shame forever. ⁸God is near me. He will vindicate me and show that I am innocent. Who will bring charges against me? Who is ready to accuse me of sin? Let him come and confront me. ⁹The God of heaven is my judge. He is the One who defends me. Who will come to accuse me, to prove me guilty? All those who accuse me will disappear and be no more. They will vanish like a garment eaten by moths."

¹⁰Where are those among you who will reverence the Lord and obey His Servant? If there are such, let them put their faith in the Lord. The way may be dark and there may be no light, but let them place their confidence in the God of Jacob. ¹¹But you want to light your own fire and provide your own light. Go ahead, walk in the light of your own doing, in the light of the torches you have lit. Just remember that you will suf-

fer the consequences of your doings.

The Lord Comforts Jerusalem

51 The Lord says, "Listen to me, you who want to do right and who come to me for help. Look back to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were dug.² Think of your father Abraham and your mother Sarah who gave you birth. When I called Abraham, he was childless, but I blessed him, and through Sarah he became many.³ Just as surely I will comfort Jerusalem and have compassion on those who live in her ruins. I will make the deserts of Judah like Eden, her wasteland like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her; thanksgiving and the sound of praise will be heard.

⁴Listen to me, my people, listen to what I have to say. My law will go out to the nations and my justice will become their light.⁵ My deliverance is drawing near. My salvation is on its way. My arm will bring about justice. The islands will look to me for help and wait in hope for me to save them.⁶ Look at the heavens above and look at the earth below. Someday the heavens as you know them will disappear. They will vanish like smoke; the earth will wear out like a garment; its inhabitants will die like flies. But my salvation will be forever and my righteousness will never fail.

⁷"Listen to me, those of you who know what is right, you who have my law in your hearts. Don't be afraid of what people say about you. Don't be hurt by their insults.⁸ The time will come when your enemies will be eaten by worms as moths eat old garments and get into wool. But my power to save will last forever, and my deliverance will extend to all generations."

⁹Awake, Lord, put on your strength. Awake, as in the days of old, as in generations past. It was you who triumphed over Egypt and over Rahab, that symbolic monster of evil.¹⁰ It was you who

dried up the Red Sea. It was you who made a path through the deep waters so those whom you freed could safely cross over and come to Canaan.¹¹ That's how things will be again. The redeemed of the Lord will return to Jerusalem with singing. Everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness will overwhelm them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

¹²The Lord says, "I am the One who strengthens and comforts you. Why should you be afraid? The sons of men who are against you are nothing but grass.¹³ Have you forgotten your Creator who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth? Why should you live in constant terror of those who wish to destroy you? Their fury cannot touch you.¹⁴ The captives will be set free. They will no longer die in a foreign land, nor will they lack bread.¹⁵ I am the Lord your God. I can churn up the sea until it roars. I am the Lord Almighty.¹⁶ I have shared with you my words and covered you with the shadow of my hand. I, who stretched out the universe and laid the foundations of the earth, I am saying to Jerusalem, 'You are my people.'"

Israel's Captivity Will End

¹⁷Awake, Jerusalem! Rouse yourself! Stand up on your feet! You have drunk the cup of displeasure which the Lord has given you to drink. You have emptied the cup and it made you stagger.¹⁸ Of all your sons there was not one to steady you, to keep you from falling, to lead you in the way. Not one of your sons took you by the hand to help you.¹⁹ Double calamities have come upon you. Your land was devastated by war and wasted by famine. No one was there to comfort you.²⁰ At every street corner your people collapsed from weakness. Your sons fainted and were like deer caught in a hunter's net. They tasted the Lord's displeasure, the rebuke of the God of Israel.

²¹Therefore, listen to me, those of you who are afflicted, those of you who are drunk with sorrow and stagger in pain.

²²This is what the Sovereign Lord, the One who pleads your cause, says, "I will take away the distasteful cup of captivity that I gave you to drink, the cup that made you stagger and fall. You will not be made to drink that cup again. ²³I will put that cup into the hands of your enemies, those who oppressed you, who made you lie face down in the streets and then walked on your bodies as if you were nothing but dirt."

God Will Redeem Jerusalem

52 Awake, Jerusalem! You will become strong again. You will dress in your beautiful garments. The heathen will never again enter your gates to take you captive. ²Get up from the dust and sit on your throne. Shake free from the chains around your neck, you captives from Zion, and return home.

³This is what the Lord says, "You were taken captive and sold for nothing. You were redeemed without money and set free without price." ⁴The Lord also says, "At first my people went to live in Egypt and became slaves. Then Assyria oppressed my people living in the northern kingdom of Israel, took them away by force and paid nothing for them. ⁵Now Babylon has done the same thing to those of you in the southern kingdom of Judah. They took you captive and paid nothing for you. Every day these rulers blaspheme my name and treat me with contempt. ⁶But my people will know me. They will yet acknowledge that I told them beforehand what would transpire. Yes, I am the One who foretold it and allowed it to happen."

⁷How beautiful is the sight of messengers coming across the mountains bringing good news! How good to hear news of deliverance, the proclamation of salvation and the announcement, "God is King!" ⁸The sentinels will shout for joy. The people will break out in singing. With their own eyes they will see the Lord as He returns to Zion. ⁹Break out in singing, you ruins of Jerusalem! The Lord is com-

ing to rescue His people and bring comfort to His city. ¹⁰The Lord will return with power. He will save His people in the sight of all nations. The ends of the earth will see the salvation of the Lord.

¹¹Leave! Leave! Get out of Babylon! Do not defile yourselves with any unclean thing. Especially those of you who will be carrying the vessels of the Temple of the Lord. ¹²This time you will not have to leave in a hurry or flee from an army as you did when you came out of Egypt. The Lord will go with you and be your rear guard. He will protect you from all those who want to attack you and harm you.

¹³The Lord says, "My Servant will come to you. He will complete His task. Then He will return to me and be lifted up and His name will be exalted above every other name. ¹⁴Many people will be shocked when they see Him hanging on a cross. His appearance will be disfigured beyond that of any man, and His form will be marred beyond human likeness. ¹⁵But He will startle the nations when they see Him coming again. Kings and rulers will be speechless, in awe of His glory. They will see some things never before told and understand some things never before heard."

The Sin-bearing Servant

53 Who has believed our message? Who has seen the Lord's hand in all this? ²It was the will of God that His Servant grow up like a tender plant rooted in dry ground. He had no outward beauty to make us notice Him. There was nothing in His appearance to make us admire Him. ³He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. We turned our backs on Him and ignored Him as if He had no value. He was despised, and we took no pity on Him.

⁴He willingly bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we thought He was smitten by God, afflicted and rejected by the God of Israel. ⁵He was pierced for our sins; He was crushed for our iniquities;

the punishment and pain that made us whole was placed on Him, and by His wounds we are healed. ⁶All of us like sheep have gone astray. We have each gone our own way. Yet the Lord laid on Him all our iniquities.

⁷He was oppressed and afflicted. He was mistreated and falsely accused, yet He bore it all without saying a thing. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep stands silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. ⁸He was unjustly arrested, judged and led away to die. Who can point to His descendants? He was cut off from the land of the living and nailed to the wood for all who deserved to die. ⁹He was buried without honor as if He were a sinner. A rich man donated a grave for Him. He had done nothing violent, neither was deceit found in His mouth.

¹⁰It was the will of the Lord for Him to die. And though God made Him to be an offering for our sins, He will rise again and complete what God wants Him to do. He will see the fruit of His labor, and His offspring will live forever. ¹¹He will suffer many things, but then have fullness of joy. He will know that what He did was not in vain. He will see the fruit of His life and be satisfied. By the knowledge of Him, many will be justified, for He will bear the iniquities of them all. ¹²The Lord says, "I will honor Him and give Him a place among the powerful and strong. He will share His reward with those who are faithful. He will freely give His life for His people and die the death of a transgressor. He will suffer their due and intercede for them in heaven."

The Covenant of Peace

54 Jerusalem, during these years you've been like a widowed woman who never had children. But now you can sing and shout for joy because you will have more children than a woman with a husband. Listen, this is what the Lord says: ²"Make the tent you live in larger. Stretch it out and make it

wider. Lengthen the ropes and reset your stakes. Don't hold back your dreams. ³My plan is for you to become a sprawling city and expand right and left until your influence takes in the whole world. You will inherit the cities of the Gentiles, and that which is desolate will be rebuilt.

⁴"Don't be afraid. I will not let you be shamed. Don't hesitate to come back. You will not be disgraced. You will forget the shame of your youth and your loneliness as a widow in captivity. ⁵Your Maker is still your husband; the Lord Almighty is His name. The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer. He is the God of all the earth. ⁶You've been like a wife deserted by her husband and left in distress. You're like a young bride who has been rejected. But the Lord calls you back home." He says, ⁷"For a little while I left you to yourself, to experience the consequences of your unfaithfulness. But with deep love and compassion I will bring you back home. ⁸I hid my face from you only for a moment because I refused to approve your behavior. But with everlasting kindness I will show the love and compassion I have for you.

⁹"As in the days of Noah I promised never again to bring a worldwide flood on the earth, so now I promise not to be angry and rebuke you this way again. ¹⁰The mountains and hills may crumble, but my love for you never ends. I will not hide my face from you, nor will I break my covenant of peace." This is the word of the Lord, the One full of compassion.

¹¹The Lord says, "O afflicted city, lashed by winds of war, with no one to comfort you, I will rebuild you with stones of turquoise and lay your foundations with sapphires. ¹²I will build your pinnacles with rubies, your gates with sparkling pearls and your walls with precious stones. ¹³Your sons and daughters growing up will be taught by the Lord and great will be the peace of your people. ¹⁴You will be established in righteousness and will be safe from tyranny and terror. You will be far from oppres-

sion and there will be nothing to fear.

¹⁵"If anyone comes to attack you, it will not be my doing. If they come to fight against you, they will be made to surrender. ¹⁶I gave the blacksmith wisdom to forge iron, but he might use this wisdom to fashion weapons. I gave governments wisdom to maintain law and order, but they might create armies to come and destroy you. ¹⁷But no weapon forged against you will prevail. No army that attacks you will succeed. I will help you answer those who accuse you. I will protect you and defend you. This is the rightful heritage of the servants of the Lord. I will vindicate my servants in the eyes of all the people."

God's Invitation to Come and Eat

55 The Lord says, "Come! Everyone who is thirsty, come to the waters. You who have no money, come, buy and eat. Come! Buy the fresh juice of the grape. Come and buy milk. It will cost you nothing. ²Why should you spend money for that which isn't bread or work for that which doesn't satisfy? Listen to me! Do what I say and your soul will be delighted with the best food there is. ³Listen to me, my people, and come to me for bread. Listen to what I have to say and you will live and not die. I will renew my covenant with you and give you the blessings I promised David. ⁴I made him a commander and leader of Israel and through him gave witness of my power. ⁵Through you I will summon nations you don't even know about. From the ends of the earth they will come to you because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, who has honored you."

⁶Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. ⁷Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord who will have mercy on them and to our God who freely pardons. ⁸The Lord says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways. ⁹As the heavens are higher than

the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts and my ways higher than your ways.

¹⁰"Just as the rain and snow come down from heaven and don't return until the earth is watered, causing it to sprout and bring forth fruit for the eater and seeds for the sower, ¹¹so the word that goes out of my mouth will not return to me empty but will carry out my wishes and succeed in doing what I sent it out to do.

¹²"You will leave Babylon with joy and go out in peace. The mountains and hills of your homeland will burst forth in song as they see you coming, and all the trees will clap their hands. ¹³The cypress will grow where there were thornbushes, and the myrtle will come up instead of briars. This will be a sign of what the Lord promised to do for you, a reminder of what He has done."

Salvation Offered to All Nations

56 This is what the Lord says. "Do what is right and maintain justice. Soon my righteousness will be seen and I will save you from your bondage. ²I will bless the man who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it and who keeps himself from doing evil.

³"Strangers who join the Lord should not be made to feel that they are not part of God's people. Let not the man who is dysfunctional and can't have children say, 'I'm a dry tree.'" ⁴The Lord says, "If you honor me by keeping the Sabbath as you should, hold to my covenant and do what pleases me. ⁵within the walls of my house I will hang a plaque with your name on it, which will be better than having children to carry on your name.

⁶"And to the strangers who join my people and want to serve the Lord because they love Him, who keep the Sabbath as they should and hold to my covenant, ⁷I will bring them to Mount Zion, to my holy mountain, and will give them the joy of salvation. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house is a house of

prayer for all people.”⁸The Sovereign Lord who promises to bring the captives home will also bring others to Israel besides those who are His own.

Israel's Leaders Are Irresponsible

⁹Right now the nations are like wild animals eager to come and devour Israel, and the Lord will let them do so.¹⁰He says, “The leaders of Israel who were supposed to warn my people are blind! They don’t think. They’re like dogs that can’t bark, that lie down and dream and sleep.¹¹They’re like greedy dogs with huge appetites that never get enough to eat. They’re like shepherds with no understanding of sheep. Everyone does as he pleases and tries to get what he can for himself.¹²They say to each other, ‘Come, let’s drink all the wine and beer we want because the markets are looking good, and tomorrow will be better than today.’”

Israel's Idolatry

57 Good people die and no one considers why. Devout men are taken away and no one understands. But the Lord takes them away to spare them from evil.²Those who live the way God wants them to will find peace and rest in death.³But as for you, you sons of sorcerers, you sons of adulterers and prostitutes, come here and listen to me.⁴The Lord says, “Whom do you think you’re mocking? At whom are you sneering and sticking out your tongue? You’re nothing but a brood of rebels, children of transgression and the offspring of liars.⁵You worship the fertility gods to satisfy your lusts and have sex under every tree and every place you set aside for these idols. You offer your newborn in the valleys and under the clefts of the rocks as sacrifices to these gods.⁶You take stones from the stream beds in these same valleys and make them into gods and worship them. You pour out wine as offerings to them and bring them your grain. In the light of all this, do you think I will just overlook it all?

⁷“You go up to the high mountains to offer sacrifices and have sex there to please your fertility gods.⁸You set your obscene idols inside your bedroom door. Then you undress and climb into bed with the temple prostitute who came to your home to ‘worship’ your idol with you. This is what you do under the guise of worship to satisfy your lust.⁹You have also put on your perfumes and ointments and gone to visit other kings to ask for help. You have sent envoys to distant countries looking for answers. You have even communicated with the spirit world looking for solutions to your national problems.¹⁰You wore yourself out seeking help from other gods and other kings. You never say, ‘It’s hopeless.’ You seem to find new strength from your idols and never stop seeking foreign help.

¹¹“Who are these idols that you fear to displease so much that you turn against me and lie to me? Have you forgotten me because I have kept silent so long about your sins and misbehavior? Is that why you don’t respect me anymore?¹²Do you think what you’re doing is right? I will no longer keep silent but will expose your doings, and your gods will not be able to help you.¹³When you cry to them for help, let them come and save you. A strong wind will take care of them. One puff of wind from me would blow them all away. But those who love me, who put their trust in me and who make me their refuge will inherit the land and worship me in my Temple.”

God Offers Forgiveness and Healing

¹⁴The Lord says, “Take the stumbling blocks out of the way of my people! Build a road, make it smooth and get it ready for me!”¹⁵This is what the High and Holy One who lives forever says: “Though I live in a high and holy place, I will also live with him who has a humble and contrite spirit. I will revive the spirit of the humble and give courage to the heart of the contrite.¹⁶I will not continue to discipline my people with captivity. This

would cause their spirits to faint and they would die, the very people whom I have created. ¹⁷I had to discipline them because of their lust and greed. I turned my face away from them because of their sins. But there are some who stubbornly persist in sinning.

¹⁸I have seen what they have done, but I will offer them forgiveness and healing. I will bring them back home and give them peace. I will comfort those who mourn. ¹⁹I will give peace to those far and near. I will heal my people, and praise will be on their lips. ²⁰The wicked who stubbornly continue in their sins are like an angry sea which never rests, whose waves bring in nothing but filth and muck. ²¹There is no lasting peace, no rest of spirit for those who do wickedly."

Fasting That God Approves

58 The Lord says, "Shout it as loud as you can! Don't hold back! Raise your voice like the sound of a ram's horn, and show my people their sins and the descendants of Jacob their transgressions. ²Day after day they seek me and act delighted to know my ways as if they were a people who wanted to do what is right, eager to keep my laws. They ask for justice and act eager for me to be near them.

³"Then they say, 'Why should we fast and pray if the Lord doesn't answer our prayers? Why should we humble ourselves and worship Him if He pays no attention to us?' You fast and pray, but you still do your own thing and take advantage of everyone you can. ⁴You fast as a duty and become edgy and irritable. You quarrel and fight and strike each other with your fists. You can't act like this and expect me to listen to you and answer your prayers. ⁵Is this the kind of fasting and praying that I'm pleased with, for a man to deny himself food and drink and humble himself, only to end up acting the way you do? Is it a matter of bowing down in prayer and sitting in sackcloth and ashes? Is this what you call a day of

fasting and prayer, a day acceptable to the Lord?

⁶"Let me tell you the kind of fast that is acceptable to me. It is to remove the chains of injustice, to untie the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free and to lift the spirits of those who are broken-hearted. ⁷Share your food with the hungry and open your houses to the poor traveler who has nowhere to stay. Give clothes to those who have nothing and don't turn away your own flesh and blood. ⁸If you do this, my light will shine on you like the morning sun and your healing will be quickly evident. I will go before you and my glory will be your rear guard. ⁹When you call on me, I will answer. When you cry for help, I will say, 'Here I am.'

"If you stop oppressing people, stop pointing an accusing finger and speaking evil of others, ¹⁰and if you spend yourself on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of those who are afflicted, then the darkness that surrounds you will become as light as day. ¹¹Then I will guide you and satisfy your needs. I will bless you and give you good things to eat, even in times of drought. I will keep you strong and well. You will be like a garden that has plenty of water, fed by a spring that never runs dry. ¹²I will help you rebuild the old waste places and raise up the foundations laid by previous generations. You will be known as the people who build things up, who restore what is ruined. You will be known as repairers of broken walls and restorers of paths to walk in."

¹³The Lord says, "If you will stop trampling on the Sabbath—pursuing your own interests and doing what you please on my holy day—and start honoring the Sabbath instead, making it a delight, not doing your own work or talking about your own business on that day, but consider others—¹⁴then you will find the joy that comes from serving the Lord. I will cause you to be honored all over the world, and you will delight yourselves in the inheritance that I

promised to your father Jacob.” The mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Isaiah Condemns People's Sins

59 The Lord is not so far away that He cannot save you, nor are His ears so deaf that He cannot hear you. ²But your own iniquities have been the barrier between you and your God. Your wickedness has caused Him to hold back, to cover His face and not hear you. ³Your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with immoralities and your tongue with deceit. ⁴No one calls for justice. No one pleads for truth. You rely on empty arguments, even deceit, and give birth to more evil. ⁵You hatch evil like eggs from poisonous snakes. Whoever eats your eggs will die, and even when one is crushed, another deadly snake comes out. ⁶You try to make your evil deeds look good, but it's like dressing yourself in spider webs. Your deeds are evil and violence is in your hands. ⁷You rush eagerly into sin and are quick to shed innocent blood. Your thoughts are evil, and ruin and destruction follow wherever you go. ⁸No one is safe when you're around. You don't know what it means to be honest and just. By your example you make crooked paths for others to walk in, and those who go that way will never know peace.

Isaiah Confesses Their Sins

⁹“O Lord, we know why you don't help us and why there is no more justice. We look for light to walk by, but there is nothing but darkness. We look for brightness, but there is nothing but shadows. ¹⁰We grope our way along as those who are blind grope along a wall. In daylight we stumble as if it were night. Among the strong we're as good as dead. ¹¹We growl like bears and moan mournfully like doves. We look for justice, for deliverance from justice, but nothing happens. We want to be saved, but salvation seems far away. ¹²Lord, our sins are many. They testify against us by showing

you what kind of people we really are. And we know it. ¹³We've rebelled against you. We've turned our backs to you and oppressed those who tried to follow you. We thought up lies and spread them everywhere. ¹⁴So justice is gone and righteousness stands at a distance. Truth has fallen in the streets, and honesty can't get through the city gates. ¹⁵Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever tries to do what is right becomes a victim.”

The Lord Redeems Israel

The Lord looked down on us and was displeased because there was no justice to be found. ¹⁶He saw no one helping the oppressed and no one ready to intercede for another. The Lord will use His own arm to bring Him victory, and His own righteousness will sustain Him. ¹⁷He will wear righteousness as His breastplate and salvation as His helmet. He will put on the garments of justice and wrap Himself in the cloak of zeal. ¹⁸According to their deeds He will repay the wicked. His enemies will receive retribution for what they have done, even those who live on the islands of the sea. ¹⁹From the east to the west, men will respect Him; from the rising of the sun to its setting, men will glorify His name. When His enemies rise up against Him, the Spirit of the Lord will come in like a flood sent from the hand of God.

²⁰The Redeemer will come to Zion. He will come to save His people, those who have turned from their sins. ²¹“This is my covenant,” says the Lord. “This is my promise to you. I will put my Spirit upon you and my words in your mouth. They will be in the mouths of your children and their descendants throughout all generations, from now on and forever.”

The Future of Jerusalem

60 “Arise, Jerusalem, and shine, for your Light has come and the glory of the Lord shines upon you! ²Darkness covers the earth and thick darkness the people, but you will walk in my light and

my glory will shine upon you. ³My desire is that nations will be attracted to your light and kings to the rising of your brightness. ⁴Look around and see what is happening! Your people are preparing to come home from Babylon! Your sons will come back from far away and your daughters will return with their children. ⁵You will see this with your own eyes and be filled with joy unspeakable. Your heart will throb with excitement. The Lord's plan is that the riches of global trade and the wealth of nations come to you. ⁶Caravans of camels from Midian and Ephah will come to your land. They will come from Sheba carrying gold and incense and praising the God of Israel. ⁷The sheep of Kedar and the rams of Nebaioth will be brought to you to be sacrificed on my altar. I will make my Temple more glorious than ever.

⁸"Who are all these that fly along like clouds, like doves coming home?" ⁹They're the trading ships of Tarshish coming from distant lands. They bring with them silver and gold to honor the God of Israel who has endowed you with glory.

¹⁰"People from other nations will come and rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. Though I disciplined you, I will have compassion on you and in my favor show you mercy. ¹¹Your gates will always be open. They will not be shut either by day or by night. Nations will bring you their wealth, and kings will lead their people in a parade of celebration down your streets. ¹²The nations that won't serve you will perish. They will be completely destroyed. ¹³The wood products of Lebanon will come to you, such as pine, fir and cypress. They will be brought to you to beautify my Temple and to make my city glorious. ¹⁴The sons of those who oppressed you will come and bow before you. Those who despised you will come to show you their respect. They will call you The City of the Lord, The City of Israel's Holy God.

¹⁵Although you have been forsaken and hated for my name's sake, a city de-

serted and one to be avoided, I will make you great and beautiful again. You will be the joy of endless generations to come. ¹⁶Nations will nurse you and royalty will feed you. When all these things happen, you will know that I am your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel.

¹⁷"I will give you gold in place of bronze, silver in place of iron, copper in place of wood and metal in place of stones. I will appoint peace as your governor and ask justice to be your ruler. ¹⁸Violence will be gone from your land, and ruin and destruction will be no more. Your walls will be called Salvation and your gates Praise.

The Presence of God Will Be Your Light

¹⁹"The sun will no longer be needed to brighten your day, nor will the moon be needed to shine on you at night, because the Lord will be your light both by day and by night. The presence of God will be your glory. ²⁰Your days of grief and sorrow will end; your light will never go out and your brightness will never grow dim. ²¹Everyone will do what is right and your people will possess the land forever. I have planted you and made you a people to display my greatness and compassion to the world. ²²The smallest of you will become a thousand, and the weakest of you a strong nation. I will do this at the right time, and I will make it happen, for I am the Lord!"

A Message of Freedom

61 The Lord's Servant says, "The Spirit of the Sovereign God is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives of Satan and to release the prisoners of death. ²He has sent me to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor for those who accept me and the future day of judgment for those who reject me. He has sent me to comfort those who mourn, ³to replace the ashes they sprin-

kled on their heads with a crown of beauty, to give the oil of gladness to those who are sad and the garment of praise to those who weep."

Israel's Glory Restored

The God of Israel says, "My people will be called oaks of righteousness, planted by the Lord to display His grace and glory. ⁴They will restore the old waste places and rebuild the ancient cities. They will repair the walls which were torn down and bring in the righteousness of many generations.

⁵"Listen to what I have to say. People whom you have not known will come to serve you. They will shepherd your flocks, till your soil and harvest your vineyards. ⁶You will be priests of the Lord and will be called ministers of God. You will eat the riches of the Gentiles and glory in their wealth. ⁷Your shame and disgrace will end. You will live in your own land. Your wealth will double and your joy will be forever.

⁸"I am the Lord. I love justice and hate everything evil. I faithfully reward obedience and will make an everlasting covenant with those who love me. ⁹They will be known and admired among the nations and their descendants among people everywhere. All who see them will acknowledge that they are the people whom the Lord has blessed."

¹⁰I delight myself in the Lord and my soul rejoices in my God. He has clothed His people with garments of salvation and covered them with the robe of His righteousness. He has crowned them as a bridegroom and adorned them as a bride. ¹¹As surely as seeds sprout and soil causes the sprouts to grow, the Lord will cause righteousness to spring up among His people, and all nations will praise Him.

The Lord Will Vindicate Jerusalem

62 The Lord says, "My heart yearns for Jerusalem. I will not keep quiet. I will not rest until I see her vindi-

cated and her goodness floods the earth like the morning sun, her salvation like a glorious, blazing torch. ²Listen! Nations will see your goodness and kings will see your glory. God will give you a new name, and that's the name by which you will be called. ³You will be like a jeweled crown in the hand of the Lord, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. ⁴No longer will you be called The God-Forsaken City, The Land That God Destroyed. Instead you will be called The Land of God's Delight, The Bride of God, because the Lord will delight in you. He will claim you as His own, and you will be His wife. ⁵As a young man marries the woman he loves, so will your children be married to Jerusalem, the city they love. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will the Lord rejoice over you."

⁶I have asked the watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem to watch day and night and not stay silent. You who talk about the Lord, plead with Him to do what He said He would do. ⁷Give Him no rest until He keeps His promise and restores Jerusalem, making her a city that people everywhere will praise. ⁸The Lord has made a covenant with His people, and by His right hand He has sworn to carry it out. He has said, "Never again will I give your grain to be food for your enemies. Never again will foreigners drink the juice of grapes from your vineyards which you worked so hard to produce. ⁹But those who harvest the grain will eat it and praise the Lord. Those who work the vineyards and gather the grapes will bring drink from the firstfruit of their harvest into my Temple."

¹⁰Go! Go outside of the city! Clear the stones, build the roads, make a highway and raise the flag of Israel, for God's people are coming home! ¹¹The Lord is sending messengers to the ends of the earth. He says to them, "Tell the people of Jerusalem, 'Your Savior is coming and His reward is with Him.' ¹²You will be called God's Holy People, the Lord's Redeemed, and Jerusalem will be called

The City That God Loves, The Land That God Has Blessed.”

The Lord Will Judge the Nations

63 Who is this coming from Edom dressed splendidly in red, coming from Bozrah in the greatness of His strength? It is the Lord, with power to save, coming in righteousness to announce His victory. ²Why are His garments so red, as a man who had just trampled grapes to make wine?

³The Lord says, “I have trampled the nations which oppressed my people, and I did it alone. I trampled them as a man tramples grapes to make wine. I trampled them furiously and their blood stained all my robes. ⁴The day of reward has come, the day to deliver my people. ⁵I looked, but there was no one to help me. I was not surprised that no one offered to support me. So with my own strength I brought salvation to my people, and my own arm sustained me. ⁶I trampled the nations in my displeasure and shattered them with my strength. I made them drunk with anger and they shed each other’s blood.”

The Justice and Mercy of God

⁷Let me tell you of the justice of the Lord and the kindness for which He should be praised. Stop and think of what the Lord has done for us and of the good things He has waiting for us. He is full of love and compassion. ⁸The Lord says, “These are my people. They will not lie or deal falsely with me, so I will come and save them.” ⁹When they suffered, He suffered. Then the Angel of His presence came and saved them out of all their troubles. In His love and mercy He lifted them up and carried them in His arms.

¹⁰But they rebelled against Him and grieved the heart of the Holy Spirit. Their sinning brought them in conflict with the Lord. So He disciplined them as He had told them He would do. ¹¹Then they remembered the past. They looked back to the days of Moses and

prayed to the Lord, “Where is He who brought His people through the Red Sea and guided them through the wilderness as a shepherd guides His sheep? Where is He who put within them His Holy Spirit? ¹²Where is He who rolled up the sleeves of His right arm and stood by the side of Moses? Where is He who divided the waters to gain for Himself everlasting renown?” ¹³Led by the Lord, the people walked through the sea on dry ground. They made their way through the wilderness as a horse makes his way in open country, and they did not stumble.

¹⁴As sheep are led by a faithful shepherd into a fertile valley, so they were led to a goodly land, and the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest. Lord, this is how you have led your people in the past and it has brought honor and respect to your name.

A Prayer for Help

¹⁵Lord, please look down from your Holy Throne in heaven and come to our rescue. Where is your zeal and power? Where is your tenderness and compassion? ¹⁶You are our Father. We have no one else to turn to. Abraham can’t hear us and Jacob can’t see us. You are not only our Father but many generations have also known you as their Redeemer. ¹⁷Why, O Lord, do you let your people stray from your ways? Why do you allow us to become so stubborn that we rebel against you? For the sake of the few who have served you, who have always been yours, for the sake of Israel, come and help us! ¹⁸Your people have been driven out of the land. Your enemies have trampled down your Sanctuary. ¹⁹We have been your people from old, yet you treat us as if you had never been our God, as if we had never been called by your name.

64 Lord, why don’t you tear open the skies and come down to earth? The mountains would tremble before you. ²Forests would be set ablaze and burn like twigs set on fire. Oceans would

boil and become dry. O Lord, come and let your enemies see your power. Let them see your compassion for your people. Let them fear you and tremble at your presence. ³In the past you have done some amazing things, unheard of and unexpected. When you came down on Mount Sinai the whole mountain shook. ⁴Before that no one had seen or heard of a God who acted this way on behalf of those who serve Him. ⁵You gladly help those who do what's right, who remember your ways. But you were displeased with us because we continued to sin against you and against each other. So how can we be saved? ⁶All of us are unclean and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. We're drying up like fallen leaves, and our sins are blowing us away. ⁷No one calls out to you in prayer or tries to find you, for you have hidden yourself from us and have let us suffer the consequences of our own sins.

⁸But you are our Father, Lord. You are the potter and we are the clay. We are the work of your hands. ⁹Lord, don't be angry with us, or hold our sins against us forever. Please, look down on us and help us, for we are still your people. ¹⁰Your cities are destroyed and are like ruins in a desert. Jerusalem looks like a desolate wilderness. ¹¹Your beautiful Temple, where our fathers praised you in song, has been burned with fire. Everything we treasure has been lost and lies in ruins. ¹²After all this, Lord, are you still holding back? Will you keep silent and punish us beyond what we can take?

God's Judgment on the Wicked

65 The Lord says, "I was ready to show myself to those who didn't ask for me. I was ready to be found by those who didn't look for me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a people who didn't even call on my name. ²Every day I've held out my hands to my people to welcome them, but they are a stubborn people who love to walk in their own ways and do their own thing. ³They insult me

by sinning in front of my face. They offer sacrifices in sacred gardens and burn incense on pagan altars. ⁴At night they go to the graves and sit among the tombstones to get messages from the dead. They eat the flesh of pigs and drink broth made from meat sacrificed to pagan gods. ⁵Then they have the nerve to say to others, 'Stay away from us! Don't even come near for we are holier than you!' Such behavior is like smoke in my nose from a fire that never seems to stop. ⁶It stands written before me: I will not be quiet forever. I will not overlook what my people have done, but will step aside and let them suffer the consequences of their own actions. ⁷I will discipline them by letting them reap the results of their own sins as well as those of their ancestors. They burned incense at sacred shrines in the mountains of Judah. They disowned me in front of their pagan gods. I will no longer delay but will punish them for what they have done."

⁸The Lord says, "Just as men don't destroy grapes that still have some juice in them, so I will not destroy my people who still have some good in them. ⁹I will bless the descendants of Jacob and Judah. They will inherit my mountains. My people will inherit the land and those who serve me will live there. ¹⁰Sharon will become a pasture for flocks and the Valley of Achor a resting place for herds, and for my people who love and follow me. ¹¹But for those who forsake the Lord, who forget my holy mountain, who eat the meat offered to Gad the god of prosperity and drink mixed wine offered to Meni the god of the future, ¹²their prosperity will be the sword, and their future a violent death at the hand of their enemies. I called to you, but you didn't answer. I spoke to you, but you didn't listen. Instead, you chose to disobey me and do those things that displease me."

¹³Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says, "My servants will eat, but you will go hungry. My servants will drink, but you will go thirsty. My servants will rejoice, but you will be disgraced. ¹⁴My ser-

vants will sing from hearts full of joy, but you will cry out from hearts full of pain and will weep in anguish of spirit. ¹⁵Your name will be used as a curse and the Lord will let your enemies put you to death. But He will call His servants by a new name which others will not know. ¹⁶Anyone who asks for a blessing on the land will do so by the God who is faithful and true. The troubles of the past will be gone and forgotten.

The New Heavens and the New Earth

¹⁷Look, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. ¹⁸So be glad and rejoice in what I will do, for I will make Jerusalem a joy and her people a delight to be with. ¹⁹I will rejoice over Jerusalem and delight in my people. The sound of weeping and the voice of crying will no longer be heard. ²⁰Never again will babies die or infants need to be buried who live for only a few days. Those who reach a hundred will have just begun to live, but sinners will be no more.

²¹My people will build houses and inhabit them. They will plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them. ²²No longer will they be put out of their houses for others to move in. They will not plant vineyards only to have others enjoy the fruit. My people will be like trees that never die. They will forever enjoy the works of their hands. ²³They will not work in vain nor will their offspring be doomed to die. They will be a people forever blessed by the Lord and so will their children. ²⁴Before they call, I will answer. While they are still speaking, I will respond. ²⁵Wolves and lambs will feed and play together. Lions will eat grass like cattle, and serpents on the ground will not harm anyone. They will not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain," says the Lord.

People Worship the Way They Want

66 The Sovereign Lord says, "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house do you think you could build for me to rest in? What kind of house can you build for me that I can't build myself? ²Haven't I created the whole universe and everything in it? Didn't I speak, and all creation came into being? What I really look for are those who are humble and penitent in spirit, who listen in awe to my word and are eager to do my bidding.

³"But my people don't care whether they sacrifice an animal or a human being, whether they sacrifice a lamb or a dog, whether they bring a grain offering or pig's blood or whether they offer incense to me or pray to an idol. They've made up their minds to do it their way because they like to worship the way they want to. ⁴I need to discipline them. I will do so by bringing disasters on them, the very things of which they're so afraid. Because when I called to them, no one answered. When I spoke, no one listened. They closed their ears and continued to do evil."

The Lord Vindicates His People

⁵What else does the Lord have to say? He says, "There are some of you who obey me. That's why your brothers hate you and will have nothing to do with you. They laugh at you and say, 'Let the Lord do something for you so we can rejoice with you.' But they will be put to shame."

⁶Hear that uproar in the city? That noise is coming from the Temple! It's the sound of the Lord defeating His enemies!

⁷The Lord says, "My holy city is like a woman who suddenly gave birth without ever going into labor. Before the pains even came, she delivered a son. ⁸Has anyone ever heard or seen such a thing? Has a country ever been born in a day or a nation been brought forth in a moment? But soon Zion will be in labor, and without pain she will give birth to her own children. ⁹Do you think I would

bring my holy city to the point of rebirth and then not give delivery? Would I close a womb to keep a baby from being born?" ¹⁰The Lord says, "Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her. Rejoice with her, all you who have mourned over her. ¹¹You may now come and nurse at her consoling breasts. You may drink deeply and delight yourselves in her wealth."

¹²The Lord further says, "I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations will flow to her like a mighty stream. You will be nursed by her, and she will carry you in her arms and hold you on her knees. ¹³As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort Jerusalem and, in turn, she will comfort you."

God Sets Up His Kingdom

¹⁴When you see what the Lord will do for His servants you'll be glad. Your heart will rejoice and your bones will grow strong. Everyone will see the merciful hand of God on His people and His indignation carried out against His enemies.

¹⁵Listen! The Lord will come surrounded by fire, riding His chariots like a whirlwind. He will show His great displeasure and will rebuke with flames of fire. ¹⁶By fire and sword He will execute judgment, and those slain by the Lord will be many.

¹⁷The Lord says, "Those who mix heathen rites with the worship of Jehovah, who purify their bodies and go to their sacred gardens to give themselves to the most degrading sexual practices, who ignore my instructions and eat the flesh of

pigs and mice and other abominable things, will all be destroyed together.

¹⁸"I know their thoughts and have watched their actions. The time is coming when I will bring together all nations to see my glory. ¹⁹But before then, I will put a mark on my people and send some of them as ambassadors to the nations of the world, including the islands of the sea, and to such lands as Spain, Libya, Tubal and Greece. They will tell the people about my greatness and power. They will speak kindly to those who have not heard of my fame or seen my glory as they have. ²⁰They will bring back your brothers in exile from all nations. They will bring them to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as a joyous offering to the Lord. They will bring them on horses, in chariots and wagons and on mules and camels. They will bring them to my Temple as a harvest offering in clean vessels. ²¹Some of them I will select to be my priests and to serve me as Levites.

²²"As surely as the new heavens and the new earth that I will create will remain before me forever, so will your descendants and your name remain. ²³From the festival of one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, everyone will come to worship me," says the Lord.

²⁴"They will see the dead bodies of those who have rebelled against me lying outside the city. But just as worms don't stop until they devour the dead and fire doesn't stop until it destroys, so the fire of the Lord will destroy and consume the wicked."

JEREMIAH

1 These are the words of Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, one of the priests in the town of Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin.

²The word of the Lord came to me in the thirteenth year of Josiah, king of Judah, ³and during the reigns of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, all of whom were sons of Josiah. The Lord spoke to me many times during my forty-year ministry, which ended in the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came against Jerusalem and took captives the third time.

The Call of Jeremiah

⁴When I was called to serve as a prophet, the Lord said to me, ⁵“Before you were formed in the womb I knew you; before you were born I selected you. I am calling you to be a prophet for me to Israel and to the surrounding nations.” ⁶I answered, “O Sovereign Lord, you know I can’t speak well, and I’m much too young for this.”

⁷But the Lord said, “Don’t say you’re too young. I want you to go to the people and tell them everything I tell you. ⁸Don’t be afraid of them, for I’ll be with you and protect you.”

⁹Then the Lord reached down and touched my mouth, saying, “I have just put my words in your mouth. So go and speak for me, and I will tell you what to say. ¹⁰You are to speak to nations and kingdoms, and my word will uproot and pull down, overthrow and destroy, build and plant.”

¹¹Then He spoke to me again, “Jeremiah, what do you see?” I said, “I see a rod made from an almond tree.” ¹²The Lord said, “That’s right. My word is like a rod, and I will use it to make sure that judgment is fulfilled.”

¹³Again He said, “What do you see?” I said, “I see a boiling pot north of here, leaning this way ready to tip over.” ¹⁴The

Lord said, “That’s right. Soon disaster will pour in from the north and overflow the whole land. ¹⁵I am about to call a nation from the north to come against your land. Their king will take all the cities of Judah and set up a seat of judgment at the gates of Jerusalem. He will surround the city and break through her walls. ¹⁶I will allow this to happen to my people because they have sinned by offering sacrifices to other gods; they have made idols and worshiped the works of their own hands.

¹⁷“So I want you to prepare to stand up to the people and confront them. Tell them everything I command you. Don’t be afraid of them, or I will make you fearful in their presence. ¹⁸I will be with you, and you will be like a fortified city, an iron pillar, a bronze wall. You will be able to stand against the whole country, against the kings of Judah, its priests and its people. ¹⁹They will resist you and fight against you, but they will not overcome you because I am with you and will protect you. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

God’s Case Against Jerusalem

2 Again the Lord said to me, ²“Go and give this message for me to Jerusalem and to my people who live there. Tell them the Lord says, ‘I remember how faithful you were when you were young, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not cultivated. ³You were special to me. You belonged to me and to no one else. You were the firstfruit of the harvest to come. You were my sacred possession. All who touched you were held guilty, and disaster overtook them.’”

⁴Listen to the word of the Lord, you descendants of Jacob and you families of Israel. ⁵The Lord said, “What fault did your fathers find in me to leave me? They left me to follow worthless idols and soon they became just like them. ⁶They didn’t ask, ‘Where is the Lord who brought us out of Egypt and led us

through the wilderness, a land of deserts and pits, of dangers and darkness, a land where no one lives and through which no one likes to travel?" ⁷I brought you into a fertile land, rich with fruit and abundant harvests. But you defiled the land and made it detestable. ⁸Not even the priests asked, "Where is the Lord?" The very ones who taught the law didn't know me. The leaders of the people rebelled against me, and self-appointed prophets spoke by the authority of Baal and went after worthless idols.

⁹"I will state my case before my people. I will bring my charges against them and their children and grandchildren, because they are no different. ¹⁰Go west to the island of Cyprus. Send someone east to the land of Kedar and see if anything like this has happened anywhere else. ¹¹Have you ever seen a nation change its national god? And these gods aren't even real! But you have exchanged the living God for lifeless idols. ¹²Be appalled at this, those who live in the heavens, and shudder with horror at what you see. ¹³My people have committed two very great sins. They have forsaken me, the Spring of Living Water, and have dug their own wells, wells that crack and run dry.

¹⁴"Is Israel a slave by birth? He is not. Then why does he enslave himself? Why are other nations so eager to plunder his land and to make him their slave? What is happening to him? ¹⁵They have growled at him like lions ready for the kill. They have laid waste his land. His cities are burned and his villages are deserted. ¹⁶The men of Memphis and Tahpanhes in Egypt have already shamed you by killing your king in battle.

¹⁷"But you have brought trouble on yourself! You left the Lord your God and the path along which He was leading you. ¹⁸Do you think you will gain by asking Egypt to come to your defense against Assyria or Babylon? Is the water of the Nile any better than the water I can give you? Will you gain anything by asking Assyria or Babylon to come to your de-

fense against Egypt? Is the water of the Euphrates any better? ¹⁹Your own wickedness is the problem; your own apostasy will teach you a lesson. You will see what it's like to turn away from the Lord your God and forsake the One who loves you. Awe of me is no longer in your heart. I, the Lord have spoken."

²⁰Again the Lord said, "Long ago you broke the cords of love that held you to me. You said, 'I will not serve you!' On every high hill and under every spreading tree you worshiped fertility gods and lay down in front of them like a prostitute. ²¹I planted you as a choice vine from the very best seed, but look at what has happened to you. How did you become such a worthless plant? ²²Even if you washed your body with an abundance of the strongest soap, you couldn't wash away the stain of your guilt. ²³How can you say that you're not guilty or that you haven't really worshiped Baal? Look at your behavior! You run around like a young she-camel in heat. ²⁴You're like a wild donkey sniffing the air, craving to mate. No one can control you. No one has to chase after you because you're ready to mate at any time. ²⁵Don't keep running after other gods until your feet are blistered and bare and your throat is dry. You say, 'I can't turn back because I love these gods. They give me hope. I cannot leave them. I must go and worship them.'

²⁶Just as a thief is disgraced when he's caught, so will the house of Israel be disgraced, including their kings, officials, priests and false prophets. ²⁷They say to a carved piece of wood, 'You are my father giving me guidance,' and to a piece of chiseled stone, 'You are my mother bringing me comfort.' You have turned your backs on me and will not face me. Yet, when you're in trouble you come running to me shouting, 'Please come and save us!' ²⁸Where are the gods you made for yourselves? Let them come and save you and get you out of trouble. You have all kinds of gods, at least one for every city in Judah.

²⁹“Why do you complain that I have forsaken you? You are the ones who have forsaken me! You’ve rebelled against me and everything I’ve taught you. ³⁰I disciplined you, but it didn’t do any good. You wouldn’t listen to me. Like a raging lion you used your swords to kill the prophets I sent to help you.”

³¹People, listen to what the Lord is trying to tell you! He says, “Have I been like an empty wilderness to you, like a dark and forsaken land? If not, then why do you say, ‘We are a free people and can live anywhere we want to. We have no plans to come back’? ³²Does a young woman engaged to be married forget her jewels or a bride forget to wear her wedding dress? But you have forgotten me for more days than I like to count.

³³“You’ve become so skilled in chasing and seducing lovers that even wicked women can learn from you. ³⁴Your clothes are stained with the blood of the innocent and the poor, and even though they have committed no crime, you treat them as if they had. Yet you tell yourselves, ³⁵‘We are innocent of any wrong. The Lord is not displeased with us, but with the wicked.’ I, the Lord, will decide that. I will bring you to judgment and show you your sins, no matter how much you deny it. ³⁶You have cheapened yourselves by turning to the gods of other nations. You will go to the Egyptians and be disappointed by their response just as you were with the Assyrians’ response. ³⁷You will come away from Egypt hanging your head in shame. The Lord has rejected the help of those you trust and they will not come to your aid.”

Israel’s Shameless Conduct

3 The Lord said, “If a man divorces his wife and she marries another man, he doesn’t take her back, because such behavior degrades the people and pollutes the land. While you have not divorced me, you have had many lovers and think that you can come back to me any time you want to.

²“Look at the hills around you. Is there any hill on which you have not worshiped other gods and played the prostitute for them? You have waited along the roadside for your lovers to take them up to the hills with you. You have defiled the land with your wickedness. ³Therefore, the expected showers have not come and the spring rains have not fallen. You’ve developed the brazen look of a prostitute and no longer blush at what you’re doing. ⁴You say to me, ‘You are our God, our Father, our Friend. You have loved us since we were children. ⁵So we know that you won’t forsake us or be displeased with us forever.’ You say this and then use my love for you to cover up all the evil you do.”

Israel, the Unfaithful Wife

⁶It was during the reign of Josiah that the Lord said to me, “Have you seen what Israel, that unfaithful woman, has done? She has gone to the top of every high hill and under every spreading tree and has played the prostitute for her gods. ⁷I wanted her to come back to me, but she never did. Judah saw what happened to her sister Israel, but it made no impression on her. ⁸I had to give Israel a certificate of divorce and allowed her to be taken away because of her prostitution. But Judah didn’t care. She went out and did the same thing. ⁹She took her prostitution lightly and polluted the whole land, committing adultery in front of her idols. ¹⁰Even though she saw what happened to her sister Israel, Judah didn’t come back to me with her whole heart, but only pretended to do so. ¹¹“In one way, Israel was more honest and less guilty than Judah because at least she didn’t pretend to love me.”

¹²Then the Lord said, “Send this message to my people in the northern provinces of Assyria to which my people Israel have been taken: ‘Return to me. I still love you as a husband. I am merciful and full of compassion. I am not angry. ¹³Only acknowledge your guilt. Admit that

you have sinned, that you have rebelled against me, that under every spreading tree you have given your favors to foreign gods and have ignored my commandments. ¹⁴Return to me, all you who have been unfaithful, because I am your husband. I will take one representative from each of your cities and two from each tribe and bring you back home.

¹⁵"I will give you rulers who obey me. They will be shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you on gently and feed you with knowledge and understanding. ¹⁶When you are back in your land and your numbers have increased, there will be no need for the Ark of the Covenant. It will not be missed, neither will another one be made. ¹⁷Jerusalem will become the metropolis of the earth and will be called The Throne of the Lord. All nations will come there to worship in His presence. They will not follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts. ¹⁸In those days, the house of Judah will join the house of Israel, and their exiles will return to the land that I gave to your ancestors as a permanent possession.

¹⁹"I will gladly treat you as my sons and daughters, give you the land I promised and make it the most beautiful inheritance of all the nations. All I ask is for you to call me 'My Father' and not turn away from me. ²⁰But like an unfaithful woman who leaves her husband, you have been unfaithful to me."

²¹I hear voices coming from the tops of the hills, people weeping and pleading with their gods. They have perverted their ways and forgotten the Lord. ²²The Lord says, "Return to me, my people, return to me and I will help you. Come to me and I will cure you of your backsliding. Say to me, 'Yes, Lord, we will come, for you are the Lord our God. ²³You are our refuge and strength. Surely you are our help and salvation. We have been deceived and led into idolatry and worshipping idols. The gods we have worshiped in these hills can't save us.

²⁴From our youth we have worshiped

other gods. Yet they have not protected our flocks and herds, our sons and daughters and the things our fathers worked so hard for all these years. ²⁵We lie down in shame and our disgrace covers us. We and our ancestors have sinned against you all our lives and have refused to listen to your voice or to obey you."

4 The Lord says, "If you want to return to me, O Israel, then make up your mind and return to me. If you put away your detestable idols and are faithful to me and no longer go astray, ²if you will promise to obey me in truth and righteousness, acknowledging me as Lord, then I will make you a blessing to all nations and they will praise me for what I have done."

³This is what the Lord says to the people of Judah and Jerusalem, "Break up the hard soil of your hearts. Don't sow good seed among thorns. ⁴Listen to me, people of Judah and Jerusalem. Circumcise your hearts and serve the Lord. If you continue to sin, I must discipline you because of all the evil things you're doing. My discipline is like a fire that cannot be quenched until it does what it has been sent to do.

Invasion From the North

⁵"So blow the ram's horn in Jerusalem and throughout Judah! Pick up your weapons and shout, 'Run for the fortified cities!' ⁶Run for safety! Don't delay! Raise the signal to flee to Zion! Disaster and terrible destruction are coming on the land from the north." ⁷Listen! As a lion coming from its place of hiding, a destroyer of nations has set out from his kingdom. He's coming to destroy our land and make it desolate. Our cities will be destroyed and left without people. ⁸Put on sackcloth and weep because the Lord is displeased with our behavior and will discipline us by removing His protection.

⁹"In that day," says the Lord, "the king and his officials will lose courage. The

priests will be shocked and the false prophets will be astonished at what the Lord has done.”¹⁰ Then I said, “Lord, why did you let your people be deceived by these false prophets who told us we would have peace when the sword of the enemy is at our throats?”

¹¹The Lord said to the people of Judah and Jerusalem, “A scorching wind will come on the land from the desert. It will not be the gentle breeze that blows at harvest time. ¹²It will be a strong wind coming at my command. It will be judgment without mercy.” ¹³Look! In vision I can see the enemy already coming, like a cloud of dust blown in from the desert by a strong wind. His many chariots look like a whirlwind and his horses are as fast as eagles. We are doomed! ¹⁴O Jerusalem, wash the evil from your heart; be spared all this and be saved. How long will you delight yourself in wicked thoughts?

¹⁵Voices from the northern city of Dan and from the hills of Ephraim tell us of the coming disaster. ¹⁶They tell us that a besieging army from a distant land has raised its war cry against the cities of Judah. ¹⁷They will surround Jerusalem like men guarding a sacred field. This will happen because Israel has turned against the Lord. ¹⁸The Lord says, “You have brought this suffering on yourselves by the way you have lived and acted. You have sealed your own doom. It is bitter and has pierced the depths of your heart.”

Judah Will Fall

¹⁹What anguish I feel for Jerusalem! I can hardly bear it! My heart races so wildly, I can't keep quiet! In vision I've heard the sound of battle. ²⁰I've seen disaster follow disaster. The whole country will be left in ruins. Suddenly our houses will be destroyed and our families torn apart. ²¹How much longer shall I have visions of raging battles and hear the sound of the ram's horn for war? ²²The Lord said, “My people are fools. They don't know me anymore. Like senseless

children they don't understand what I'm trying to tell them. They're skilled in doing evil and pride themselves in their wisdom, but they don't have the slightest idea what it means to be good any more.”

²³I also had a vision of the whole earth at the end of time, and it looked like the ruins of Jerusalem. It looked like the unformed earth before it was beautified, nothing moved anywhere. The sky was black and the heavens had no light. ²⁴I looked at the mountains and they were shaking; the hills were swaying back and forth. ²⁵I saw no one anywhere. Even the birds were gone. ²⁶I looked, and the fertile farm lands had become deserts and all the cities lay in ruins. This had happened because of the Lord's displeasure against a world full of sin.

²⁷This is what the Lord said, “The whole world will lie in ruins. Yet I will not destroy this planet. ²⁸It will lie in mourning and the heavens above it will be dark. I have spoken and will carry out my judgment against sin. I will not change my mind.”

²⁹In vision I saw that at the noise of the coming horsemen and at the sight of the bowmen, everyone in Judah will flee. Some will run to the forests and others to the rocks. All the cities will be deserted, and no one will live in them. ³⁰Jerusalem, you are doomed! Why are you so dressed up? Why are you putting on your makeup and your jewelry? You're making yourself beautiful for nothing! Your lovers have left and are planning to come back and kill you. ³¹You will scream like a woman having her first baby. You will cry out like someone gasping for their last breath. You will stretch forth your arms and cry, “I'm going to die! They're coming to kill me!”

The Justice of God

5 The Lord said to me, “Go through the streets of Jerusalem and see for yourself. Go into the marketplaces and look around. Can you find one honest man? Can you find one merchant who seeks the truth and acts justly and does what is

right no matter what the cost? If you can, the Lord will forgive the whole city and spare it from destruction. ²They say, 'We will love and serve the Lord,' but they don't really mean it." ³I said, "O Lord, I know you look for honesty and faithfulness. You disciplined the people, but they didn't change their ways. You increased your discipline, but they set their faces like a rock and refused to turn from their sins."

⁴Then I said to myself, "The people who are behaving this way are poor and can't read. They don't know what the Lord requires and don't understand the law of God. ⁵I'll go to those in power and to those who are educated and talk to them. I'm sure they have some idea of what the Lord requires of them, and they will know something about His law." But I found that they, too, have rejected the Lord's authority and are not doing what He wants them to do.

⁶That's why the Lord will let a power come down from the north and devour the land. It will attack the cities like a lion in the forest, like a wolf in the wilderness, like a leopard waiting for its prey which then tears it to pieces. This will happen because their rebellion is great, and again and again they have turned away from God to follow their idols.

⁷The Lord said, "Tell me, how can I forgive them when they turn their backs and walk out on me? They make promises to gods that are not real and go to them for help. They forgot that I was the One who supplied all their needs. Yet they continue to commit adultery. They go to the temple prostitutes, seeking to please their pagan gods. ⁸They are like well-fed lusty stallions, each one longing for the other man's wife. ⁹Should I sit by and do nothing? Should I wait until they consume their bodies with lust? Should I not correct and discipline them?"

¹⁰"I will allow the enemy from the north to come into their land and cut down their vineyards, but not completely. I will make a difference between

those who love me and those who don't. I will cut off the people like branches; only a remnant will survive. ¹¹The people of Judah, like the people of Israel before them, have been utterly unfaithful. They've turned against their own God! I, the Lord, have spoken!"

¹²The false prophets have lied to the people about the Lord. They have said, "The Lord won't do anything. Nothing will happen. No one's going to attack us. We're not going to have a war and famine and terrible times like some say we will. That's just not true. ¹³Those who claim to be prophets of the Lord are just trying to remind us that God is the God of heaven. Don't take their predictions of famine and war seriously. Their words are nothing but wind. They have no message from the Lord. We should let them have a taste of what they say by putting them in jail and letting them go hungry for a while."

¹⁴Then the Lord said to me, "Jeremiah, because the people have this attitude about you, I will make my words in your mouth like a fire, and the people will be the wood which it consumes." ¹⁵He also said, "People of Jerusalem, I will bring a nation against you from a distant land. It is an ancient and enduring nation, a people whose speech you can't understand, whose language you don't know. ¹⁶Their troops are mighty warriors, bowmen and swordsmen who kill without mercy. ¹⁷They will devour your harvests, kill your sons and daughters, slaughter your cattle and destroy your vines and fig trees. Their armies will destroy your fortified cities in which you put so much of your trust. ¹⁸Yet even then I will not let them completely destroy you or your land."

¹⁹The Lord said to me, "When the people ask you, 'Why has the Lord let all this happen to us?' say to them, 'You have forsaken the Lord and brought in gods from foreign lands and served them here, so now foreigners will come to take you to their land to serve these same gods there.'

²⁰"Take this message to the house of

Jacob and say to the people of Judah: ²¹Listen to me, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but can't see and ears but can't hear. ²²Shouldn't you respect your God? Shouldn't you at least stand in awe at my creative power? I'm the One who made the reef as a boundary for the sea, a barrier the oceans can't cross. The waves may roll in, but they can't go beyond the beach. They may roar, but they will not prevail.

²³But you people don't think about all this. You are a stubborn lot and very rebellious. You are extremely independent and have turned and left me. ²⁴You never say to yourselves, 'Let's honor the Lord our God. He's the One who gives us the fall and spring rains to have good harvests.' ²⁵But your sins have kept the rains from coming as they should, and your good harvests are being taken away from you.

²⁶Wickedness is everywhere. Evil men lie in wait to catch an innocent victim like hunters who snare birds, who set traps to catch an enemy. ²⁷Their houses are full of lies, like cages full of ugly birds. Yet, they've become powerful and rich. ²⁸They've grown fat and their faces shine. There's no limit to their evil. They don't plead the case of the fatherless and the widow and see to it that the helpless get their rights. They don't defend the poor and the needy; all they think about is money. ²⁹Shouldn't I do something about this? Shouldn't I correct the situation? Shouldn't I discipline such a nation and punish the evildoers?

³⁰Besides this, another shocking thing is happening in the land. ³¹Self-appointed prophets speak nothing but lies and the priests do what these prophets tell them to. You love it and wouldn't have it any other way, even though you are my people. But what will you do when all this comes to an end?"

Disaster Is Coming

6 The Lord says, "Run for safety, O children of Benjamin! Run for your lives! Leave Jerusalem! Sound the ram's

horn in Tekoa! Build signal fires on the hills of Beth Hakkerem! Disaster is coming out of the north and terrible destruction. ²The city of Zion is like a beautiful and delicate woman, but she will not be spared. ³Armies will come from the north and surround her. They will pitch their tents wherever they want. They will destroy her pastures and no one will stop them. ⁴They will say to each other, 'Prepare for war! We will start the attack at noon!' But then they'll change their minds and say, 'Hold it! That's not a good idea because that doesn't give us enough time. ⁵Let's attack at night and destroy the city's defense towers. Then before morning we'll attack her walls.'

⁶The Lord said to Jerusalem, "I've told them to cut down your trees and build siege ramps against your walls. I will help your enemies because your city is full of wickedness and oppression. ⁷Just as underground water keeps filling a well, so wickedness keeps filling the streets of Jerusalem. Violence and crime are everywhere. Her sin is like a deadly cancer. ⁸O Jerusalem, it's not too late. Take this message as a warning of what is about to happen to you. I will soon have to turn away from you because of your sins, and your land will become a wilderness, a place where no one wants to live. ⁹Armies will come against you again and again and will strip the land of Judah of her people as a man strips his vineyard of grapes at harvest time."

¹⁰Then I said to the Lord, "Who will listen to me if I go and warn them? Their ears are closed, so they don't hear a thing I'm saying. As soon as I tell them that I have a message from the Lord, they get upset and scorn the message as if it's coming from me. ¹¹Yet I'm burning with zeal for you, Lord, and I can't hold it back any longer! What shall I do? Who will listen to me?"

The Lord said, "Go and talk to the youth in the streets, to the young adults, to husbands and wives and to the elderly, because no one will be spared

from what's coming. ¹²Their houses will be taken from them, as well as their fields and their wives. I will discipline the people and stretch out my hand to correct them. ¹³Every one of them, from the least to the greatest, does whatever he can to get money, even dishonestly. They're all greedy for gain, including their priests and their so-called prophets. They all cheat and take advantage of everyone they can. ¹⁴They act as if such things don't matter because that's part of life. They don't see their sins as open wounds but as minor bruises. They say, 'Don't get upset over such little things. Don't worry; everything's all right.' They keep saying, 'Peace, peace,' but there is no peace. ¹⁵Are they ashamed of what they're doing? No, they're not. They have no sense of shame, no sense of guilt. They don't even blush any more. Judah will be overrun by her enemies and will fall like other nations I have had to discipline."

¹⁶Then the Lord gave me this message for the people of Judah: "You're standing at the crossroads. Stop and take a look. Which way are you going to go? Look for the old ways, those ancient paths where the good way is, and walk in it. Then you'll find rest for your souls and peace will come to your land. But you keep saying to me, 'We will not walk in those ancient paths.' ¹⁷I appointed watchmen over you. I told them to sound the ram's horn to warn you of what's coming. But you said, 'We're tired of hearing the same thing.' ¹⁸Listen to me, all you neighboring nations. I want you to take a good look and see what will happen to my people when I discipline them. ¹⁹Listen to me, you inhabitants of the earth. I will discipline my people by letting you ruin their land. They will reap what they have sown because they have rejected my words and turned against my law. ²⁰I don't care about the expensive incense they bring to me from Sheba or the rich spices from distant lands. I will not accept their offerings, nor am I pleased with their sacri-

fices while they continue living in sin." ²¹The Lord said, "I will let such troubles come on my people that both parents and children will stumble and fall, and neighbors and friends will perish.

²²"Armies will come from the north and sweep over the land. A great and powerful nation is already preparing for war. ²³The troops are armed with bow and spear. They're cruel and have no mercy. They sound like the roaring sea as wave after wave of their horsemen come riding across the land. They're coming against Jerusalem equipped for battle. ²⁴The people will cry out, 'We hear them coming! We're afraid of what they will do to us! We feel so helpless. Terror has taken hold of us, and we're in pain like a woman in childbirth who can't deliver her baby. ²⁵Let's not leave the city to go hide in the field. Let's not be caught walking on the open road. The enemy has surrounded the city and is armed with swords. He will have no mercy.' ²⁶O, my people, put on sackcloth and sprinkle ashes on your heads! Mourn and wail as over the death of your only son, because the destroyer will come suddenly and destroy you."

²⁷Again, the Lord spoke to me, "Jeremiah, I have called you to test my people as a man tests the purity of ore. I want you to test them to see what they're like. ²⁸You will find that underneath they're hardened rebels. They're always ready to slander others and commit more evil. Their hearts are as hard as bronze or iron. They're all corrupt, the whole lot of them. ²⁹The fires will fiercely burn to take away the lead, but it will not melt. The wicked are not purged out, and evil is not removed. ³⁰My people are like impure silver. They have rejected me and I will reject them by letting their enemies come against them."

Trusting in the Presence of the Temple

7 This is the word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ²"Go and stand at the entrance of the Temple and give the people this message: Hear the

word of the Lord, those of you who are coming here to worship. ³This is what the Lord Almighty says, "Repent and change your ways, and I'll let you live in your land. ⁴Don't deceive yourselves by saying, 'This is the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord!' and think that no destruction can touch you because of the Temple.

⁵Only if you change your ways and deal justly with each other; ⁶if you stop taking advantage of aliens, orphans and widows; if you stop killing innocent people and worshiping idols as if they were gods; ⁷only then will I let you stay in the land that I gave to your forefathers as a permanent possession.

⁸You keep hanging on to the false belief that nothing will hurt you as long as my Temple is here. Your trust is useless. ⁹You continue to steal, murder, commit adultery, lie under oath, burn incense to idols and offer sacrifices to gods you don't even know. ¹⁰You do all the things I detest and disapprove of and then come into my Temple to worship me, telling yourself that you're safe and all is well. ¹¹Do you think that my Temple is a hiding place for robbers? I know what you're doing and I see your behavior.

¹²"Go to Shiloh, the first place I set aside for the Sanctuary and for the Ark of the Covenant, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel. ¹³You're doing the same things your sister to the north did. I have spoken to you again and again, but you don't listen. I have called to you, but you don't answer. ¹⁴What I did to Shiloh I will do to the Temple in Jerusalem in which you put your trust. I will destroy the place where I put my name, the house that I gave to you and to your fathers. ¹⁵I will drive you out of my sight by letting your enemies come and take you to a strange land as captives, just as I did to your northern relatives in Ephraim and Israel."

¹⁶Then the Lord said to me, "Don't plead with me for these people any more or pray to me for them, because I will not

listen. ¹⁷Can't you see what they're doing on the streets of Jerusalem and in all the cities across Judah? ¹⁸The children gather firewood, the men build fires and the women bake cakes to offer to Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of love and fertility, called the Queen of Heaven. They also pour out wine offerings to other such gods—and I'm supposed to overlook all this? ¹⁹If they think they're hurting me, let them think again. They're only hurting themselves and will bring on destruction to their own confusion and shame. ²⁰I will discipline them and pour out my displeasure on the Temple, on the people, on their animals and on their crops and trees. My discipline will be like a fire that cannot be quenched."

²¹Then the Lord gave me this message for the people, "Go ahead—keep adding more and more sacrifices to your offerings and eat the sacrificial meat reserved for priests. It won't do you any good. ²²When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, I didn't just tell them about sacrifices and offerings. ²³I also told them about the importance of obedience. I said to them, 'Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in my ways so that things will be well with you.' ²⁴They didn't listen or pay attention to what I said. They did whatever their stubborn and evil-loving hearts told them to do, and instead of becoming better, they became worse. ²⁵From the day your ancestors left Egypt, I have sent my servants the prophets again and again to help them. ²⁶But your ancestors didn't listen to them or pay attention to what they said. Each generation has become more stubborn and done more evil than the previous one."

Idols Inside the Temple

²⁷Then the Lord said to me, "Jeremiah, I want you to tell the people everything I've said, but they won't listen to you. You'll call to them, but they won't answer. ²⁸This is a nation of people who have not obeyed their own God or re-

sponded to His discipline. Truth and faithfulness have departed, and honor and loyalty aren't even mentioned any more. ²⁹I want you to go to the city square and cut off your hair, then throw it away. I want you to go to the hills outside Jerusalem and sing a funeral song, because I have turned away from my people and left them alone.

³⁰"The people of Judah have done evil. They've put idols inside my Temple and defiled it by their wickedness. They have worshiped these idols right in front of me! ³¹Just outside the city, in the Valley of Hinnom, they have built an altar called Topheth and have sacrificed their infant sons and daughters to their pagan gods. I never asked them to do anything like that, nor would it ever cross my mind.

³²"The time will come when that valley will no longer be called the Valley of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. They will bury my people there until there is no more room. ³³Many will be left unburied, and their bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, and no one will stop and chase them away. ³⁴In Jerusalem and in all the cities of Judah, I will bring to an end the sound of joy and gladness and the voice of the bride and bridegroom, because the whole land will look like a wilderness."

8 The Lord said, "Out of contempt for my people, their enemies will dig up the bones of kings and officials, of priests and false prophets and of the people of Jerusalem. ²Their bones will be like dung on the ground, spread out before the sun, moon and stars which they loved and served, which they consulted and worshiped. ³The people who do survive will be taken away to places where they wish they were dead rather than alive."

False Security

⁴The Lord said, "When a man stumbles and falls, doesn't he get back up? If someone misses a turn in the road, doesn't he

turn around? ⁵Then why do you turn away from me and keep on going? Why do you cling to your idols and refuse to come back to your Lord? ⁶I've been carefully listening to my people, but they're not honest with me. No one is sorry for what he's done. Each one does his own thing and goes after it like a horse racing to battle. ⁷Even birds know where their nest is and when to go there. The stork, the dove, the swallow and the thrushes all know the laws that govern them and when it's time to migrate. But my people don't care about the laws that govern them.

⁸"How can you say, 'We are a wise and understanding people because we know the law of the Lord,' when your scribes have lied with their pens by twisting my words? ⁹The time will come when those who say they're wise and understand things will be put to shame. They will be confused by what they see happening and will find themselves trapped by their own words. They have rejected the word of God, and their wisdom will be seen for what it is. ¹⁰Their wives will be taken from them by strangers and their fields by their enemies. From the least to the greatest, they're all greedy. They're either after money or status or both, and their self-appointed prophets, as well as their priests, tell lies.

¹¹"They act as if my people's wounds were only minor. They say that all is well when it's not. They talk about peace, but there is no peace. ¹²As leaders they act shamefully, but it doesn't seem to bother them. They've lost all sense of what it means to be honest or to feel ashamed of what they have done. They don't even blush any more. When the enemy comes into the land, they will be brought down and will fall with the others. I, the Lord, have spoken.

¹³"There will be no grain to harvest, no grapes to pick, no figs to take from the trees. The leaves on your trees will dry up and your orchards will be gone. ¹⁴The time will come when you will say, 'Why stay here and be killed? Let's go to our

fortified cities, and if we have to die, let's die there. The Lord has turned against us. He has put poison in our drinking water, for we have sinned against Him. ¹⁵We wanted peace at any cost, but we found no good in it. We looked for healing, but there's been nothing but trouble.

¹⁶"The enemy has already reached the city of Dan to the north. The whole land quakes at the sound of the horses' hooves. The enemy is coming to destroy our country and everything in it, the cities and all who live there.' ¹⁷Those of you who escape will be bitten by poisonous snakes. You will die in the field and not be buried."

Jeremiah, Sick at Heart

¹⁸When I heard this, I was sick at heart. I tried to comfort myself in the Lord, but the pain within me would not go away. ¹⁹Listen to the cry of my people throughout the land. I can hear it now. They will cry out, "Where is the Lord? Is He no longer King of Jerusalem?" The Lord will say, "You have left me for your idols and have worshiped those lifeless gods. Why have you done this?" ²⁰Surely the harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved. ²¹I hurt because my people hurt. Horror grips my soul as I sit and mourn. ²²Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Is there no medicine that can heal the wounds of my people?

9 How I wish my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears. I would weep day and night for my people. ²¹I wish I had a place to stay in the desert where I could get away from my people for a while. For all of them are adulterers and very treacherous to live with. ³Their tongues are like bows, ready to shoot forth lies. Dishonesty rules the land and they go from one sin to another. As the Lord said, "They don't even know who I am."

⁴A person has to be on guard with his

friends; he can't trust even his own brother. Family members deceive each other as Jacob deceived Esau. Brother slanders brother, and friend slanders friend. ⁵They all deceive each other, and no one can be trusted to tell the truth. They have taught their tongues to lie. They weary themselves with sinning and are too tired to repent. ⁶I live in the midst of sin and deception and have nowhere to go. As the Lord said, "They refuse to know me."

⁷Therefore He said, "I will now refine and test them. What else can I do with such sinful people who will not listen to anything I say? ⁸Their tongues are like poison arrows tipped with lies. With their mouths they speak cordially to their neighbor, but in their hearts they're setting a trap for him. ⁹Should I not discipline them for that? Isn't it right for me to vindicate my name against such a sinful nation?"

¹⁰When I heard this, I said to myself, "I will mourn for the nation and weep for my people. The land will soon be desolate and the highways empty. The lowing of cattle will no longer be heard, and the birds and animals will be gone." ¹¹The Lord said, "I will turn Jerusalem into a heap of ruins, a place for jackals to live. The cities of Judah will become desolate, emptied of inhabitants."

¹²I asked the Lord, "Who understands the reason for this? To whom has the Lord explained all this so he in turn can tell it to others? Don't the people have a right to know why their land will be devastated and why their country will become a wilderness?" ¹³The Lord said to me, "You know why. The people have forsaken my law, which I gave them for their own good. They have ignored me when I told them what to do. ¹⁴They have worshiped Baal as their fathers taught them to do. ¹⁵Therefore, listen to what I will do. I will make this people eat their food in bitterness and drink their water in sorrow. ¹⁶I will scatter them among nations that neither they nor their fathers have

heard about. I will allow armies to come against them and pursue them with the sword until I have destroyed their land.

The People Will Cry for Help

¹⁷“Stop and think about what I just said. Call for professional mourners, for the women who sing funeral songs. ¹⁸Let them come and mourn over the nation until the eyes of the people overflow with tears and their eyelids are wet with crying. ¹⁹This is the sound of crying that you will hear coming out of Zion: ‘Our country is ruined! Our nation is shamed! Our houses are destroyed and we are being taken from our land.’”

²⁰Then I went and said to the women of Zion, “Listen to what the Lord said and open your ears to His words. You need to teach your daughters how to mourn and teach each other how to sing funeral songs. ²¹Death has climbed through our windows and entered our fortresses. It will cut down our children in the streets and our young men in the marketplace. ²²Bodies will be everywhere. They will be piled up in the streets like mounds of manure in the fields. Our people will be like grain cut down by reapers, left lying on the ground with no one to pick them up.”

²³Then the Lord said to me, “Don’t let the wise man glory in his wisdom nor the strong man in his strength nor the rich man in his riches, ²⁴but let those who glory, glory in this, that they know me and understand that I am the Lord who does what is right, who is steadfast in love and just and kind toward all.

²⁵“But the days are coming quickly when I will punish those who are circumcised in their foreskins but not in their hearts. ²⁶Judah will be punished along with Egypt, Edom, Ammon, Moab and all those who wear square-clipped beards or shave the sides of their head in honor of their gods. There is no difference between these people and the people of Judah for they are all uncircumcised in heart.”

Idols and the Living God

10 People of Israel, listen to the word of the Lord. ²This is what He says, “Don’t follow the ways of the world by doing what other nations are doing. Don’t let the astrologers frighten you with their interpretations of signs in the sky, such as comets or eclipses, even though others are terrified by such things. ³The religion of these people is meaningless. They cut down a tree and bring it in from the forest. They have a craftsman use his chisel and shape it into a god. ⁴They cover it with silver and gold. Then they fasten it in place so it won’t fall. ⁵And so it stands there as a scarecrow does in a field of melons. It can’t speak or move. They have to carry it where they want it because it can’t walk. So why be afraid of such gods? They can’t harm you; neither can they do you any good.”

⁶Lord, I know that there is no One like you. You are the Mighty One. You are great and powerful and so is your name. ⁷Who should not respect you, O King of nations? There is no one like you among all the wise men from every land or among any of their kings and rulers. ⁸They’re stupid and foolish to go to such idols for guidance. Such advice is no better than being handed a piece of wood. ⁹Their idols stand there covered with silver from Spain and with gold from Uphaz. The gods which their craftsmen and metalworkers made are then dressed in blue and purple provided by weavers. But their gods are only statues designed and made by man. ¹⁰But you, Lord, are the true and living God, the everlasting King. When you show your power, the earth trembles and the nations shake with fear at your presence.

¹¹The Lord said, “This is my message to the nations: These gods you worship did not make the earth and sky. They will be destroyed before your eyes and will perish from the earth.”

¹²The Lord is the One who made the heavens and the earth. He did so by His

own power. He created it out of nothing. He formed it by His wisdom and stretched out the heavens according to His understanding. ¹³When He speaks, the waters above the earth begin to roar. He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth and lightning flash in the sky. He brings rain and calls the wind out of His storehouse. ¹⁴No one can understand such power. The craftsmen are put to shame, for their gods are not alive and have no such power. ¹⁵Their idols are worthless, the products of ignorance and delusion. When their judgment comes, they will all perish. ¹⁶The God of Israel is not like that. He created all things and chose Israel to be His people. The Lord Almighty is His name.

The Coming Captivity

¹⁷People of Jerusalem, soon you'll be under siege! Gather up your belongings and be ready to leave your country. ¹⁸The Lord says, "I will hurl you out of the land. I will bring distress upon you and allow you to be taken captive."

¹⁹When I heard this, I said, "Woe is me! My heart is wounded and will not heal! I thought that when troubles came, I could endure them! ²⁰Jerusalem is ruined. It is like a tent whose ropes have snapped. Our sons are gone, and we will see them no more. There is no one left to rebuild our houses, to pitch our tents and to hang our curtains. ²¹Our spiritual shepherds are senseless. They don't go to the Lord for guidance. No wonder they have failed and our people are scattered."

²²Listen! News has reached us that there are movements in the nations to the north. They are mobilizing their armies and will come and turn the cities of Judah into heaps of rubble. They will become a place for jackals and wild dogs.

²³Then I prayed to the Lord, saying, "Lord, I know a man's life is not his own and that he has no control over his own destiny. He can't find the answer in himself and is unable to direct his steps.

²⁴Discipline us with justice and kindness,

not in anger, or we'll all die. ²⁵Rather, pour out your anger on those nations who don't worship you, who worship idols and refuse to acknowledge your sovereignty. They've killed your people and are intent on destroying us and leaving our country in ruins."

The Covenant Broken

11 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ²"Listen to the conditions of my covenant. Then go and tell the people of Judah and those who live in Jerusalem what they are. ³The man who refuses to live by the terms of my covenant is destined to die. ⁴These are the same terms I gave to your ancestors when I first brought them out of Egypt, the place that was like an oven to them. I said, 'Obey and do the things I ask you to do, and you will be my people and I will be your God.' And they agreed. ⁵I even took an oath that if they would carry out the terms of my covenant, I would give them the rich and fertile land in which you're living today." Then I said, "Yes, Lord, I will go and tell them what you said."

⁶The Lord spoke to me again, "Go and proclaim my message in the cities of Judah and on the streets of Jerusalem. Urge the people to listen to the words of my covenant and obey them. ⁷I brought their ancestors out of Egypt, and from then even until now, I have warned my people again and again not to disobey. ⁸But they didn't listen or pay attention to what I said. Instead they stubbornly did their own thing and walked in the imagination of their own hearts. So I let them reap the consequences of breaking the covenant I had asked them to keep, which they didn't do."

⁹Then the Lord said, "There is a quiet but determined revolt going on among the people of Judah and Jerusalem. They're actually planning to do more evil. ¹⁰They're going back to the sins of their ancestors who stubbornly refused to do what I asked them to do, but defi-

antly worshiped other gods. First, Israel broke the covenant I made with their forefathers, and now Judah is doing the same. ¹¹Therefore, I will bring on them a disaster which they cannot escape and one they will not forget. Even if they cry to me for help, I will not listen to them nor answer their prayers. ¹²The people of Judah and those who live in Jerusalem will run to their idols for help, but they will neither help them nor be able to stop the disaster. ¹³The people have as many gods as there are cities in Judah and there are as many altars to Baal as there are streets in Jerusalem. ¹⁴So don't pray to me and plead for these people any more because I will not listen."

¹⁵Then the Lord gave me this message for the people: "Does Judah, my beloved, have the right to come to my Temple asking me for help when she's doing such vile things? Does she think she can stop her punishment by offering me more meat? If slaughtered animals could make me protect her, she would be happy because then she could safely continue her wickedness." ¹⁶Yes, once the Lord called you A Green Olive Tree because you bore good fruit. But with a mighty storm of lightning and thunder, He will set it on fire and its branches will be burned up. ¹⁷The Lord who planted you will bring disaster on you because of the evil the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done by burning incense to Baal.

The Plot Against Jeremiah

¹⁸Then the Lord showed me the plots my enemies were making against me. ¹⁹I was like a trusting lamb ready to be taken out and killed. I didn't realize they were talking about me when they said, "Let's chop down that tree and destroy its fruit. Let's kill that man and get rid of him, and it won't be long before people will forget all about him." ²⁰Then I prayed, "O Lord, you are a righteous judge. You know men's hearts and can read their minds. I place my life in your hands. Do punish them for plotting to kill me."

²¹The Lord said to me, "The priests of Anathoth, the ones from your own hometown, are saying that if you prophesy one more time in the name of the Lord, they'll kill you. ²²Therefore I will punish them. Their young men will be killed in war, and their sons and daughters will die because of the famine. ²³I have set a time when I will bring disaster on these men and not a remnant of them will survive."

Jeremiah Argues His Case Before the Lord

12 I said, "O Lord, when I argue my case before you, I know that you will prove to be right. Yet, I feel I must speak up. I wonder about your justice. Why are wicked men so prosperous? How can those without faith be so much at ease? ²You planted our people in this land, and they have taken root. Like a tree, they have grown and borne fruit. You are always on their lips and they speak well of you, but you are far from their hearts. ³Lord, you know all about me. You not only see what I do, but you also know my thoughts. You know that I love you and my heart is with you. These wicked men who want to kill me deserve to be dragged away like sheep to be butchered. When the day of destruction comes, do make a distinction between them and those who try to do what is right. ⁴How long will our land be dry and our trees not bear fruit? How long will the drought last and our crops shrivel? How long will animals and birds have to suffer and die because of the wickedness of our people? The people say, 'God doesn't care what happens to us.'"

The Lord Answers Jeremiah

⁵Then the Lord replied, "If you get tired when running with men, how will you compete with horses? Events in Judah will happen quickly. If you can't face the problems in a land that's fairly peaceful, what will you do when war comes? If you can't survive in open country, how will you survive when the

Jordan floods? ⁶Even members of your own family have turned against you and betrayed you. They're joining the men who are plotting to kill you. Don't trust them, even though they're kind to you and speak well of you as if they were your closest friends.

⁷Yes, I will forsake my house and abandon my inheritance. I will give my beloved Judah into the hand of her enemies. ⁸My offspring has become like a lion in the forest. She roars at me. I hate the things that have made her this way. ⁹My people have fallen and are surrounded by birds of prey. Call the beasts of the field to come and join in the feast. ¹⁰The shepherds of armies will come and destroy my vineyard. They will trample down my field. They will turn my pleasant land into a wilderness. ¹¹They will turn the whole country into a wasteland. The land will mourn, and my field will be desolate because no one who lives there cares. ¹²Your enemies will come across the barren heights to conquer and plunder your cities. The sword will come upon the whole country from one end to the other, and no one will be safe. ¹³My people will sow wheat but reap thorns. They will wear themselves out trying to get ahead, but it won't work. They will bear the shame of their doings, for the Lord will withdraw His protection."

¹⁴The Lord spoke to me again, saying, "I also have something to say about these nations who have so violently taken away the land I gave to my people. I will uproot them from their own land and take the remnant of Judah from among them. ¹⁵After this, I will have compassion on them and give them back their country. ¹⁶If they're willing to learn about me from my people and seek after me, swearing to be loyal to me instead of to Baal, then I will accept them as part of my people and prosper them in whatever they do. ¹⁷But if a nation will not listen, I will completely uproot it and destroy it forever."

Symbol of the Linen Waistband

13 Then the Lord told me to go and buy myself a new linen waistband and put it on, but not allow it to touch water. ²So as a priest, I went and bought a new linen waistband and put it on. ³Later the Lord said to me, ⁴"Go to the valley northeast of Anathoth through which a river runs, take off your new linen waistband and hide it in a hole in the rocks." ⁵So I went and hid it in a hole in the rocks as the Lord had told me. ⁶After some time the Lord told me to go back to the valley to get the linen waistband that I had hidden there. ⁷So I went back to where I had hidden it, and when I pulled it out, I saw that it was rotten and good for nothing.

⁸Then the Lord said to me, ⁹"This is what I will do to the pride of Judah and the pride of Jerusalem. ¹⁰These people refuse to obey me. They're as stubborn as ever and determined to continue to worship their gods. They're just like this waistband, totally useless to me. ¹¹As a priest ties his waistband tightly around himself, so I tied Israel and Judah to me. I did this because they were my people, and I wanted them to honor me and praise my name. But they wouldn't listen."

¹²Again the Lord spoke to me, "Jeremiah, tell the people that wineskins were made to be filled with wine. They will tell you that everybody knows that. ¹³Then say to them, 'This is what the Lord says: As wineskins are filled with wine, so everyone in this land will be as disoriented as a drunken man, including the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the self-appointed prophets and all those who live in Jerusalem. ¹⁴I will punish them for their sins and destroy them like useless wineskins. Fathers and sons will turn against each other, as will the old and the young. I will show them no compassion or pity, but will let them reap the consequences of what they have done.'"

The People's Pride and Arrogance

¹⁵People of Israel, don't be arrogant

and rebellious. Listen to the Lord and pay attention to what He says. ¹⁶Give glory and honor to the Lord your God before He brings on the darkness, before your feet stumble on the mountains at sunset. You hope for light, but the Lord will turn it into darkness. ¹⁷If you won't listen, my heart will break with sorrow and my soul will weep because of your arrogance and pride. My eyes will overflow with tears because the Lord's flock will be taken captive.

¹⁸The Lord said, "Tell the king and the queen mother to come down from their thrones of pride and humble themselves, or their crowns will be taken away. ¹⁹The cities in the far south will be taken and their people carried away captive. All of Judah will be taken and her people will be driven into exile.

²⁰"Daughter of Zion, lift up your eyes and take a good look! Your enemies are coming at you from the north. Where are the children I entrusted to your care, that beautiful flock of which you were so proud?" ²¹What will you say when the Lord permits those whom you thought to be friendly to come and conquer your land and rule over you? You will be in pain like a woman giving birth. ²²If you ask yourself why this has happened to you, why your skirts have been torn off and your body mistreated, it's because of your sins. ²³Can a man change the color of his skin or a leopard change its spots? Neither can you change yourselves to love goodness when you're used to doing evil. ²⁴The Lord will scatter you as chaff that's blown away by the wind.

²⁵"This will be your lot," says the Lord. "This is what will happen because you've turned away from me and put your trust in idols. ²⁶I will not protect you in your sinning, but will let your enemies come and pull your skirts over your heads, to let everyone see you to your shame. ²⁷I have seen your shameful acts of pagan worship, your prostitution, your adulteries and your lustful neighings like those of stallions going after a mare in heat.

Woe to you, O Jerusalem! How long will you continue to live such wicked lives and remain unclean?"

Sword, Drought, and Famine

14 Then the Lord said to me concerning the drought: ²"Judah is mourning; her cities are dying. Her people lie on the ground weeping, and a cry of despair goes up from Jerusalem. ³The rich send their servants for water. They go to the wells but find none. They return with empty jars. They're ashamed to tell their masters and sit there in despair. ⁴The ground is cracked because there is no rain. The farmers are sick at heart and don't know what to do. They, too, sit there and hold their heads in despair. ⁵The doe in the field forsakes her newborn fawn to go in search of grass. ⁶The wild donkeys stand on barren heights and pant for breath like jackals. Their eyes are failing because there is no food."

⁷I prayed, "O Lord, though we have sinned, do something for the sake of your name as you have done for our ancestors. We have sinned against you many times. Our apostasies are great. ⁸You're our only hope! You're the only One who can save us from disaster. Why are you like a passing stranger, a traveler who stays for only one night and then goes on? ⁹Why do you stand motionless like a surprised man, like a warrior who can't save? You are among us and we bear your name. So please don't leave us."

¹⁰This is what the Lord said in answer to my plea, "These people love to go to their foreign gods. They can't control their own feet. I'm not pleased with what they have done to themselves and against me. I will not overlook their sins, but will let them reap what they have sown.

¹¹"So don't pray for these people asking me to help them. They're beyond help. ¹²Even if they fast and pray, I will not listen to them. Even if they bring offerings and sacrifices, I will not accept their worship. Instead, I will allow them to be consumed by war, famine and disease."

¹³I prayed again, "O Lord, you know that the self-appointed prophets are telling the people that no famine or war will touch this land because you promised your people peace." ¹⁴The Lord answered me, "These prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not appointed them, spoken to them or sent them. They are telling people lies based on false visions, divinations and their own twisted thinking. ¹⁵Therefore, I will tell you what will happen to these self-appointed prophets who dare to speak for me: telling people that all will be peace and that there will be no war and famine. I will let these 'prophets' be consumed by war and famine just as the people will be. ¹⁶Their bodies and the bodies of the people who believed them will lie in the streets of Jerusalem, and no one will bury them. This will happen to them, their wives, their sons and their daughters. They will reap the consequences of their own wicked ways."

¹⁷Then the Lord asked me to tell the people about my sorrow: "I cry day and night for you. I can't stop crying because the Lord's virgin daughter has been seriously wounded. ¹⁸When I go out in the fields, I foresee many of you being killed by the sword. When I go into the city, I foresee the results of the coming famine. Your prophets and priests carry on their work, but they don't know what they're doing to you. They are totally oblivious to what's coming."

The People Plead With the Lord

¹⁹Then I prayed to the Lord, "Lord, have you rejected us completely? Don't you like us? Why have you let your people be wounded and hurt so that they can't be healed? We hoped and prayed for peace, but nothing happened. We hoped and prayed for healing, but things got worse. ²⁰O Lord, we have sinned. We confess our sins and admit that they're just like the sins of our ancestors. ²¹Remember your promises to us and don't abandon us. Don't disgrace Jerusalem, the place where

you have put your name. Do remember the covenant you made with us. Don't go back on your word. ²²Not one of our idols can give us rain. The sky can't give us the showers we need. We are putting our hope in you, Lord. You are the only One who can give us what we need."

The Lord Will Not Extend Mercy

15 The Lord answered me, "Even if Moses and Samuel were standing here pleading with me, I would not have mercy on these people. Tell them to leave my presence and go elsewhere for help. ²If they ask you where they should go, tell them, 'This is what the Lord said: Some of you are destined to die of disease. Some of you are destined to die by the sword. Some of you are destined to die because of the famine. And some of you are destined to be taken captive by your enemies and carried into the land of Babylon.'

³"I have decided to let four detestable things happen to them: People will be killed by destroyers invading their land, dogs will drag away their bodies, birds will eat their flesh, wild animals will attack and devour those who are left. ⁴I will make them abhorrent to all the kingdoms around them because of the awful thing that Hezekiah's son Manasseh did in Jerusalem when he was king of Judah."

⁵Then the Lord said, "Who will have pity on you, Jerusalem? Who will cry over you? Who will care about you or ask you how you're doing? ⁶You have rejected me. You continue to turn your back on me. So I have turned my back on you. I will remove my protection and let you be crushed because I can't continue to have compassion on you and protect you in your sinning. ⁷I will sift you at the gates of your cities, and you will be like straw tossed to the wind. I will bring sorrow and bereavement on the people because they have not changed their ways.

⁸"There will be more widows in the land than you can count. They will seem as numerous as the sand on the seashore. Young men will be killed in their prime,

and their mothers will cry out in pain. Anguish and terror will sweep over the land as suddenly as a midday storm.⁹ The mother of seven sons will lose all of them, then feel faint and gasp for breath. Her bright day will turn dark. She will feel alone and sick at heart, then die in grief. Those who survive will be at the mercy of the swords of their enemies.”

Jeremiah Gets Discouraged

¹⁰What a terrible situation I’m in! Why did my mother ever give me birth? The whole country is against me! I have to argue with everyone about the condition of our people. In all my dealings, I have never taken advantage of anyone, yet they all curse me as if I had.

¹¹The Lord said, “I will protect you for the good of my people. There will be a remnant who will serve me, and I will make your enemies come to you and plead with you for help in the time of trouble and distress.¹² Can a man break iron or bronze with his bare hands? Neither will they be able to stop the iron power that will come upon them from the north.

¹³“Their wealth and treasures will be plundered and taken away because of their sins throughout the country.¹⁴ I will let their enemies come and take them to a land they don’t know. Mercy has come to an end, and the consequences of their sins will burn like a fire against them.”

¹⁵I said, “Lord, I know you understand all things. Please don’t forget me. There are those who want to kill me. It’s because of the message you gave me that I’m being mistreated and insulted.¹⁶ When your words came to me, I ate them with joy. They were the delight of my heart. I accepted them because I wanted to bear your name and be known as yours.

¹⁷“I never enjoyed the company of those who mock your word. I never sat with those who laughed at what you said. But I sat alone because your hand was upon me, and you filled my heart with in-

dignation over what I heard them say about you.¹⁸ Why does this have to go on and on? Why does my spirit have to keep suffering over what I hear? Why does my heart have to be in constant pain? Will your presence in Israel be like a stream that goes dry in the summer or like a spring that fails when we need it?”

The Lord Restores Jeremiah’s Courage

¹⁹The Lord answered, “If you stop your complaining, I will restore your courage. If you say things worth saying instead of feeling sorry for yourself, then you’ll continue to be my messenger and speak for me. The people need to change and turn to you. Don’t feel so sorry for them that you change and end up being like them.²⁰ I will make you like a fortified wall. The people will fight against you, but will not be able to break you down and destroy you. I will be with you and deliver you.²¹ I will save you from the hands of the wicked and rescue you from those who would kill you. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

Jeremiah Stays Single

16 Again the Lord spoke to me, saying,² “I don’t want you to get married and have children in this place.³ Let me tell you what will happen to the sons and daughters who are born in Jerusalem and to the women who are mothers and the men who are fathers.⁴ They will die from the outbreak of deadly diseases, and no one will mourn over them nor will anyone bury them. Their bodies will lie in the streets like piles of manure. They will be killed in war or die from the famine, and their bodies will become food for birds and wild animals.

⁵“I don’t want you to go to a home where someone has died and eat the funeral meal with them. Don’t go there to mourn with them and bemoan their situation because I have withdrawn my mercy and peace from the people.⁶ Both rich and poor will die. No one will bury them. No one will mourn over them, nor will anyone shave his head as a sign of

grief. ⁷No one will offer food to comfort those who mourn, nor will anyone express sympathy for what has happened, not even at the loss of a father or mother.

⁸“Don’t visit a home where there is feasting and sit down to eat and drink. ⁹Listen to what I am telling you. I will bring an end to feasting. Throughout the land I will bring an end to sounds of joy and gladness, the happy voices of the bride and the bridegroom. I will do all this during your lifetime.

¹⁰“When you tell the people this, they will ask you why I’ve decided to let all this happen to them. They will ask you what great crime they are guilty of or what great sin they have committed against me. ¹¹Tell them, ‘First, your forefathers turned their backs on me and worshiped other gods and followed them. They forsook my law and refused to obey me. ¹²Now you have done the same thing, only worse. You have behaved more wickedly than they have. All of you follow your own desires and stubbornly do your own thing instead of listening to me. ¹³So I will allow you to be taken to a land that neither you nor your ancestors have known. There you can serve other gods day and night, and I will neither interfere nor come to help you.’

The Captives Will Come Home

¹⁴“The time is coming when my people will no longer say, ‘As the Lord lives who brought us out of Egypt.’ ¹⁵Instead they will say, ‘As the Lord lives who brought us back from Babylon, from the land of the north and from the countries in which we were held captive.’ At the appointed time I will restore my people to the land that I gave their ancestors.

¹⁶“But for now, I will send for fishermen to come and catch my people and take them away. I will send for hunters to hunt them down on every mountain and hill, bring them out of caves where they’re hiding and carry them away captive. ¹⁷I see everything they do. Nothing is hidden from me, nor have their sins es-

caped my sight. ¹⁸I will make them pay equally for their wickedness because they have defiled the land with their detestable idols and vile images that stand there lifeless, and my people bow down and worship them.”

¹⁹Then I prayed, “O Lord, you are my strength and stronghold, my help in times of trouble. I know that if the nations of the world turned to you, confessed their sins and said, ‘Our ancestors worshiped nothing but false gods, lifeless idols that did us no good,’ that you would forgive them. ²⁰Men can’t make gods, and if they form images, they’re not really gods. ²¹So let the nations see your power, and they will know that you are the Lord and we are your people.”

Judah’s Sin

17 The Lord said, “Judah’s sin is written with an iron pen, engraved with a diamond tip. It is written on their hearts and carved on the corners of their many altars. ²Even their children come to these altars to worship the mother goddess Asherah whose pole has been set up on every hill and mountain in the country. ³Therefore, I will let their enemies come and take away their wealth and their national treasures because of all the sinful things they have done on the high places throughout the land. ⁴Because of their sins they will lose the inheritance I gave them. Their enemies will enslave them and take them to a land they don’t know. My displeasure will burn in their hearts, and it will be something they will never forget.”

⁵The Lord also said, “Cursed will be those who put their trust in man, who make flesh their strength and whose hearts turn away from the Lord to other gods. ⁶They will be like shrubs in the desert, like scraggly bushes on salty ground where nothing worthwhile can grow. They will end up living in parched places in the wilderness, in the salty land by the Dead Sea.

⁷“But blessed are those whose hope is

not in themselves but in the Lord. ⁸They will be like trees planted by flowing rivers, sending their roots into good soil. They have no fear of the heat and their leaves are continually green. They're not bothered by drought and will always bear fruit. ⁹Who can understand man's heart? It's devious and deceitful above all else. Who can trust it? It's sick. Who can heal it? ¹⁰I know man's heart. I know how his mind works. I examine his heart and test his thinking. I reward him for what he has done, according to the fruit of his life."

¹¹Then I said, "The man who gains riches by unjust means is like a bird that sits in a nest and hatches eggs that it did not lay. Even during the prime of life, his riches will control him, and in the end he will be shown to be a fool. ¹²Your throne in the heavenly Sanctuary is glorious from the beginning and is without end. A glorious place is the place of your Sanctuary here on earth. ¹³Lord, you are Israel's hope. Our hope is not in ourselves, but in you. All who forsake you will disappear like names written in the sand because they have turned away from you, The Spring of Living Water.

Jeremiah Prays for Help

¹⁴"Heal me, O Lord, and I will be healed. Save me, and I will be saved. You are my hope, the One I will praise. ¹⁵The people keep saying to me, 'Where is the word of the Lord? Where are those things that He said would happen to us? Let's see them!' ¹⁶Lord, I didn't run away from your call to the prophetic ministry, but I didn't expect to have to give a message like this. Neither have I prayed that something like this would happen to turn them back to you. Lord, you know everything I think and say. It's in front of you like an open book.

¹⁷"Don't make me afraid of you, Lord. You're my only safety, my only refuge during times of trouble. ¹⁸Let those who persecute me and want to see me dead be confounded. Don't let them make a

public spectacle of me. Help me not to be terrified by what they're planning to do to me. Let them be the ones who are terrified. If need be, let disaster come on them twice to stop them from killing me."

The Importance of the Sabbath

¹⁹Then the Lord said to me, "Go and stand by the People's Gate, the one the kings of Judah use to go in and out of the city and give the message I'm going to give you. Then go to each of the other gates and give the same message. ²⁰Urge the king and all the people of Jerusalem who go in and out of these gates to stop and listen to what the God of Israel has to say. ²¹Speak up and say, 'Hear the word of the Lord! Don't take merchandise in and out of the city on the Sabbath! ²²Don't carry a load out of your house on the Sabbath to transact business. Honor the Sabbath and keep it holy just as I asked your ancestors to do. ²³But your ancestors didn't listen to me or pay attention to what I said. They became more and more stubborn and refused to obey me or to respond to my discipline.

²⁴"But if you will pay attention to what I have to say and obey me, if you will stop taking your goods in and out of the city to transact business on the Sabbath, ²⁵then the kings who come through these gates and sit on David's throne will be blessed as David was. They and their officials will ride in chariots and on horses and be followed by the leading men of Judah and by those living in Jerusalem, and this city will be inhabited forever. ²⁶People from everywhere will come to Jerusalem. They will not only come from other cities in Judah and from the territory of Benjamin, but from the foothills and mountains all over Palestine. They will bring whole burnt offerings, grain offerings, incense, thank offerings and other gifts to the house of the Lord. ²⁷But if you don't listen to me and don't keep the Sabbath as you should, I will kindle a fire in the gates of Jerusalem that will burn down her

palaces, and no one will be able to put it out until it has done its work.”

The Potter and the Clay

18 The Lord spoke to me again, saying, ²“Go down to the potter’s house and I’ll tell you what to do.” ³So I went to the potter’s house and watched him as he worked. ⁴Whenever a piece of clay on the wheel didn’t turn out the way he wanted it to, he would reshape it and make it into something else.

⁵Then the Lord said, ⁶“Don’t I have a right to do with my people as this potter does with the clay? As the clay is subject to the touch of his hand, so the future of Israel is subject to me. ⁷The same thing is true for all nations. If at any time I speak concerning a nation or kingdom to be uprooted, torn down or destroyed, ⁸and that nation turns from its evil ways, then I will change my mind about the disaster I had planned to bring on it. ⁹If I plant and build a nation or a kingdom ¹⁰and that nation disobeys and does wickedly, I will change my mind and will not do the good I intended to do for it. ¹¹So go and speak to the people of Judah and Jerusalem and tell them that I changed my mind and reconsidered the good I had intended to do for them. I have decided to let disaster come on them, to uproot them and let them be carried away captive into another country. But if they acknowledge their sins and turn from their evil ways, I will change my mind about the discipline I had planned for them.

The People Reject God’s Warning

¹²“When you tell the people this, they will say to you, ‘Why should we stop what we’re doing? Nothing is going to happen. We like what we’re doing and have no intention of doing differently.’”

¹³Later the Lord spoke to me again and said, “Ask the nations if anything like this has ever happened in their country. Do their people stubbornly refuse to obey their gods? The people of Israel have

done an unheard of thing among the nations by refusing to obey their God. ¹⁴Do the snows on the mountains of Lebanon ever stop providing you with water in their season? Do its cool streams ever cease to flow?

¹⁵“Yet my people have forgotten me and have burned incense and brought offerings to worthless idols. This made them stumble in everything they do. They no longer follow the ancient paths, but walk in paths of their own making. ¹⁶Their land will be laid waste. It will be the object of lasting scorn. All who pass by will wag their heads in disbelief. They can’t understand how these people have turned against their own God. ¹⁷I will scatter my people before their enemies like chaff blown by the wind. I will show them my back but not my face in the day that I bring disaster on them.”

Jeremiah Persecuted

¹⁸When I gave the people the message the Lord had given me, they said, “We have to do something about Jeremiah. We have priests to instruct us, wise men to counsel us and prophets to give us the word of the Lord. We don’t need him. Let’s not touch him, but bring charges against him and strike him with our tongues. Let’s stop listening to him and pay no attention to what he says.” And that’s what happened.

¹⁹So I prayed, “O Lord, please listen to me. Do you hear all the things my enemies are saying about me and planning to do to me? ²⁰They’re repaying me evil for good. They’ve already dug my grave for me. Remember how I came to you to speak in their behalf to save them from disaster? How can they think that I’m against them? ²¹But now, O Lord, I have done all I could. If their children have to die in the famine or by the sword, so let it be. If their wives have to be made childless and become widows because their husbands were killed in battle, so let it be. ²²Let our enemies come and invade the land and plunder the houses of our

people. They've already dug a pit to catch me and set traps for my feet. ²³But Lord, you know all this. How can you ever forgive them their crimes and blot out such grievous sins? Let them reap what they have sown. Let them be overcome by their enemies."

The Sign of the Broken Jar

19 The Lord said, "Go and buy a clay jar from the potter and then go to the elders of the people and the older priests. ²Ask them to go with you to the Potsherd Gate and follow you outside the city until all of you can overlook the Valley of Hinnom. Then say to them, ³'This message is for the king of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Listen, for this is what the Lord God of Israel says: I will bring such a disaster on you that all who hear about it will be stunned and their ears will tingle. ⁴I will do this because my people have turned their backs on me and filled this city with foreign gods. They've sacrificed to gods that even their ancestors and former kings refused to worship. They've filled this place with the blood of the innocent. ⁵They've built altars to Baal on which they've sacrificed their new born sons. This is something I never asked them to do and would never think of such a thing.

⁶"The days are coming when this place will no longer be known as the Valley of Hinnom, but as the Valley of Slaughter. ⁷I will turn the plans of the people of Jerusalem and Judah upside down. I will let their enemies come and slaughter their men in battle. I will let those who hate them strike them down with the sword. I will give their bodies to the birds for food and to the wild animals for a feast. ⁸I will make this city an object of scorn. All who pass by will shake their heads and hiss at this place. They will see it as a place that's been cursed. ⁹I will not interfere but will let the people become so hungry in the siege that they will kill and eat their own infants and the flesh of those who have died. Their ene-

mies will besiege the city and not give up until they've broken down the walls and destroyed it."

¹⁰After I finished giving these men the message, the Lord said to me, "Now take the jar that's in your hand and throw it down and smash it in front of them. ¹¹Then say to them, 'This is what the Lord said: I will smash this nation and this city and break it to pieces just like this jar, and no one will be able to put it back together. People will bury their dead in this valley outside the city until there will be no more room. ¹²This is what I will do to this place and to those who live here. It will become a place of slaughter. ¹³The houses in Jerusalem have been defiled and will be destroyed, including the house of the king and all houses on whose roof gardens they burned incense to the stars and poured out wine as an offering to their gods.'

¹⁴Then I turned and left the elders and priests standing there and went back into the city. I went and stood in the courtyard of the Temple and said to the people, ¹⁵"This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says, 'Listen to me! I'm going to bring on this city and on all the cities in Judah a disaster that you'll never forget, because you are so stubborn and refuse to listen to what I have to say.'"

A Message to the Officer of the Temple

20 When Pashhur the priest, the chief officer in charge of the Temple, heard me say these things, ²he had me arrested, whipped and put in stocks in the prison by the Upper Gate of Benjamin at the entrance to the Temple. ³The next day Pashhur released me, and I said to him, "Your name is not Pashhur, but Terror. This is the name that the Lord has given you.

⁴"The Lord says, 'I will bring terror to yourself and to your friends. Some of them will be killed by the sword while you stand by and look on. I will hand this country over to the Babylonians, who will come and invade the land, take many of our people as captives to Babylon and

kill many others with the sword. ⁵I will let your enemies come and plunder the wealth of this city, claim all its treasures and its prized possessions, including all the treasures of the king, and take them back to Babylon. ⁶As for you, Pashhur, you and your whole family will be captured and also carried off to Babylon. There you will die and be buried, together with your friends to whom you've prophesied lies."

Jeremiah Complains to the Lord

⁷Then I said to the Lord, "O Lord, you first spoke to me so strongly that you had me thinking that very soon you would destroy our city and discipline us for our sins, but you still haven't done what you said. If I was wrong, why didn't you tell me? Now everyone's making fun of me and my messages. Not a day goes by without someone pointing his finger at me, laughing and mocking. ⁸Whenever I tell the people that violence and destruction will come on this place, they ridicule, scorn and insult me, all because I tell them what you told me to say.

⁹"But when I say to myself, 'I'll just wait to see what will happen. I'll stop preaching and will say nothing more about it to anyone,' then your message becomes like a fire in my bones. I try to hold back, but I can't. I will no longer doubt it. ¹⁰I hear people whispering to each other, 'Look! There's the doomsday preacher! Let's go and report him to the authorities!' Even people I thought were my friends are eager for my downfall. They talk among themselves and say, 'Maybe we can trick him into saying something he shouldn't, then we can have him arrested and take revenge.' ¹¹But you, Lord, are on my side. You're like a mighty warrior, always protecting me from those who want to kill me. They will fail and be disgraced, and their disgrace will not be forgotten.

¹²"O Lord, mighty God, you judge all men fairly. You are the only One who can probe men's hearts and minds. Let me see

my enemies confounded for I have committed myself to your cause." ¹³Sing unto the Lord! Praise His name! He rescues the helpless from the power of evil men.

Jeremiah Gets Discouraged Again

¹⁴As for me, I feel like a failure! Cursed be the day that I was born! Forget my birthday, the day my mother gave me birth! I don't want it to be remembered! ¹⁵Cursed be the man who brought my father the news that he had a son. Cursed be the man who said, "Congratulations! It's a boy!" making my father glad. ¹⁶May he be like the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah that the Lord destroyed because they didn't repent. May he hear the cry of battle in the morning and hear the groans of the dying at noon. ¹⁷Why didn't he kill me when I was born? Why didn't my mother's womb become my grave? ¹⁸Why was I ever born? All I've had is trouble and sorrow. All I have to look forward to is to end my days in shame.

Jerusalem's Doom Is Sure

21 Now when Nebuchadnezzar's armies finally came to besiege Jerusalem, King Zedekiah sent Pashhur—not the one who had me arrested—and the priest Zephaniah to me, saying, ²"Please speak to the Lord for us because Nebuchadnezzar's armies are determined to take the city. Maybe this time the Lord will be kind and fight for us. Maybe He'll perform a miracle as He did against Assyria when Hezekiah was king, so that Nebuchadnezzar will retreat and go home."

³Then the word of the Lord came to me, and I said to the men, ⁴"This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to King Zedekiah, 'If you fight against the king of Babylon, I will turn your weapons back on you. His army is outside the wall besieging you, and I will bring it inside the city. ⁵If you do any of this, I will fight against you with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and destroy you and your army. ⁶I will strike down both men

and animals living in this city. They will die by the sword or by the plague that will follow. ⁷I will give you and your officials and the people who survive the sword and the plague into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who will have many of you put to death.’”

⁸The Lord spoke to me again, “Go tell the people, ‘This is what the Lord says: I am giving you a choice between life and death. ⁹Those who stay in this city will die by the sword, by famine or by the plague, but those who leave the city and go out and surrender to the Babylonians will live and escape with their lives. ¹⁰I have set myself against this city and will give it into the hands of the king of Babylon who will destroy it by fire.’”

¹¹“Then go to the descendants of the royal house of David and say to them, ¹²‘This is what the Lord says: I told you to see that justice is done every morning. I wanted you to rescue the people from those who oppress and rob them, but you didn’t. The evil you tolerated has forced me to discipline you with fire. It will be a fire that no one can stop.

¹³“Jerusalem, you sit there like a queen. You tell yourself that no one can scale the heights you sit on and conquer you. You think you’re well protected and no one can harm you. ¹⁴But I will bring you down from your heights and punish you just as you deserve. I will kindle a fire in your forests that will consume everything around you. I will kindle a fire in your palaces that will burn them to the ground.’”

Jeremiah Speaks to the Kings of Judah

22 Before Zedekiah became king, the Lord had told me to go to see King Jehoiakim, who had ruled Judah for eleven years, and say to him, ²“Listen to the word of the Lord, O king, you and your officials and your people. ³This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. See to it that those who are being cheated and robbed are protected by law. Don’t oppress or mistreat aliens, or

phans or widows. Stop killing the innocent to protect the guilty. ⁴If you really put your heart into doing what is right and see that justice is done, then the kings of Judah who reign after you will come through the gates of this palace riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by their officials and cheered by the people. ⁵But if you don’t listen and do what I ask, I promise you that this palace will become a heap of ruins.

⁶“Your palace is beautifully situated, like a picture from the land of Gilead. It may be as glorious as the cedars on the mountains of Lebanon out of which Solomon built his great hall, but I will not hesitate to make it an empty shell. ⁷I will send men to destroy it, and with their battle axes, they will cut down your beautiful cedar beams and throw them into the fire.

⁸“People from many nations will pass by this city and say, ‘Why has their God done such a terrible thing to this beautiful city?’ ⁹Others will answer, ‘Because they have forsaken the covenant their God has made with them and have worshiped and served other gods.’ O King, this is the message the Lord has given me for you.”

¹⁰Then I said to the people, “People of Judah, don’t keep crying, wishing good King Josiah were back. The Lord allowed him to die to spare him the pain of captivity. Instead, think about what happened to Jehoahaz, his son who ruled over Judah for only three months and was captured and taken to Egypt to die there.

¹¹“Remember what the Lord said to Jehoahaz? He told him that he would succeed his father to the throne but would reign for only three months. Because of his evil ways, the Lord let King Necho of Egypt take him captive. ¹²He spent years in prison and longed for his homeland, but died there and never returned home again.

¹³“This is what will happen to your present king, Jehoiakim, Josiah’s other son, who enlarged his palace at the ex-

pense of the people. He makes his fellow countrymen work for him for nothing and refuses to give them their honest wages. ¹⁴He said, 'I will enlarge my palace and make it even more beautiful. I will add more rooms and put in bigger windows.' So he went ahead and enlarged his palace, paneled it with cedar, put in bigger windows and decorated the rooms in royal red.

¹⁵"When he got through, did it make him a better king? Do cedar and beautiful decorations make him a good king? His father Josiah was just and fair in everything he did, and all went well with him and his kingdom. ¹⁶He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and all went well within his house. This is what it means to know the Lord and be a great king. ¹⁷But his son, Jehoiakim, is selfish and greedy. He has his heart set on himself and on dishonest gain, even if it means shedding innocent blood, oppressing the poor and exploiting the whole nation."

¹⁸This is what the Lord said about Jehoiakim, "The people will not mourn for him as they did for his father. No one will say, 'How terrible! Our king is dead!' No one will weep for him and say, 'My brother, my sister, we've lost our king!' ¹⁹His body will be treated as the body of a dead donkey. The Babylonians will take it away and throw it outside the city."

²⁰I said, "People of Jerusalem, go to the mountains of Lebanon and to the land of Bashan and cry out in pain. Let your voice be heard in the land of Moab, because your allies will be crushed; your lovers will be defeated. ²¹The Lord spoke to you and warned you when you were still secure and prosperous, but you wouldn't listen. You have been this way from your youth. You never would listen to Him. ²²The winds of war will come on you from Babylon and blow your false shepherds away. Your allies will be defeated and you will be disgraced and put to shame because of your wickedness. ²³You had cedars brought in from

Lebanon and now you live in cedar-lined houses, but you will groan in pain like a woman in labor."

²⁴Later the Lord gave me a message for Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, saying, "Even though you are the new king and are like a royal ring on my finger, I will pull you off and cast you out of my sight. ²⁵I will turn you over to the people you're so afraid of, people who want to kill you. I will hand you over to Nebuchadnezzar, who will take you to Babylon. ²⁶You, your mother and your wives will be taken captive and carried into a land where you were not born, and you will all die there. ²⁷You will long for your homeland, but you will never return." ²⁸Why did Jehoiachin become as a broken jar that no one wanted? Why was he and thousands of his people taken into exile to a land they did not know? ²⁹O land of Judah! Listen again to what the Lord at that time said about your king, ³⁰"Jehoiachin is like a man without children, a man who will not prosper. His reign will last only a few months, and his offspring will never sit on David's throne or rule over Judah."

The Lord Is Our Righteousness

23 During the siege of Jerusalem before Jehoiachin and others were taken away, the Lord asked me to speak to the leaders of Judah and say to them, "Woe to the shepherds of the people. Woe to the shepherds who have destroyed and scattered the sheep of my pasture. ²This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to shepherds who are supposed to watch over my people, 'You have scattered my flock and driven them away from me. You have not cared for them or visited them. So now I will visit you and punish you for the evil you have done. ³But I will not forget my people. I will gather the remnant of my flock from the countries where I have scattered them and will bring them back to their own pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply. ⁴I will place shepherds over

them who will care for them. My people will no longer be afraid or terrified, and not one will be taken captive again. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

⁵Then the Lord said to me, “The time is coming when I will raise up a Descendant of David to be King over Israel. He will be a righteous Branch from David’s line and will rule my people wisely and do what is just and right. ⁶During His days Israel will be saved, and under His rule the people will dwell safely and be at peace. This is the name by which He will be known: The Lord Is Our Righteousness.

⁷“The time is coming when my people will no longer say, ‘As the Lord lives who brought us up out of the land of Egypt,’ ⁸but they will say, ‘As the Lord lives who brought us back from the land of Babylon and from all the countries where we had been scattered.’ Then my people will live in their own land.”

False Prophets

⁹I am awed by the power of the Lord. I am like a drunk man who staggers from too much wine. My heart trembles and my bones shake when the Lord speaks. Woe to the false prophets who prophesy smooth things. ¹⁰The land is full of adulterers unfaithful to the Lord. Because of this, the land is cursed and parched and the pastures are dry. The leaders of the people continue in their evil ways using their power unjustly.

¹¹The Lord says, “Both the prophets and priests are godless. I have seen them do evil even in my own Temple. ¹²The paths in which they lead people are slippery and dark. I will make them stumble and fall. I will bring disaster on them, for the time of their punishment is coming. ¹³I watched the false prophets of Samaria in the Northern Kingdom speak in the name of Baal and lead my people astray. ¹⁴Now I see false prophets in Jerusalem and they’re not only doing the same thing, but much worse. They commit adultery. They lie. They steal. They lead

the people to do wrong and by their example encourage wickedness. The people of Jerusalem are like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.”

¹⁵This is what the Lord says about these prophets, “I will give them bitter food to eat and deadly water to drink because they’ve spread wickedness throughout the land.”

¹⁶This is what the Lord says to the people of Jerusalem, “Don’t listen to what these self-appointed prophets are telling you. They fill you with all kinds of false hopes by telling you what they’ve imagined the future will be like, which is not what I told them to say. ¹⁷They keep telling those who openly despise my teachings that all is well and no harm will come to them, even to those who stubbornly and willfully continue to sin. ¹⁸Have any of these prophets stood in the council chambers of the God of Israel and heard me say this? Have they ever heard me say what they’re telling the people? Not one of them has ever listened to me or paid attention to what I’ve said.”

¹⁹The storm of the Lord is coming. It will come swirling down on the heads of the people like a mighty, twisting wind. ²⁰It will not stop until it has accomplished what it was sent to do. Then in the days to come, His people will understand the Lord’s purposes more clearly.

²¹The Lord said to me, “I didn’t send these false prophets to speak to my people. They’ve run with their own message. I didn’t speak to them, yet they’ve gone ahead and prophesied. ²²If they had stood in my council chamber and heard what I said as they claim they did, they would be telling the people what I said and turning them away from their wickedness and all the evil things they’re doing.

²³“I am the Lord, the God who is nearby and far away. ²⁴I see everything and everyone. No one can hide from me. I am everywhere in heaven and on earth. ²⁵I have heard what these false prophets have said, who prophesy lies in my name. They say, ‘I had a dream! I had a vi-

sion from the Lord! Listen to me!’ ²⁶How long will these prophets mislead my people with lies, with the deceit of their own hearts and with visions of grandeur for Israel? ²⁷They hope that what they tell the people will prevent them from being too attached to me so they can become more attached to Baal. ²⁸If these false prophets had a dream, let them say it was only a dream and not mislead the people. But if a true prophet has had a dream from me, he must tell the people what he has seen and heard no matter how unwelcome it is. There’s no comparison between an ordinary dream and a message from the Lord, any more than there is between straw and wheat.

²⁹“My word is like a fire in a man’s bones and like a hammer that crushes rocks. ³⁰I am against self-appointed prophets who steal words from true prophets and mix them with their own, then say they came from me. ³¹I am against those prophets who speak their own words and claim to have had a dream or a vision from the Lord. ³²Listen! I am against any prophet who leads my people astray by telling them dreams that are full of lies. I did not appoint these prophets nor did I send them. They are no help to my people; therefore, I am against them. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

³³Then the Lord said to me, “Jeremiah, when one of my people or one of these prophets or priests asks you, ‘What is the burden of the Lord? What is it that’s troubling Him?’ then say to them, ‘You are the ones who are a burden to the Lord. You are the ones who are troubling Him. He will turn against you just as He said He would.’ ³⁴If a prophet or a priest or anyone else claims that the dream he had is from the Lord when it is not, I will punish him and those of his household who support him.

³⁵“My people should be asking, ‘What is the word that comes from the Lord? What has the Lord said?’ ³⁶Don’t listen when these false prophets say, ‘The Lord spoke

to me, saying. . . .’ or ‘This dream from the Lord means. . . .’ They speak as if their own words have divine authority to change the word of the Lord. ³⁷Go and confront these prophets and ask them, ‘What answer did the Lord give you to help our people?’ or ‘What message do you have that comes from the Lord?’ ³⁸If they claim that what they’ve said came from a dream that the Lord gave them, tell them that this is what the Lord says, ‘Anyone who proclaims lasting peace is a false prophet. What you’re saying did not come from me. ³⁹Therefore, I will turn against you and against the city I gave to you and to your fathers. I will cast you from my presence. ⁴⁰I will bring disgrace and lasting shame on you that no one will forget.’”

Two Baskets of Figs

24 After Jehoiachin, king of Judah, and the officials, craftsmen and skilled workers were taken as captives to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, the Lord gave me a vision in which He showed me two baskets of figs sitting in front of the Temple. ²One basket was full of good figs, like those that ripen early. The other basket was full of poor figs, which were so bad that no one could eat them. ³Then the Lord said to me, “Jeremiah, what do you see?” I said, “Two baskets of figs. One basket has good figs and the other has bad figs. The good ones are very good, and the bad ones are very bad.”

⁴The Lord said, ⁵“Some of my people who were taken captive to Babylon are like these good figs. ⁶I will watch over them and treat them gently. I will bring them back to their land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and never uproot them again. ⁷I will give them all one heart, a heart that will know I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will love me with all their hearts.

⁸“But King Zedekiah, his crooked officials who refused to obey me and surrender to the Babylonians as I told them to, are the bad figs which no one can eat

whether they stay here or flee to Egypt. ⁹I will make them the laughingstock of nations. People will create jokes about them, make fun of them, ridicule them and curse them. ¹⁰I will let hunger, disease and even the sword come on them until they're destroyed or taken away from the land that I gave to their forefathers."

Seventy Years of Captivity

25 In the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, which was the first full year of Nebuchadnezzar as king of Babylon, the Lord had given me a message for the people of Judah. ²So I went and spoke to the people of Jerusalem and Judah, saying to them, ³"It's been twenty-three years since the Lord called me to prophesy. He called me in the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign, and I have never failed to tell you what He has said. But all these years you've never listened. ⁴Even though what I told you was reinforced by other prophets of the Lord, you still did not listen. ⁵They also told you to turn from your evil ways and from the wicked things you were doing, and that if you did, you could stay in the land that the Lord had given to you and to your ancestors. ⁶They told you to turn away from worshipping other gods and engaging in those immoral rituals that go with it. If you had turned away from these idols, the Lord would not have had to discipline you. ⁷But you didn't listen. You went right ahead and carved yourself more idols and brought even more wickedness and harm on yourselves.

⁸"Because you didn't listen to the Lord, this is what He says: ⁹I will send for the armies to the north, and my servant Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, will come against Judah and her neighbors and will devastate their land, leaving their cities in ruins as objects of horror. ¹⁰I will silence the shouts of joy and gladness, the happy voices of the bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones grinding out rich wheat, and I will put out the light of late-burning lamps.

¹¹Judah and her neighbors will be devastated and will come under the control of the king of Babylon for seventy years.

¹²After the seventy years are complete, I will discipline Babylon and its people for their sins. I will destroy their country, and the city of Babylon will come to its end. ¹³I will bring all the disasters on them that I said I would bring on Judah and her neighbors, which Jeremiah has written about in this book. ¹⁴The Babylonians will be captured by great kings, and I will repay them according to their deeds for all the cruelty they have done to my people."

God's Judgment on the Nations

¹⁵The Lord, the God of Israel, spoke to me in vision, saying, "Here, take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my righteous anger and make those nations drink it to whom I send my message. ¹⁶When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad with despair because of the sword that I will bring against them."

¹⁷In vision I took the cup from the Lord's hand, then wrote out the message and gave it to the king and to the ambassadors of the nations as He told me to, and they all drank from it. ¹⁸Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah with its kings and officials were first on the list to drink from the cup of the Lord's displeasure. Their land will be laid waste and their cities will become an object of hissing and cursing. ¹⁹The list the Lord gave me included Egypt—Pharaoh, his officials, his people, ²⁰and all the foreigners living there. Also listed were all the kings in the land of Uz, and the kings of the Philistines ruling in the cities of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and Ashdod. ²¹Then came the people of Edom, Moab and Ammon.

²²Next on the list were the kings of Tyre and Sidon, kings of the coastal cities along the Mediterranean, ²³including the cities of Dedan, Tema and Buz, and the people who shaved a ring around their heads above their ears. ²⁴After that came the kings of Arabia, rulers of the desert

tribes, ²⁵kings of Zimri, Elam and Media. ²⁶Last on the list were the kings to the north. Then the Lord told me that what I had written down would apply at the end of time to all kingdoms on the face of the earth. They will all drink of the cup of His displeasure, and the ruler of spiritual Babylon will not be exempt.

²⁷Then the Lord said to me, "Tell the people of Jerusalem and Judah that this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Drink from my cup, get drunk and vomit, then fall down never to rise again because of the sword of war I'm sending against you.'

²⁸"If they refuse to accept the message that is in the cup, but rebel at what they hear, then say to them, 'This is what the Lord says: You will drink the cup! ²⁹I'm beginning to bring disaster on my own city. Do you think that you will go unpunished? You will not! I am sending the sword of war on you and on all the neighboring nations near and far. I, the Lord, have spoken.'

³⁰"You, Jeremiah, must tell the people everything I tell you. Tell them, 'The Lord will roar down from the heights and thunder from the heavens. He will roar mightily against His own land. ³¹The Lord has a controversy with these nations as He will have with all the nations of the earth at the end of time. The day will come when He will bring judgment on all mankind. Everyone on earth will be tried in court, and God will put the wicked to death forever. The Lord has spoken.'

³²The Lord gave me a vision, saying, "Look! Disaster is already coming on the nations around you. A great storm with twisting winds is ready to strike. The storm will come on you and your people, but at the end of time it will also come on all nations of the earth in the great day of my displeasure."

³³In vision I saw that at that time the slain of the Lord will be many, from one end of the earth to the other. They will neither be mourned nor taken away for burial but will lie like refuse on the

ground. ³⁴Weep and howl, you shepherds. Roll in the dust, you lords of the flock. The day of your slaughter has come. You will shatter as easily as a piece of pottery. ³⁵The shepherds will have no place to flee, and the lords of the flock, no place to hide.

³⁶Listen to the cry of the shepherds and the moaning of the lords of the flock because the Lord is destroying their pastures and taking away their people. ³⁷These peaceful meadows will become a wilderness and the cities laid in ruins because of the Lord's displeasure. ³⁸Like a hungry lion coming out of its cave, the Lord will come against His people. Their land will be laid waste by the sword of war because of His righteous anger.

Jeremiah Condemned to Die

26 When Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, first became king of Judah, the Lord spoke to me, saying, ²"Go and stand in the courtyard of the Temple and tell the people who come there from all the cities in Judah everything I have told you, and don't leave anything out. ³If they listen and repent of their evil ways, I will not punish them. ⁴Say to them, 'This is what the Lord says: If you don't listen to me and do what I ask you to do, ⁵if you don't listen to the words of my servants the prophets whom I have sent to you, ⁶then I will destroy Jerusalem and the Temple as I destroyed Shiloh, the site of the ancient Sanctuary when Eli was high priest. I will make Jerusalem a curse to all the nations of the earth.'

⁷Some of the priests and false prophets were also in the Temple and heard me say all these things to the people. ⁸As soon as I finished repeating everything the Lord had told me, the priests and prophets pushed through the crowd, grabbed me and said, "You will die for this! ⁹Why have you said that this Temple will become like Shiloh and that this city will be destroyed and cursed?" Then the people crowded around and turned against me.

¹⁰When the leaders of Judah heard

what had happened, they hurried to the Temple and took their seats by the New Gate to judge me. ¹¹The priests and false prophets said to them, "This man deserves the death sentence because he spoke against the Temple of the Lord and against Jerusalem." Then they turned to the people and said, "You were there and heard what he said."

¹²I defended myself, saying, "The Lord told me to tell the people everything you heard me say and to prophesy against the Temple and against Jerusalem. ¹³All of you need to change your ways and do what the Lord has said. Then the Lord will change His plans and will not destroy this city and the Temple. ¹⁴As for me, I'm in your power. Do to me whatever you think is right. ¹⁵But be sure of this, that if you put me to death, you and the people of this city will be guilty of executing an innocent man, because what I've told you did not come from me but from the Lord."

¹⁶The officials and the people said to the priests and the prophets, "This man does not deserve to die because he only told us what the Lord wanted us to know." ¹⁷Then some of the elders of the land pressed forward and said, ¹⁸"When Hezekiah was king of Judah, the prophet Micah said, 'Zion will be plowed like a field and Jerusalem will become a pile of rubble. The hill of the Temple will become overgrown with thickets.' ¹⁹Did King Hezekiah put Micah to death? Didn't he fear the Lord and seek His face? Didn't the Lord change His plans and not let disaster come on the city and the Temple as He had said He would? Now here we are ready to put an innocent man to death and bring a terrible disaster on ourselves by refusing to listen to him and continuing to disobey the Lord."

²⁰Now there was another prophet of the Lord who had also prophesied against the city. His name was Uriah, and he had said some of the same things I had said. He had told the people what would happen to their city and their land

if they didn't change their ways. ²¹When King Jehoiakim and his officials heard what Uriah had said, they also tried to arrest and execute him. But when Uriah heard about it, he fled to Egypt.

²²Then King Jehoiakim asked Elnathan to take some men and go to Egypt to find Uriah and bring him back. ²³They tracked him down and brought Uriah back to stand trial before King Jehoiakim, who had him killed and his body thrown into the pit that was used as a public burial ground for the city. ²⁴But because I had the support of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, I was not handed over for execution.

Symbol of Jeremiah's Yoke

27 Soon after Zedekiah, son of Josiah, became king of Judah, the Lord said to me, ²"Make yourself a neck yoke out of straps and crossbars and put it on. ³Then go and speak to the ambassadors from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon, who are here in Jerusalem visiting the king to forge an alliance against Nebuchadnezzar. ⁴Give them this message: 'This is what the Lord, the Almighty God of Israel, says: ⁵Tell your king that it was by my great power and strength that I created the heavens and the earth, its people and all the animals. Since the earth is mine, I can give it to anyone I please. ⁶I am the One who has asked Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to do my work. I have given Judah and all the neighboring nations with their people and animals into his hands. ⁷They will serve him and his son and grandson until the time comes for his own nation to fall. Then his country and people will serve other powerful nations and kings.

⁸"If any nation or coalition of nations refuses to surrender and submit to his rule, I will let war, starvation and disease come on that nation or nations until Nebuchadnezzar has completely destroyed them. ⁹So don't listen to your self-appointed prophets who claim to know the future, who tell you they have had visions. Don't believe those who

claim to have some kind of special wisdom to know what's coming or those who tell you they can read your future in the stars. Don't listen to them when they tell you to resist the king of Babylon, and you will defeat him. ¹⁰They're telling you lies. If you resist the king of Babylon, you will be defeated and taken from your country, and many of your people will perish. ¹¹But those nations who surrender to the King of Babylon and willingly serve him will save their country from destruction, and their people will continue to live peacefully in their own land."

¹²I also gave this message to King Zedekiah of Judah: "Surrender to the king of Babylon. Willingly serve him and you will live. ¹³Why will you and your people die? Why will you let sword, famine and disease ravage your land? This will not only happen to Judah, but to any of the surrounding nations that will not submit to the king of Babylon. ¹⁴Don't listen to these self-appointed prophets who advise you not to surrender and say you will remain free and will not serve the king of Babylon. They are prophesying lies. ¹⁵The Lord says, 'I have not sent them. They have appointed themselves and are prophesying lies and doing it in my name.'"

¹⁶Then I said to the priests and all the people present, "This is what the Lord says, 'Don't listen to the prophets who tell you that very soon the treasures that Nebuchadnezzar took to Babylon twice before will be returned. They're lying to you. ¹⁷Don't listen to them! When the king of Babylon comes against Jerusalem this time, surrender to him and you will live. Why should this city become a pile of ruins? ¹⁸If they were really prophets of the Lord and the word of the Lord were in them, they would be praying that the things left in the Temple, in the palace of the king and in Jerusalem will not be taken to Babylon. ¹⁹The Lord said that because of the people's sins, the things which are left, the huge bronze columns in front of the Temple, the bronze wash

bowls, the silver carts and everything else that was not taken to Babylon before, will be taken this time.

²⁰"When Nebuchadnezzar first came, he took many captives and treasures to Babylon. When he came the second time, he took King Jehoiachin to Babylon, with more captives and treasures. ²¹This time Nebuchadnezzar will come and take with him all the things left in the Temple and the treasures in the palace of the king. ²²All these things will be taken to Babylon and will stay there until the day I call for them to come back."

Hananiah, a False Prophet

28 It was in the fifth month of the fourth year of Zedekiah, king of Judah, that Hananiah, a self-appointed prophet from the city of Gibeon, challenged me publicly in the Temple in front of the priests and the people. He said to me, ²"The Lord God did not tell us to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar, but that He will break the power of Babylon ³and within two years bring back to Jerusalem the Temple treasures that the king of Babylon took with him before. ⁴The Lord will also bring back to us, Jehoiachin, our former king, along with all the people who were taken captive. The Lord will break the power of Babylon once and for all. The Lord has spoken."

⁵Then I spoke up in the presence of the priests and people who were in the Temple, saying, ⁶"I wish the Lord would do this. May the Lord do everything you say and make your prophecy come true. It would be great if Nebuchadnezzar brought back the Temple treasures and the people he took with him to Babylon. ⁷But now listen to what the Lord told me to tell you. ⁸The prophets who lived long before you and me prophesied that war, famine and disease would come on many nations and great kingdoms because of their wickedness, and it has happened. ⁹The only way to know that a prophet who predicts peace has been sent by the Lord is if his prophecy comes true."

¹⁰Then Hananiah took the little yoke that I had around my neck, the one the Lord had told me to wear, and broke it. ¹¹He said to the people, "This is what the Lord has said, 'I will break the yoke which Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, has put on the neck of Judah and the surrounding nations within the next two years.'" After I heard that, I turned and left the Temple.

¹²Sometime later, after Hananiah had done this, the Lord told me to go to him and give him this message: ¹³The Lord says, "You have broken a small wooden yoke, but I will replace it with an iron one." ¹⁴The Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says, "I will put an iron yoke on the neck of Judah and all the surrounding nations. I will make them serve Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and give their people, their land and even wild animals who live there into his hand."

¹⁵So I went to see Hananiah and gave him the message. Then I said to him, "Listen to me, Hananiah. The Lord has not sent you, and you know it. You're making these people believe a lie!" ¹⁶This is what the Lord says: 'I will remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you will die because you have led the people astray and told them to rebel against my words.'" ¹⁷In the seventh month of that same year, Hananiah suddenly died.

Jeremiah Writes to the Captives

29 Then I wrote a letter to the priests, prophets and leaders of the people who were in exile, the ones Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon during his previous campaigns. ²This was after King Jehoiachin, the queen mother, many of the officials and leaders of Jerusalem and Judah, and many of the craftsmen and skilled workers had been taken away. ³I gave the letter to Elasah and Gemariah whom King Zedekiah was sending to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. ⁴The letter said: This is what the Lord God of Israel says to all the peo-

ple whom He allowed to be taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar:

⁵"Plan to settle down and build houses where you can because you'll be there for seventy years. Don't just sit there feeling sorry for yourselves. Plant little gardens and enjoy what you produce. ⁶Find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage and let them have their sons and daughters. Have your families as you would if you were in your own land. ⁷Contribute to the peace and prosperity of the country where I allow you to be taken. Pray for that country, because if it prospers, so will you. ⁸Don't let the self-appointed prophets who were taken into captivity with you or any others who claim to have had visions and dreams from the Lord tell you any differently. ⁹They're lying to you and telling you that they're prophesying in my name. But that isn't true. I have not sent them. I, the Lord, have spoken.

¹⁰"When the seventy years are up, I will keep my promise and bring you back to your own land. ¹¹I already know the plans I have for you. I will help you, not hurt you. I will give you a future and a hope. ¹²You will call on me and I will answer. You will talk to me and I will listen. ¹³You will seek me and find me as you search for me with all your heart. ¹⁴You will find me and I will bring you back to your own land. I will gather you from all the nations and places to which I have scattered you. I will bring you back to the place from which you were taken into exile and give you back all that was yours."

¹⁵After you read my letter you will say, "The Lord has given us prophets here in Babylon, so why should we listen to him?" ¹⁶This is what the Lord says about the people who are still here in Jerusalem and the king who now sits on David's throne: ¹⁷"I will discipline them by letting war, famine and disease come on them, but they will continue to worship their gods and rebel against me. They will be like rotten figs that nobody wants. ¹⁸I will pursue them with war,

famine and disease across the land and again many will be taken captive and brought to Babylon to join you. Other nations will be shocked and terrified at what the God of Israel has done to His own people. Jerusalem and Judah will become abhorrent to all the surrounding kingdoms and an object of cursing and hissing to everyone.

¹⁹“I will let all this happen because the people back here still aren’t listening to me. I have sent them my words again and again just as I’m sending them to you. But you’re not paying attention either. ²⁰Now listen! I’m the One who let you be taken from Jerusalem to Babylon. ²¹This is what I have to say about Ahab and Zedekiah, those false prophets who are sending you letters full of lies: I will hand them over to Nebuchadnezzar at the next siege and he will take them to Babylon and execute them before your very eyes. ²²Then those of you who have been taken from Judah to Babylon will say when you curse someone, ‘May the Lord do to you what He did to Zedekiah and Ahab, those agitators whom the king of Babylon burned in the fire.’ ²³This was their fate because of the terrible things they did. They committed adultery with their neighbors’ wives and in my name spoke lies to the people. They claimed I said things I never said. I will witness against them because I saw what they did and heard what they said.”

²⁴The Lord also told me to write to Shemaiah, the dreamer, who’s always undermining what I say to the people. I told him to listen to what the Lord says: ²⁵“You sent letters in your name to the people back here in Jerusalem, to Zephaniah and to all the other priests, saying, ²⁶‘The Lord told me that He has appointed you, Zephaniah, to take charge of the Temple. So you should see to it that any madman who thinks he’s a prophet by prophesying that the Temple shall be destroyed, must be placed in chains and have an iron collar put around his neck. ²⁷Why haven’t you done

this to Jeremiah who is just this kind of madman? He keeps writing to us and telling the people about another attack on Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and the coming of more destruction. ²⁸Jeremiah must be stopped! He sent a letter to us here in Babylon telling us that we would be here for a long time. He told us to settle down and if we could, to build houses, plant little gardens and plan to stay here for seventy years.’”

²⁹After Zephaniah the priest got Shemaiah’s letter and read it to me, ³⁰the Lord said to me, ³¹“Send this message to all the exiles: ‘This is what the Lord says about Shemaiah, the dreamer: Because he has prophesied in my name when I have not sent him and has told you to believe that what he said was true when it was a lie, ³²I will surely punish this dreamer. He will have no descendants left among you, nor will he see the good things I will do for you when you come back home. This is because he has told you to turn against what I have said. I, the Lord, have spoken.’”

The Lord’s Promise of Restoration

30 Then the Lord said to me, ²“Write down in a book everything I just said because ³the days are coming when I will bring my people back from captivity, back to the land I gave to their ancestors, and they will own that land again. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

⁴Then the Lord gave me this message of hope for Israel and Judah: ⁵“I hear cries of fear and terror, not the sounds of peace. ⁶Ask yourselves this question: Can a man get pregnant and have babies? Then why do your men stand there holding their abdomens like a pregnant woman ready for delivery? Why do they have this painful look as if they were in labor? Why have their faces turned so deathly pale? ⁷A terrible day is coming. There will be another attack on Jerusalem by the king of Babylon. That will be an awful day. There will be no day

like it. It will be like the time of Jacob's trouble, but I will be with my people and they will be saved out of it.

⁸"The day is coming when I will break the yoke of captivity that is around the necks of my people. I will tear off their bonds and foreigners will no longer be able to hold them. ⁹They will serve the Lord their God, and a Descendant of David whom I will choose will sit on the throne as King. These promises are not only for you but also for my people at the end of time.

¹⁰"So don't fear, my son Jacob; there's no need to be terrified. I will come and save you. I will bring you out of a distant place. I will bring your children back from the land of their exile. Jacob will have peace and be secure in the land, and no one will make him afraid. ¹¹I am with you and will save you. I will completely destroy all nations among which you are now scattered. I will not completely destroy you, but I will discipline you and will do so fairly.

¹²"Right now, your injuries are incurable, your wounds beyond healing.

¹³There is no one to bind up your wounds, no medicine to heal you. There is no one to argue your case or plead your cause.

¹⁴All your allies, your political lovers, have forgotten you. They no longer care about you. I had to discipline you and treat you as an enemy would because your sins are so many and your guilt is so great.

¹⁵Why are you crying so much over your wounds? Is your pain without a cure? I haven't turned against you. I have punished you because of your great wickedness and your many sins. ¹⁶The time will come when all who devoured you will be devoured. Your enemies will be taken into captivity. Those who plundered you will be plundered. All who have devastated your land will be devastated.

¹⁷"But I will heal your wounds and restore your health. I will care for you and plead your cause. They have called you an outcast, but you are still my son. ¹⁸I will restore the land to my people and

will have compassion on their cities. Jerusalem will be rebuilt and the king's palace will once again stand in its rightful place. ¹⁹My people will live there, and from their dwellings will come songs of thanksgiving and sounds of praise. I will add to their numbers, and they will not be decreased. I will bring them honor, and they will not be despised. ²⁰Their children will see their nation restored as it was in the days of old. It will be established before me, and I will punish all those who oppress and harass my people. ²¹Their Leader will be one of their own. Their Ruler will come from their own people. I will bring Him close to me, for who else would dare to boldly come and stand in my presence? ²²I will be your God, and you will be my people."

²³But before this, the storm of the Lord will come and burst upon us. It will come on us like a swirling tempest and will burst on the heads of the wicked. ²⁴The anger of the Lord will not turn back until He accomplishes what He has in mind. In the days ahead you will see in all this the loving hand of a mighty God.

A Remnant Will Be Saved

31 The Lord said, "The time is coming when I will again be the God of all Israel, and you will be my people. ²In the past you escaped the sword of Egypt and found grace in the wilderness. I drew near to you in the pillar of cloud and gave you rest."

³It was in the wilderness that the Lord said, "I love you people with a love that lasts forever. I will be faithful to you and will continue to love you and draw you close to me. ⁴I, the Lord, will rebuild you. You will be rebuilt as a people and again become the Virgin of Israel. You will pick up your tambourines and dance for joy. ⁵Once again you will plant your vineyards on the hills of home. You will plant your grapes in peace and enjoy the fruits of your labor. ⁶The voice of your watchmen will echo over the hills as they cry

out, 'Come to Zion! Come and worship the Lord our God!'"

⁷The Lord says, "Sing with joy for my son Jacob. Shout for the nation that is now chief of all nations. Make your praises heard. Say, 'The Lord will save His people and rescue the remnant of Israel.' ⁸I will bring my people back from the lands of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth. The blind and the lame, the women who are pregnant and ready to give birth will also be among the great throng who will return home. ⁹They will make their way back home with tears of joy. Their hearts will be full of prayer and praise as I lead them along. I will lead them beside streams of refreshing water and in straight paths so they will not stumble and fall. I am their Father, and Israel is my firstborn son."

¹⁰Then the Lord gave me a message for the nations, saying, "All you nations, listen to me. Proclaim it to distant lands. He who scattered Israel will also gather Israel. He will watch over His flock like a good shepherd. ¹¹The Lord will ransom Israel and take them out of the hands of the strong. ¹²My people will come back home and sing for joy on the heights of Mount Zion. They will rejoice in the goodness of the Lord and in His bountiful blessings. There will be an abundance of grain, grapes, olives, flocks and herds. Their lives will be like a well-watered garden and they will sorrow no more. ¹³Their maidens will dance and be glad, and so will their men, both young and old. I will turn their mourning into gladness and will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow and pain. ¹⁴I will fill the hearts of the priests with praise and take care of all their needs. I will shower my people with blessings and they will rejoice in my goodness."

God's Mercy

¹⁵Again the Lord spoke to me, saying, "I hear a voice in Ramah near the tomb of Rachel, a voice of mourning and bitter weeping. The mothers in Israel are weep-

ing for their children who were killed. They refuse to be comforted. At Ramah the captives are gathered together to be taken away to Babylon.

¹⁶"But stop your crying and wipe away your tears. Everything you have done for your children will not go unrewarded. I will bring them back from death and from the land of the enemy. ¹⁷There is hope for you, O Israel, in the Lord your God. Your children will return home. They will come back to their own country. I, the Lord, have spoken. ¹⁸I have heard the moaning of Jacob. My people say, 'Lord, you have disciplined us like unruly calves, and we have been disciplined. Turn our hearts around, and we will return, for you are the Lord our God. ¹⁹We turned away from you, but we want to come back. We rebelled against you but now we repent of our sins. We beat our breasts in shame. We bear the disgrace of the foolishness of our youth.' ²⁰Israel, are you not my dearest son, the child in whom I delight? Though I speak against you and though I discipline you, I have not forgotten you. My heart longs for you, and I have great compassion for you.

²¹"Follow the road signs. Look for the guideposts. They will bring you back to me and you will return to your own land. Return to me, O virgin Israel. Come and return to your own cities. ²²How long will you wander in the spiritual wilderness and refuse to listen to me? O faithless people, I, the Lord, will do something previously unheard of: Israel will be stronger than her enemies; it will be as strange as women surrounding and protecting men.

The Future Prosperity of God's People

²³"I will bring you back from captivity. My people will return to Judah and everywhere they will say, 'May the Lord bless the sacred hill of Jerusalem, the holy place where our God is.' ²⁴My people will live together in peace, farmers and shepherds alike. ²⁵I will strengthen the weary and refresh the faint. ²⁶My

people will say, 'I went to sleep weary and woke up refreshed!'

²⁷"The days are coming when I will fill the land of Judah and Israel with people and animals. ²⁸Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, to overthrow and destroy, so I will watch over them to plant and rebuild. ²⁹In those days people will no longer say, 'Our parents ate sour grapes and their children taste the bitterness.' ³⁰Instead, everyone will die for his own sin. Whoever eats sour grapes will taste his own bitterness.

The Everlasting Covenant Renewed

³¹"In the days to come I will offer my everlasting covenant to Israel again. ³²It will seem like a new covenant to them, different from the covenant I offered to their ancestors when I brought them out of Egypt. But it is not. They broke that covenant and made their own, though I was their husband and always loved them. ³³This is the covenant that I will offer the descendants of Jacob: I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴No one will have to tell his neighbor about me, nor will he need to help his brother know me. They will all know me, from the least to the greatest. I will forgive them for what they have done and will remember their sins no more."

³⁵The One who keeps the sun shining, who lights up the night sky with the moon and the stars and who controls the mighty seas and makes the waves roar, the Almighty God of Israel, spoke to me again, saying, ³⁶"Only if the order of nature stopped serving me would the descendants of Jacob stop being my people. ³⁷Only if the universe could be measured and the foundations of the earth be explored, would I reject the children of Israel. Only then would I reject them for what they have done.

³⁸"The time is coming when your city will be rebuilt, from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate, ³⁹and from

the Corner Gate west to the hill Gareb and on south to Goah. ⁴⁰The whole valley, which was once full of dead bodies and where people dumped their garbage, and all the area above the Kidron Valley on the east to the corner of the Horse Gate will be sacred to the Lord. If you accept my covenant, never again will the city be torn down or destroyed."

Jeremiah Buys His Cousin's Property

32 It was in the tenth year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, which also was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, that the Lord spoke to me again. ²At that time the armies of the king of Babylon had already surrounded Jerusalem and I was confined to the court of the royal guards inside the palace. ³It was Zedekiah who had ordered me arrested. He had questioned me, "Why are you prophesying that way? You keep saying, 'This is what the Lord says: I will hand this city over to Nebuchadnezzar. He will capture it, ⁴and the king of Judah will not escape. They will capture him and hand him over to the king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar will speak to him face to face, and Zedekiah will see him with his own eyes. ⁵The king will be taken to Babylon and remain there, yet I, the Lord, will be with him. If he decides to fight the armies of Babylon, he will not succeed.'" Zedekiah was angry with me for saying all this; that's why he had me arrested.

⁶It was during that year that the Lord said to me, ⁷"Your cousin, Hanamel, will come to you in the court of the guards and say, 'Why don't you buy my property at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin? You're my nearest relative, so I'm offering it to you because you have the first right of purchase. Besides, I want you to buy it.'" ⁸Just as the Lord had said, Hanamel did come and said, "Buy the property I own in Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. It's your right to buy it." From this I knew that the Lord was behind the offer, and I no longer doubted.

⁹So I bought it from my cousin and gave him seventeen pieces of silver. ¹⁰I signed the deed, had it witnessed and then weighed out the silver. ¹¹I took the sealed copy of the deed of purchase containing the terms and conditions, as well as the unsealed copy, ¹²and gave them both to Baruch, my secretary. I gave them to him in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who had signed the deed and in the presence of all the Jews sitting in the court of the palace guards. ¹³Then I spoke to Baruch loud enough so everyone could hear, ¹⁴"This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says, 'Take these documents, both the sealed copy and the unsealed copy and put them in a clay jar and close the jar tightly so they'll be preserved for a long time. ¹⁵The time will come when houses, fields and vineyards will be bought and sold again throughout the country. I, the Lord, have spoken.'"

Jeremiah's Prayer

¹⁶After I gave Baruch the deeds, I prayed to the Lord, ¹⁷"O Sovereign Lord, you are the One who made the heavens and the earth by your great power. Nothing is too hard for you. ¹⁸You have shown your steadfast love to thousands of generations, but you have also let the consequences of the sins of parents be felt for three and four generations. O great and powerful One, you are the Almighty God. ¹⁹Great is your wisdom and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to all the ways of men. You reward each one as his life and deeds deserve.

²⁰"You performed miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt and have done many such things since then, both in Israel and in Judah and among the nations. You have made a name for yourself everywhere. ²¹You brought your people out of Egypt with a strong hand, an outstretched arm which filled them with awesome terror. ²²You gave them the land you promised their forefathers,

a land rich and fertile, a land, as they say, of milk and honey.

²³"But when they came into the land and took possession of it, they didn't listen to you. They didn't follow your instructions or live according to your commandments. So they brought all this disaster on themselves. ²⁴There are siege ramps being built against the walls of Jerusalem. You said that famine, disease and internal fighting will come on this city, and the Babylonians will take it. Already we see some of these things happening, just as you said they would. ²⁵But even though this city will fall into the hands of the Babylonians and our country will be taken over by them, you instructed me to buy this field and pay for it in full in front of these witnesses, which I have done."

God's Assurance of a Safe Return

²⁶Then the Lord said to me, ²⁷"I am the Lord, the God of all the earth. Is anything too hard for me? ²⁸So listen to what I, the Lord, have to say: I am about to hand this city over to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who will take it. ²⁹His troops will break down the walls, come in and set the city on fire. They will burn down all the places of worship where my people turned against me by burning incense to Baal and pouring their hearts out to all these other gods. ³⁰The people of Israel and Judah have displeased me from their youth up. Again and again they have made gods for themselves and have gone against everything I had told them. ³¹From the day this city was built until now, it has repeatedly turned away from me. Therefore, I will let it be destroyed to remove it from my sight.

³²"The people of Israel and Judah have forced me to do this because of their wickedness and the wickedness of their kings and leaders, their priests and false prophets. ³³They have turned their backs on me even though I taught them again and again. They have refused to listen to me or respond to discipline.

³⁴They have defiled my house by setting up their detestable idols in the Temple that bears my name. ³⁵They have built altars to Baal throughout the Hinnom valley. They have also built altars to Molech on which they sacrificed their newborn sons and daughters. I have never asked them to do such a detestable thing, nor would it ever enter my mind. Why should I ask my people to commit such a revolting sin against their own flesh?

³⁶"This city will fall into the hands of the Babylonians, not because people are unwilling to fight, but because of famine, disease and pestilence. ³⁷But the day is also coming when I will gather my people from all the countries where I let them be taken. I will bring them back and they will live in safety. ³⁸They will be my people and I will be their God. ³⁹I will give them singleness of heart and action, and they will love and respect me forever. This will be for their own good and the good of their children. ⁴⁰I will renew my everlasting covenant with them. I will never stop doing good to them. I will help them love me with all their hearts, and they will never again turn away from me. ⁴¹With all my heart I will rejoice in doing good things for them and will plant them in this land forever.

⁴²"Just as surely as I have allowed all this disaster to come on them because of their sins, just so surely will I give them all the good things I have promised them. ⁴³Once more fields and properties will be bought and sold throughout the land, a land that had become a wilderness where neither men nor animals liked to live. ⁴⁴Fields and properties will be bought for silver; deeds will be signed, witnessed and sealed throughout the land from Benjamin to Jerusalem, from cities in the hill country to the cities in the Negeb. I will bring my people back from captivity and restore to them their land. I, the Lord, have spoken."

The Restored Nation

33 While I was still confined to the court of the royal guards, the Lord spoke to me a second time, saying, ²"I am the Lord who created the heavens and the earth, who formed the earth and set it in place. ³Call on me and I will answer you. Ask me and I will tell you things that you could not possibly know. ⁴I, the Lord, the God of Israel, am telling you that the houses of Jerusalem and the royal palaces of Judah will be torn down by the people to build defenses against the Babylonians. ⁵But the Babylonians will break down the city walls. They will come in and fill the houses that are left standing with the dead bodies of men who have rejected me. I have turned against this city because of all the wickedness it has done.

⁶"But I will turn trials into blessings and bring health and healing to my people. They will enjoy an abundance of peace and security. ⁷I will restore the fortunes of Judah, and once again Judah and Israel will prosper. I will rebuild them and make them one nation as they were at first. ⁸I will cleanse them from every sin they have committed against me and will forgive them of all wickedness in which they have engaged. ⁹Then this city will bring me honor and respect, and Jerusalem will once again be a source of joy and pride to me. Every nation on earth will hear about all the good things I will do for her. People everywhere will stand in awe at the abundant prosperity and peace that I will give to Israel.

¹⁰"People will say that the land of Judah has become a wilderness, a desolate place where neither man nor beast care to live. But the time will come when the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem will once again be filled with the sounds of joy. ¹¹The voices of the bride and the bridegroom, the happy sounds of wedding feasts will once again be heard. The people will sing with joy as they bring their thank offerings to my Temple. They will

sing, 'Give thanks to the Lord Almighty for the Lord is good. His love continues forever.' Their hearts will be filled with joy because I will bless the land and make it prosper as never before.

¹²"In places that are desolate, without men or animals, there will be rich pastures where shepherds can take their flocks. ¹³Outside the cities in the northern hills to the cities of the Negeb in the south, from Jerusalem and the towns of Judah to the cities in the land of Benjamin, flocks of sheep will once more be counted and pass under the hand of those who own them.

¹⁴"The day will come when I will fulfill the promise that I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. ¹⁵At that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from the lineage of David. He will rule over Israel and do what is just and right throughout the land. ¹⁶In those days the people of Jerusalem will live in safety, and this is the name by which the city will be called: The Lord Is Our Righteousness.

¹⁷"The house of David will never fail, for I will choose one of his descendants to sit on the throne of Israel. ¹⁸There will be no lack of honest priests and Levites who will offer burnt offerings and grain offerings in my presence and will bring other sacrifices and offerings to me."

God's Unchanging Covenant

¹⁹The Lord continued by saying to me, ²⁰"If my covenant concerning the day and the night can be broken so that they no longer come at their appointed time, ²¹only then can the covenant be broken that I have made with my servant David and with the tribe of Levi; only then will there be no descendant of David to sit on the throne of Israel. ²²But my covenant will not be broken, and I will surely choose a Descendant of David to rule over Israel. The descendants of David and Levi will prosper and be as difficult to count as the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on the seashore."

²³Then the Lord said to me, ²⁴"Have

you heard what the nations are saying? They are saying that I have rejected the kingdom of Israel and Judah, the people I chose to be mine. They look with contempt on my people and no longer respect them or consider them a nation. ²⁵Just as surely as I, the Lord, have made a covenant concerning the day and the night and have made laws that govern the earth and the sky, ²⁶just as surely will I keep the covenant I have made with the children of Jacob and with my servant David. One of his offspring will rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I will be merciful to my people and bring them back from captivity. I, the Lord, have spoken."

King Zedekiah Warned

34 While Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, his army and the support troops from other nations within his empire were fighting against Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, the Lord said to me, ²"Go to see King Zedekiah and say to him: 'The Lord says: I am about to hand this city over to the king of Babylon, and he will take it and burn it down. ³You will not escape but will be captured and delivered to him. You will personally talk with him. The last thing you see will be his face just before he puts out your eyes. Then he will take you as a prisoner to Babylon. ⁴You will not die a violent death by execution. ⁵You will die peacefully. Just as the people mourned and burned incense at the funerals of kings before you, so the people will mourn over you. They will say, 'Our king is dead!' The Lord has spoken.'"

⁶I went to King Zedekiah in Jerusalem and told him what the Lord had said. ⁷This was while the Babylonian army was attacking Lachish and Azekah, the only fortified cities in Judah that were left.

Freed, Then Forced Back

⁸At this time Zedekiah proclaimed liberty to all the people in Jerusalem just as he had promised he would. ⁹Everyone

was to set his Hebrew slaves free, both male and female, as in the Sabbatical year, so that no one would be serving his fellow Israelites. ¹⁰The people did so from the highest officials on down and set their slaves free, both male and female, according to the order of the king.

¹¹But soon they changed their minds and took their slaves back and made them work for them again. ¹²Then the Lord asked me to speak to the people and say to them, ¹³The Lord says, "I made a covenant with your ancestors when I first brought them out of Egypt where they had been in bondage. ¹⁴I said to them, 'Every seventh year each of you must free any Hebrew who has sold himself to you as a slave to relieve his debts. After he has served you for six years, you must make plans to let him go free.' But your ancestors didn't listen or pay attention to what I said.

¹⁵"A little while ago you did what was right in letting your fellow countrymen go free and proclaiming liberty for everyone and confirming this with a covenant in my presence in the Temple. ¹⁶But then you changed your minds and dishonored my name by taking back the male and female slaves you had set free. You have forced these same men and women to be your slaves again.

¹⁷"Now listen to what I have to say. You're still disobeying me. You proclaimed freedom throughout the land and then changed your mind. So now I will change my mind and let you go free from me, and you will die by the sword, by famine, by starvation and disease. You will be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. ¹⁸Those who made this covenant of freedom in my presence cut a large sacrifice in two and walked between the pieces to show that they were willing to be killed like this calf if they didn't keep the agreement. But then they changed their minds. So now I will let them be killed. ¹⁹This includes the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and everyone who made this

covenant by walking between the two parts of the sacrifice. ²⁰I will hand them over to their enemies who will use the sword against them, and their dead bodies will be left lying in the open for vultures and other animals to eat.

²¹"I will hand Zedekiah, king of Judah and his officials over to those who seek their lives. I will hand them over to the Babylonians who have temporarily lifted the siege. ²²I will let them come back and resume their attack, because as soon as they stopped their attack on the city and withdrew, you broke the covenant you had made and forced your fellow countrymen to serve you. So now the Babylonians will come back and attack this city and take it and burn it to the ground. They will destroy all other cities in Judah and turn the whole country into a wilderness so that no one will want to live here. I, the Lord, have spoken."

The Loyal Rechabites

35 This is the word of the Lord that came to me earlier in my ministry when Jehoiakim was still on the throne: ²"Go to the leader of the Rechabite clan here in the city and set up an appointment for him and his relatives to come to see you in one of the meeting rooms in the Temple. When they come, offer them some wine." ³So I went to see Jaazaniah and set up an appointment for him and all his brothers and sons to come to see me in the Temple. ⁴They came and we met together in the room that the sons of Hanan the prophet normally used for their meetings. This room was next to the one assigned to the Temple officials and above the one assigned to Maaseiah, who was in charge of the Temple guards. ⁵When we were all in the room, I set before them pitchers of wine and invited them to drink. ⁶But they refused, saying, "We don't drink wine. Our ancestor Jonadab, the son of Rechab, told us that neither we nor our children should do this. ⁷He also told us never to build houses and settle down and farm, or to

buy and plant vineyards. He told us to live in tents to remind us that we are strangers and pilgrims in this world. ⁸We have obeyed and done everything our ancestor Jonadab asked us to do. We never drink wine and neither do our wives, our sons or our daughters. ⁹Neither do we own houses, farms or vineyards, nor do we plant crops. ¹⁰We have done what our forefather asked us to do. ¹¹But when Nebuchadnezzar came against the land, we decided to move to Jerusalem to escape from the Babylonian and Chaldean forces. That's the only reason we're living in the city."

¹²Then the Lord said to me, ¹³"Go and tell the leaders of Judah and the people of Jerusalem that the Lord says: Will you never learn to listen and obey?"

¹⁴Jonadab asked his children never to drink wine, and to this day not one of them has touched it. Why? Because they decided to obey their ancestor and do what he said. I have asked you to obey me, but you don't even listen to what I say. ¹⁵Again and again I have sent my prophets to you, and they have told you what I said. They urged you to turn from your wicked ways and do what is right. They urged you not to follow other gods nor to serve them so you could continue to live in this land that I gave to you and your ancestors. But you didn't listen. ¹⁶The children of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, listened to their father and obeyed him, but you won't obey me.

¹⁷"So I will discipline you and let destruction come on all who live in Judah and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Every disaster I said would come on you will come because I spoke to you again and again, but you didn't listen. I repeatedly called to you through my prophets, but you didn't answer me."

¹⁸Now before I went and spoke to the leaders and people, I said to the Rechabites, "This is what the God of Israel says, 'You have listened to your ancestor Jonadab and have obeyed him and done everything that he asked you to do.

¹⁹Therefore, the Rechabites will never lack for descendants who will stand in my presence and serve me.'"

The Scroll Read to the People in the Temple

36 In the fourth year of Jehoiakim, who was king of Judah before Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, the Lord spoke to me, saying, ²"Take a scroll and write down all the things I told you about Judah and the surrounding nations, from the time Josiah was king until now. ³Hopefully, when the people of Judah are reminded of the warnings I've given them and the disasters that will come if they continue in their wickedness, they will turn from their sins and I can forgive them."

⁴So I called in Baruch, my secretary, the son of Neriah, and began dictating to him everything the Lord had ever told me about Judah. It took about two months to write it all down. ⁵Then I said to him, "The officials no longer let me go to the Temple to worship. ⁶But the next time there's a general fast, I want you to go to the Temple and read to the people the Lord's messages just as I have dictated them to you. Don't read them only to the people of Jerusalem, but also to the people of Judah who have come there to worship. ⁷It may be that the people will listen and pray to the Lord and turn from their wicked ways, because the displeasure of the Lord is great." ⁸So Baruch got ready to read the words of the Lord to the people in the Temple, as I had told him to do.

⁹It was in the ninth month of the fifth year of the reign of Jehoiakim that the people demanded a national fast. Those living in Jerusalem and those who came in from the cities of Judah fasted and prayed to gain the favor of the Lord. ¹⁰Then Baruch went to the Temple and stood in front of the meeting room in the upper courtyard near the New Gate, which was assigned to Gemariah, the Temple secretary. There he read to the people the words of the Lord.

The Scroll Read to the King's Officials

¹¹When Micaiah heard Baruch read from the scroll what the Lord had said, ¹²he went to the palace to see the royal secretary and found that the king's officials were having a meeting. Those attending were Elishama (the royal secretary), Delaiah, Elnathan, Gemariah, Zedekiah (not the king), and the other government officials. ¹³Micaiah told them everything that he had heard Baruch read to the people from the scroll.

¹⁴Then the officials sent Jehudi to go and ask Baruch to come to the meeting and bring the scroll with him. ¹⁵Baruch went with Jehudi and when he got there, they said to him, "Come, sit down and read to us what you read to the people." And Baruch did so. ¹⁶When the officials heard what he read, they turned to each other in alarm and said, "We need to let the king hear this."

¹⁷Then they said to Baruch, "Tell us, how did you come to write all this? Did Jeremiah dictate these words to you?" ¹⁸Baruch said, "Yes, he did. He dictated every last word to me, and I wrote them in ink on this scroll." ¹⁹The officials said, "You and Jeremiah had better go and hide and not let anyone know where you are until you hear that we have had a chance to read this scroll to the king."

The King Burns the Scroll

²⁰So they took the scroll and locked it in the office of Elishama, the royal secretary, and went and reported everything to the king. ²¹Then the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll. So he went and got the scroll out of the office of Elishama and read it to the king in the presence of all the officials. ²²This was in the ninth month, and the king was in his winter apartment with a fire burning in his fireplace.

²³After Jehudi had read three or four columns, the king stopped him, reached over, and with his knife cut those columns from the scroll and threw them into the fire. He kept doing this until the entire scroll was gone. ²⁴The king and his

officials were not afraid of what they had done and not one of them tore his robe in sorrow. ²⁵Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah begged the king not to burn the scroll, but he wouldn't listen. ²⁶Then the king ordered his son Jerahmeel, together with Seraiah and Shelemiah, to arrest me and my secretary. But the Lord made sure they couldn't find us.

Jeremiah Rewrites the Scroll

²⁷After the king had burned the scroll that I had dictated to Baruch, the Lord spoke to me and said, ²⁸"Take another scroll and write on it everything that I told you to write on the first one which King Jehoiakim cut up and threw into the fire. ²⁹Also, send a message to the king, saying, 'You've burned my scroll because you were angry with what I said. You didn't like it because I told you that the king of Babylon would come and destroy your land and have no mercy on men or on animals. ³⁰The Lord says: No one from your family or from your direct descendants will ever sit on David's throne. You will be taken captive and will die at the hands of the Babylonians. Your body will lie there exposed to the sun by day and the frost by night. ³¹I will punish you, your officials and your servants for their wickedness. I will let disaster come on the people of Jerusalem and Judah because they have paid no attention to what I said or to the warnings I gave them.'"

³²So I took another scroll, gave it to my secretary and dictated again everything that had been written on the scroll which Jehoiakim had burned in the fire. Only this time I added many additional words like the first words on the scroll.

King Zedekiah's False Hope

37 When the Babylonians took Jerusalem the first time, Jehoiakim surrendered. After a few years he rebelled, and Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem again. That's when Jehoiakim died in the battle. During the three months siege, his son Jehoiachin reigned. Nebuchadnezzar

finally captured the city, took Jehoiachin to Babylon and appointed Zedekiah as king of Judah.² But neither he, his officials nor the people paid attention to what the Lord had said.

³Now the Babylonians were threatening to once more take Jerusalem, so Zedekiah sent Jehucal and Zephaniah to ask me to pray to the Lord on behalf of the nation.⁴ This was when I was still free to go in and out among the people, before I was put in prison.⁵ When the Babylonians who were besieging Jerusalem heard that Pharaoh's army was coming north to meet them, they left Jerusalem to fight the Egyptians.

⁶Then the Lord said to me, ⁷"This is what I want you to tell the king of Judah who asked you to pray for him: The Egyptian army which is on its way to help you will turn around and go back home.⁸ Then the Babylonians will come back and attack Jerusalem with even greater fury. They will be angry with you for breaking the peace treaty you made with them and asking the Egyptians to come and help you. They will take the city and burn it to the ground.⁹ So don't be deceived into thinking that because the Babylonians have gone to fight the Egyptians that they won't come back. They will.¹⁰ And don't tell yourself that if they do come back, they will be weaker and you can defeat them. Even if only a few wounded men of theirs were left, I would help them rise up and take the city and burn it to the ground."

Jeremiah Imprisoned

¹¹After the Babylonians lifted the siege on Jerusalem and went to fight the Egyptians,¹² I decided to leave Jerusalem and go to the territory of Benjamin to take possession of my share of the family property.¹³ When I got as far as the Benjamin Gate, the captain of the guard, a man by the name of Irijah arrested me and said, "If you think you're going to desert us and go over to the Babylonians, forget it."¹⁴ I said, "I'm not

deserting to the Babylonians. I'm on my way to the territory of Benjamin to claim my share of the family property." But Irijah wouldn't listen to me and took me to the city officials.¹⁵ They were furious with me when they heard Irijah's charges and ordered me beaten and locked up in the house which once belonged to Jonathan, the court secretary, but which now had become a jail.

¹⁶I was put into a deep pit like a well. It had been dug out from rock and was being used as a dungeon.¹⁷ After a long time, King Zedekiah sent for me and had me brought to the palace for questioning. He talked with me privately, saying, "In this crisis, is there any message from the Lord?" I said, "The word of the Lord is the same. The Babylonians will come back and besiege the city and burn it to the ground. You will be taken and handed over to Nebuchadnezzar."

¹⁸Then I asked the king, "What crime have I committed against you, your officials, or this nation to deserve being put in that well-like dungeon?"¹⁹ Where are the prophets who told you that the king of Babylon would never again invade our land and attack this city? Were they right?²⁰ Your Majesty, please don't send me back to that hole in the ground. If you do, I'll not survive. I'll surely die."²¹ Then King Zedekiah ordered me to be placed under guard in the palace courtyard instead. Each day I was given a small loaf of bread from one of the nearby bakeries until all the bread in the city was gone.

Jeremiah in the Dungeon

38 Now Shephatiah, Gedaliah, Jehucal and Pashhur had heard what I told the people. I had said,² "Whosoever stays in this city will die by the sword, by famine or by disease, but whosoever surrenders to the Babylonians will not be killed and will escape the war alive."³ The Lord says: I will give this city into the hands of the Babylonians and their armies will take it."

⁴When these officials heard the false

report that I had tried to escape, they went to the king and said, "This man Jeremiah should be executed. He's been discouraging our troops stationed in the city and everyone else by telling them that the Babylonians will come and take the city, no matter what we do. He's not seeking the good of our people; he's seeking their ruin." ⁵King Zedekiah said, "Very well, do with him what you want. There's nothing I can do to stop you." ⁶So they came and took hold of me and lowered me by ropes into the well that belonged to Malchiah, the king's son, which was located in the courtyard of the palace guards. The well had no water in it, but the bottom was full of mud and I sank right into it.

⁷When Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, one of the chief servants who worked in the palace, heard what they had done to me, ⁸he went to the king who was holding court at the Benjamin Gate and said to him, ⁹"Your Majesty, what your officials have done to Jeremiah is wrong. They lowered him into the muddy well in the courtyard of the guards. Only his enemies know where he is, and because there's no more bread, they'll let him die there."

¹⁰The king said, "Take three men with you, and go pull Jeremiah out of the well before he dies." ¹¹So Ebedmelech, the Ethiopian, took three men, went to the palace storeroom and got some rags and old clothes which he let down to me by a rope. ¹²He called to me, "Jeremiah, put these rags and worn-out clothes under your arms so the rope won't hurt you and we'll pull you up." I did what he said. ¹³Then they pulled me out of the pit and put me in one of the guardrooms in the prison courtyard.

King Zedekiah Calls for Jeremiah

¹⁴Soon afterward, King Zedekiah ordered them to bring me to see him by the third entrance of the Temple. He took me to one side and said, "I'm going to ask you something, and I don't want you to hide it from me." ¹⁵I said to the king, "If I

tell you the truth, you'll put me back in the well. And if I give you advice, you won't listen to me." ¹⁶Then Zedekiah took this oath: "As surely as the Lord lives who has given us life, I will not kill you nor will I hand you over to those who seek your life."

¹⁷So I said to him, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: If you surrender to the officers of Nebuchadnezzar, your life will be spared, this city will not be burned to the ground, and your family will not be handed over to the Babylonians to be killed. ¹⁸But if you don't surrender to the officers of Nebuchadnezzar, this city will be burned to the ground and you will not be able to escape." ¹⁹The king responded, "I'm not afraid of the Babylonians, but of the Jews who joined them. Nebuchadnezzar might hand me over to them and they would abuse me."

²⁰I said, "The Babylonians will not hand you over to these Jews. Don't worry about it. Obey the Lord by doing what He tells you to do, and He'll be with you. Your life will be spared and all will go well. ²¹The Lord has shown me in vision what will happen if you refuse to surrender. ²²All the women left in the palace will be handed over to the important officers of the king of Babylon. As they leave, they will make fun of you by repeating this rhyme: 'Your trusted friends misled you. They overcame you. Now your feet are stuck in the mud. Your friends are gone.' ²³Also, all your wives and children will be taken captive, and if you try to escape, the Babylonians will catch up with you and take you captive to Babylon. Then they will burn this city to the ground."

²⁴The King listened and replied, "Don't let anyone know about our private conversation, or I'll have you executed. ²⁵If my officials hear about our meeting, they will come and ask you what I said and will threaten to kill you if you don't tell them. ²⁶If that happens, tell them only part of our conversation, that you were begging me not to send you back to the

empty well for you would die there.” Then the King had the guards take me back to the palace courtyard.

²⁷As soon as the officials heard about my meeting with Zedekiah, they came to question me about what he had said. I told them what the King had told me to tell them. There was nothing more they could do to me because no one else had overheard the conversation. ²⁸I was kept in the courtyard prison until the day Jerusalem was taken.

The Fall of Jerusalem

39 In the tenth month of the ninth year of the reign of King Zedekiah, the Babylonians came and besieged the city. ²On the ninth day of the fourth month in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the Babylonians were able to make a breach in the wall. ³The troops streamed into the city, and the officials of the king of Babylon came and took their seats by the Middle Gate. They were: Nergal Sharezer (later called Neriglasser), Samgar Nebo and Sarsekim.

⁴When King Zedekiah and his guards saw that the city wall had been breached, they decided to escape. That night they left through the gate between the walls by way of the royal gardens and headed toward the Jordan Valley. ⁵The Babylonians went after them and overtook them in the plains near Jericho. They captured Zedekiah and took him to King Nebuchadnezzar who, with some of his troops, was camped near the city of Riblah in the territory of Hamath. There the king of Babylon passed sentence on Zedekiah. ⁶Nebuchadnezzar had the sons of Zedekiah killed before his eyes, as well as all the nobles of Judah who were with him. ⁷Then he had Zedekiah’s eyes put out and bound him in chains and sent him to Babylon.

⁸Nebuchadnezzar also ordered his men to break down the walls of Jerusalem and set fire to all the houses in the city, beginning with the royal palace. ⁹Nebuzaradan, the general in charge,

carried out the king’s command, then left for Babylon with those who had surrendered and those he had chosen to take from the city. ¹⁰He left behind only the poorest in the land who had owned nothing and gave them vineyards and fields so they could survive.

Nebuchadnezzar Lets Jeremiah Go Free

¹¹King Nebuchadnezzar also told Nebuzaradan, ¹²“Go and find Jeremiah and treat him well. Don’t let anyone hurt him and do for him whatever he asks.” ¹³So Nebuzaradan, the commanding general; Nebushazban, a chief officer; Nergal Sharezer, another high official, and all the other officers of the king of Babylon ¹⁴had me released from the courtyard prison. They took me with some of the other captives to Ramah where they gave me a choice of going to Babylon as their guest or staying in Judah. I decided to stay.

¹⁵Before this, while I was imprisoned in the palace courtyard, the Lord had said to me, ¹⁶“Ask to see Ebedmelech, the Ethiopian, who got you out of the well, and give him this message: The Lord Almighty says, ‘Because of their wickedness, I am about to bring on the people of this city all the disasters I warned them about. This will happen before your very eyes. ¹⁷But, I, the Lord, will save you. You will not be handed over to the Babylonians or to those whom you fear. ¹⁸I will watch over you and protect you. You will not be killed by the sword but will be able to escape because you trusted me. I, the Lord, the God of Israel, have spoken.’”

Gedaliah the Governor

40 The Lord had worked through Nebuchadnezzar to see that I was set free to go home. Later, Nebuzaradan, his commanding officer, found me in Ramah among the captives from Jerusalem and Judah being taken away in chains to Babylon. ²He took me aside and said, “The Lord your God decreed

that this land should be destroyed. ³He brought it about just as He said He would. All this has happened to you and your people because you sinned against your own God and didn't listen to Him. ⁴You shouldn't be in these chains. I'm taking them off and setting you free. If you want to come to Babylon with us, we'll be happy to have you and will take good care of you. But if you don't want to come, then you don't have to. You can stay right here in your own country and live wherever you like."

⁵When I turned to go, Nebuzaradan said, "Why don't you go and see Gedaliah, whom the king of Babylon appointed governor over Judah, and live with him or anywhere else you want to." Then he gave me an allowance of food and a gift and let me go. ⁶So I went to Gedaliah in Mizpah and stayed with him among the people who had been left in our own land.

⁷Some of the Judean officers had not surrendered to the Babylonians but had fled with their men into the open country. They heard that the king of Babylon had returned to his own land and that Gedaliah had been appointed governor of Judah and put in charge of all the Jews who had not been taken to Babylon. ⁸So Ishmael, Johanan and Jonathan who were brothers, Seraiah, the sons of Ephai, and Jezaniah took their men and went to Mizpah to see the governor.

⁹Gedaliah welcomed them and said, "Don't be afraid of the Babylonians. Put away your weapons, settle down in the land and all will be well with you. ¹⁰As for me, I'm staying here at Mizpah, and I'll speak for you when the Babylonians come to inspect my administration. I suggest that you go to your farms and harvest the grapes, the summer fruit and the oil, and live peaceably in the towns and villages you've taken over." ¹¹When all the Jews living in Moab, Ammon, Edom and the other nearby countries heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant of the people in Judah and that he had ap-

pointed Gedaliah governor, ¹²they all came back home from the countries to which they had been scattered to meet their new governor and to help with the harvest of fruit and oil.

¹³Johanan and the other officers who had fled to the open country and had not surrendered to the Babylonians responded to Gedaliah's suggestion by saying, ¹⁴"We've heard that Baalis, king of the Ammonites, has hired Ishmael from Judah to assassinate you. We have come to make sure that nothing happens to you." But Gedaliah didn't believe them. ¹⁵Then Johanan spoke to the governor privately, "Why don't you let us kill Ishmael before he kills you? If he succeeds in killing you, all the Jews around you, including the few who are left in the country, will scatter everywhere. Why should the remnant of our people perish?" ¹⁶Gedaliah said, "Don't do such a thing! It'll only bring on more bloodshed. Besides, what you're telling me about Ishmael can't possibly be true."

Gedaliah Assassinated

41 In the seventh month of that same year, Ishmael, who was related to the royal family and had been one of the chief officers of the king, came with ten men to Mizpah to see the new governor. Gedaliah greeted them and invited them to stay and eat with him. While they were eating, ²Ishmael and those who were with him pulled out their swords and killed Gedaliah, because he had been appointed governor of Judah by the king of Babylon. ³They also killed all Jews who were living with Gedaliah at Mizpah, as well as the Babylonian guards who happened to be there.

⁴Early the next day, before anyone heard about Gedaliah's assassination, ⁵eighty men from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria came to Mizpah with shaven beards, torn clothes and cuts on their bodies—which Jews were not supposed to do. They were on their way to Jerusalem with grain offerings and in-

cense to present to the Lord amidst the ruins of the Temple. ⁶When Ishmael heard that eighty men with grain were on their way to Jerusalem, he went out to meet them, weeping as he went. He greeted them by saying, "Please come and see what just happened to Gedaliah, our new governor." ⁷As soon as they were inside the city gates, Ishmael and his men killed seventy of them and threw their bodies into a nearby well. ⁸But ten of them pleaded with Ishmael, "Don't kill us! We've got wheat, barley, oil and honey hidden in the field which we'll gladly give you." He accepted their offer and didn't kill them.

⁹The well into which Ishmael threw the bodies was the one which King Asa of Judah had dug to get water when he was attacked by Baasha, king of Israel. The well was nearly filled with the bodies of the seventy men Ishmael had killed. ¹⁰Then he took the people of Mizpah captive, including the king's daughters and me because I had been left in the care of the governor by Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian general. Ishmael took us and the other men who had voluntarily joined him to cross over into Ammon.

¹¹As soon as Johanan and the army officers with him heard what Ishmael had done, ¹²they took their men and went after Ishmael and overtook him by the great pool in Gibeon. ¹³When the captives Ishmael had taken from Mizpah saw Johanan and his men, they were overjoyed. ¹⁴They all turned around and ran toward Johanan. ¹⁵But during the battle, Ishmael and eight of his men escaped and crossed over into Ammon.

¹⁶Then Johanan and his men took charge of the people whom Ishmael had taken captive. These were the ones who were left after Ishmael had assassinated Gedaliah, his officials, the Babylonian guards, some of the women and children and the seventy men who had been on their way to Jerusalem. ¹⁷But Johanan decided not to return to Mizpah but to set out for Geruth Kimham near

Bethlehem and from there to go on to Egypt. ¹⁸They were afraid that Ishmael would blame them for the murder of Gedaliah, whom Nebuchadnezzar had appointed governor, and that the Babylonians would believe him.

The Flight to Egypt

42 Then Johanan and the other officers, including Jezeiah, also known as Azariah, came and said to me, ²"Pray to the Lord our God for us that He will go with us and protect us. Once there were many more who were true to Him, but now there are only a few. ³Ask the Lord to show us where we should go and what we should do." ⁴I said, "I'll be happy to pray for you. I'll ask the Lord what He wants you to do, and whatever He says, I'll tell you. I'll not hold anything back." ⁵Then they said, "May the Lord witness against us if we don't listen to what He tells us. ⁶Whether it pleases us or not, we will obey the Lord. We know that if we listen and obey, all will go well with us."

⁷So we waited for an answer from the Lord. Ten days later the Lord spoke to me. ⁸Then I called Johanan and his officers and men and all the people together to give them the Lord's answer. ⁹I said to them, "The Lord, the God of Israel, to whom you asked me to pray spoke to me, saying, ¹⁰'If you stay in this land, I will build you up and not tear you down. I will plant you in good soil and not pull you up. The destruction I let come on this land has given me great sorrow. ¹¹Don't be afraid of the king of Babylon or his army. I am with you, and I will save you and rescue you from his hands. ¹²I am full of compassion, so I will cause the king of Babylon to have compassion on you also. He'll let each of you go back to your families and to your own land.

¹³But if you say, "We will not stay in this country," and you disobey the Lord. ¹⁴and if you say, "We will go to Egypt where we will be free from war and will no longer have to hear the trumpet call to

battle or go hungry,"¹⁵ then listen to what the Lord your God has to say: If you go to Egypt and settle there, ¹⁶the sword you fear will overtake you, the famine you dread will follow you, and you will die and be buried there. ¹⁷Everyone who goes to live in Egypt will die in war or of starvation and disease. Not one of you will survive the disasters that I will let come on you. ¹⁸Just as my displeasure was seen in what happened to the people of Jerusalem, so my displeasure will be seen in what will happen to you if you go to Egypt. You will become an object of reproach and people will use your name as a curse. You will never see your homeland again."

¹⁹Then I said to the people, "Listen to the Lord God of Israel. He has told you not to go to Egypt. I warn you that if you go, you'll be making a fatal mistake. ²⁰You asked me to pray to the Lord for you, and you promised to obey Him and do everything He asked you to do. ²¹So I prayed for you and the Lord answered. But you're still determined to have your way and go to Egypt. ²²You can be sure of this, if you go there, you'll either die by the sword or by famine and disease in the place you settle."

Jeremiah Forced to Go to Egypt

43 When I finished telling the people everything the Lord had told me, ²Johanan, Azariah and all the other proud and arrogant men said to me, "You're lying. The Lord God didn't say for you to tell us not to go to Egypt. ³Baruch, your secretary, has influenced you. He has turned you against us to hand us over to Babylon so they can kill us or take us captive to their country." ⁴Johanan and his officers and men and the people wouldn't listen to the Lord or obey Him. ⁵Then Johanan decided to take with him to Egypt all those who had returned to Judah from nearby countries. ⁶He took with him men, women and children. He also took King Zedekiah's daughters whom Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian general, had left in the care

of Gedaliah, and also my secretary Baruch and me. ⁷So Johanan went against the counsel of the Lord, and he and his men took us to Egypt to the city of Tahpanhes.

⁸When we arrived there, the Lord said, ⁹"Take a couple of large stones you can hold in one hand and bury them in the brick pavement leading up to Pharaoh's eastern palace. Make sure that the Jews who brought you here see you do it. ¹⁰Then say to them, 'This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says: I will send for my servant Nebuchadnezzar, and he will come and walk on these stones and pitch his royal tent over them. ¹¹He will defeat the Egyptians, and some of you will die in the war; others will die of disease; and still others will be taken captive to Babylon. ¹²He will set fire to the temples of Egypt and carry away their gods as trophies to Babylon. As a shepherd slings his blanket over his shoulder and wraps it around himself before leaving for the field, so Nebuchadnezzar will wrap Egypt around himself and leave for home victoriously. ¹³Before he leaves, he will destroy the Temple of the Sun in Heliopolis and all the sacred obelisks throughout the city. He will burn down the temples of the gods in whom they trusted.'"

A Message to Those Who Fled to Egypt

44 A few years later the Lord gave me a message for all the Jews in Egypt, those living in the cities of Migdol, Tahpanhes, Memphis and in southern Egypt. ²The Lord said, "All of you saw the destruction that came on Jerusalem and on all the cities of Judah. Today they are still in ruins ³because of the wickedness of the people. They even offered sacrifices to gods that neither they, you, nor your ancestors had known before. ⁴I sent my servants the prophets to the people again and again, telling them not to do such abominable things. ⁵But they wouldn't listen or pay attention to what I said. They refused to give up their evil ways of worshiping or to stop offering sacrifices to these disgusting idols.

⁶“So I decided to discipline my people by letting disaster come to the cities of Judah and to Jerusalem. They were turned into heaps of rubble and are still that way today. ⁷I want to ask you, Why would you want to bring the same things on yourselves? You know that during the invasion of Judah not only men, but women and children were killed or taken captive until only a remnant was left. ⁸Do you want to destroy yourselves? Why do you tempt me to discipline you by worshipping the gods of Egypt? You’ll end up destroying yourselves just as Judah did and will become an object of ridicule. People will use your name as a curse. ⁹Have you forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, of your kings and their wives and of the women on the streets of Jerusalem and in the other cities of Judah? ¹⁰You know all this, and yet you still don’t obey me. You haven’t listened to me or kept my laws or followed the instructions I sent you.

¹¹“Therefore, I have no choice but to allow disaster to come on you, no matter where you live, just as I did on Judah. ¹²I will see to it that all of you who disobeyed me by coming to Egypt to live will fall by the sword or die of hunger. You will become an object of ridicule, and your name will become a curse word. ¹³I will not hesitate to punish you by sword, famine and disease, just as I had to punish Jerusalem and Judah for their wickedness. ¹⁴Because you fled to Egypt does not mean that you have escaped my discipline or that you will survive and escape the hardships back home and return someday to the land of Judah. Though you long to be back home, not one of you will return, except for a few who escape.”

¹⁵Then all the men whose wives were burning incense to the gods of Egypt, all the women who were present and all Jews who were visiting us from the other parts of Egypt said to me, ¹⁶“We’re not going to listen to you because we don’t believe a word of what you told us the Lord said. ¹⁷We will continue to do what

we’re doing. We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and bring our sacrifices to her as we did back home, just as our officials did in the streets of Jerusalem and in the other cities of Judah. When we did that, we had plenty to eat, we prospered and everything was peaceful.

¹⁸“But ever since our people stopped burning incense and offering sacrifices to the Queen of Heaven, we’ve had nothing. War ravished our country, and many were killed by the sword or died of hunger.” ¹⁹Then the wives who were burning incense spoke up: “When we baked cakes and shaped them into the image of the Queen of Heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, our husbands knew it and never did anything to stop us.”

²⁰I said to both the men and women who spoke to me, ²¹“Don’t you think the Lord knew about the incense that was being burnt to the Queen of Heaven by your fathers, your kings and your officials in Jerusalem and in all the other cities of Judah? ²²This very day our land lies in ruins because the Lord could no longer sit by and do nothing about our wickedness and the detestable things we were doing. That’s why the land of Judah has become an object of cursing and a place of desolation and ruins as it is today. ²³It’s because you have worshiped other gods and have sinned against the Lord. You have not obeyed Him or kept His law or followed His instructions. That’s why all this has happened to you.”

²⁴Then I said to all the people, but especially to the men whose wives burned incense, “Now listen to the word of the Lord. ²⁵This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says, ‘You and your wives have promised your goddess, the Queen of Heaven, that you will continue burning incense and offering sacrifices to her, and you’ve kept your promise. Very well, then, keep your promise to her and follow through on your vows to an idol who doesn’t hear.

²⁶“But listen to what I have to say to

all of you who are living in Egypt. I promise that not one of you from Judah now living in Egypt will survive to use my name as surety to your promises. ²⁷I will see to it that not one of you prospers and that all of you die in this place either by the sword or by famine until not one of you is left. ²⁸But I will let a few of you escape Egypt and return home as refugees, and those who do will know whose words are true, mine or yours, and they will carry the report of what happened back to Judah. ²⁹This will be a sign to you to know that I will do what I said and that my word will not fail. ³⁰When Nebuchadnezzar invades the land of Egypt, I will hand over Hophra, the Pharaoh, just as I handed Zedekiah, king of Judah, over to him when he invaded your country.’”

God's Promise to Jeremiah's Secretary

45 Looking back, it was in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim that Baruch, my secretary, wrote down everything I had told him and read it to the king. ²In that same year I said to him, “Baruch, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to you, ³‘After you saw the king cut up the scroll and throw it in the fire, you became discouraged and said to yourself, “I give up. The Lord is only adding more sorrows to the troubles I already have. I’m so worn out that I can’t even sleep at night.” ⁴But as the God of Israel, I have a right to tear down what I have built and uproot what I have planted. I will do this to Judah and one day I will do it to the whole earth. ⁵Are you looking for great things for yourself? Don’t do it. Troubles will come on everyone, including you, but wherever you go, I will be with you and protect you. You will not lose your life, but will escape unharmed.’”

Egypt Defeated at Carchemish

46 Years before, the Lord had given me messages for those nations that in some way had touched the lives of His people, beginning with the country of

Egypt. ²This first message was for Pharaoh Necho, who was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish, near the river Euphrates, during the fourth year of Jehoiakim, king of Judah:

³“The Egyptian officers shout to their men, ‘Get your shields ready, and line up for battle! ⁴Harness the horses and mount your steeds! Sharpen your spears and put on your armor! Take your positions with helmets on!’ ⁵But wait! Why are they terrified? They’re turning back! Their men are in full retreat! Their warriors are defeated! They’re running as fast as they can without looking back! There’s terror everywhere! ⁶Those who are running can’t escape, even those who are strong can’t get away. In the north by the Euphrates River they will stumble and fall.

⁷“What nation rises like the Nile and with its army surges forward like the waves of the sea? ⁸It is Egypt. It rises like the waters of the Nile and with its army floods the land. Its troops surge forward like the waves of the sea. Egypt has said, ‘I will rise up and conquer the world. I will destroy the fortified cities and those who live in them. ⁹Our men will charge and our chariots will roll on. Troops from Ethiopia and Libya who carry mighty shields will join our ranks. The men from Lydia are skilled with the bow and have won many battles. Nothing can stop us.’

¹⁰“But I, the Lord, will discipline Egypt and punish her for her arrogance. I will offer her as a sacrifice by the river Euphrates in the land of the north. The sword will devour her troops until it has quenched its thirst with their blood. ¹¹Let Egypt go up to Gilead and buy its soothing balm, but it will be useless. Nothing will stop the pain of defeat. ¹²Nations will hear of your shame and your cries of anguish will be heard everywhere. Your warriors will stumble over each other as they flee, and those who fall will be killed. You will return to your own land a defeated foe.”

Nebuchadnezzar Attacks Egypt

¹³The next message the Lord gave me was about Nebuchadnezzar attacking the land of Egypt. The Lord said, ¹⁴“Announce this in the cities of Egypt. Proclaim it in the cities of Migdol, Memphis and Tahpanhes. Say to them, ‘Take your stations! Get ready to defend yourselves! The battle is coming this way!’ ¹⁵But your valiant men will not be able to stand. They will be swept away by the king of Babylon because the God of Israel will be fighting against you. ¹⁶Your troops will stumble and fall. Each one will say to the other, ‘Hurry! Let’s get out of here! Let’s get away from the battle and the sword!’ ¹⁷Other nations will say, ‘Pharaoh, king of Egypt, is now nothing more than a loud noise. He missed his chance at Carchemish to become a great king.’

¹⁸“I, the Lord, am king of all nations. I am God, and there is no other God. As Mount Tabor towers over the mountains around her and Mount Carmel stands high above the sea, so will be the one I’m sending to attack you. ¹⁹People of Egypt, pack your bags for exile. Memphis will be laid waste and become nothing but a heap of ruins.

²⁰“Egypt is like a beautiful calf soon to be attacked by a stinging gadfly coming against her from the north, and she will turn and run. ²¹Her mercenaries are like fattened calves. They, too, will turn and run and will not stand their ground. The day of disaster is coming on Egypt, a time of hard discipline.

²²“Egypt will hiss like a fleeing snake as the armies from the north invade her land. They will come against her with spears and axes like those who cut down trees. ²³They will chop down her forests and cut down her troops. They will be more numerous than a swarm of locusts, too many to count. ²⁴Egypt will be put to shame. Her people will be handed over to the men from the north.

²⁵“I will defeat Egypt with its gods and kings, including Amon, the god of Thebes,

and Pharaoh and those who trust in him. ²⁶I will hand all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and to his troops. But later Egypt will prosper again as in times past. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

God Promises to Preserve His People

²⁷Then the Lord gave me this message for Israel: “My people, don’t be afraid. Don’t be terrified. I will rescue you from distant nations and bring you back from the lands to which you’ve been exiled. Your descendants will come back home, and Jacob will once more live in peace and no one will make him afraid. ²⁸Jacob, my son, don’t be afraid. I will come and save you. Even though I destroy other nations, I will not destroy you. I will discipline you, but I will do it with measured justice. But I will not let you go on thinking you can sin without being disciplined.”

A Prophecy Against Philistia

47 The Lord gave me a message for the people of Philistia before the king of Egypt came back from Carchemish and attacked them at Gaza.

²The Lord said, “Look! Waters are rising in the north! Soon they will become an overwhelming flood and cover your land and all that’s in it. Your people will cry out for help and everyone will wail bitterly. ³They will hear the hoofbeats of horses, the noise of enemy chariots and the rumble of wheels coming at them from the north. Parents will stand there helpless and weak, unable to save their children.

⁴“The time has come for Philistia to be disciplined. All who come to help the cities of Tyre and Sidon will be cut off. I, the Lord, will destroy the land of Philistia, including those from the shores of Crete who came to settle there. ⁵The people of Gaza will shave their heads in mourning and people of Ashkelon will be silenced. Those in the valleys and plains will cut themselves in grief. ⁶The people of Philistia will cry out, ‘O sword of the Lord, stop slashing us! Go back into your sheath and be still!’ ⁷But how can the sword of

the Lord rest when I have given it its work to do? How can it go back into its sheath when I have ordered it to attack?"

A Prophecy Against Moab

48 Then the Lord God of Israel gave me a message for the descendants of Lot in Moab, saying, "Pity the people of Nebo because their city will be laid waste. Kiriathaim will be captured and its mighty fortress destroyed. ²Soon the splendor of Moab will be gone. The men of Heshbon are plotting her downfall. They are saying, 'Come, let us put an end to that nation.' The sword will come to Moab and the voices of her cities will be silenced.

³Listen to the cries coming from the city of Horonaim, cries of destruction and violence. ⁴Moab has been destroyed. Listen to the sobs of her children. ⁵Her people are fleeing by the way of Luhith, weeping as they go. On the road from Horonaim, cries of distress are heard. ⁶People are shouting to each other, 'Quick! Run for your lives! Run like a wild donkey into the desert!' ⁷Because you trusted in your own deeds and in your riches, you will be broken. Your god Chemosh will be carried into exile, together with his priests and attendants. ⁸Not one city will escape destruction. The lush valleys will be ruined and the fruitful plains turned into a wilderness, because the Lord has spoken. ⁹Give wings to the people of Moab so they can fly away. Her cities will be destroyed, and her towns will be as empty as salted fields without crops. No one will live in them.

¹⁰"Cursed is the man who is slack in doing the Lord's work for Him, who hesitates to invade the land of Moab and use his sword. ¹¹Moab has lived secure from her youth, like wine left to age undisturbed, not poured into jars to drink. It's unspoiled and its aroma remains. She has not been touched by war nor her people taken away. ¹²But the days are coming when the people of Moab will be poured out like wine. Her enemies will

come and empty her jars and break her jugs. She will be broken, and the blood of her people will flow in her streets. ¹³Moab will lose confidence in their god Chemosh just as Israel lost confidence in the gods she worshiped at Bethel.

¹⁴"Men of Moab, why do you keep telling yourselves, 'We are brave and strong. We are valiant in battle. We will fight off our enemies?' ¹⁵Moab will be invaded and her cities will be destroyed. Her strongest warriors will fall by the sword. I, the Lord, the king of all nations, have spoken. ¹⁶The fall of Moab is near at hand and her ruin is fast approaching. ¹⁷Those of you who live nearby, mourn for her. All of you who know her, say to yourselves, 'Her power and rule has been broken. Her glory and might are gone.'

¹⁸"Moab's destroyer is coming and will break down her strongholds and destroy her cities. Those who live in Dibon, come down from your glory and sit on the ground in the dust. ¹⁹Those who live in Aroer, stand by the side of the road and watch. Then ask the man fleeing and the woman escaping, 'What happened?' ²⁰They will say, 'Moab has fallen! Weep, for she has been disgraced. Mourn, for Moab has been destroyed.'

²¹"Judgment will come on the cities of Holon, Jahzah, Mephaath, ²²Dibon, Nebo, Beth Diblathaim, ²³Kiriathaim, Beth Gamul, Beth Meon, ²⁴Kerioth, Bozrah and all the other cities in Moab. ²⁵Her strength will be broken. Her might will be crushed. I, the Lord, have spoken. ²⁶Moab will stagger as someone drunk because she has rebelled against me. So let her wallow in her own vomit and become the laughingstock of nations. ²⁷Didn't Moab laugh at Israel? Did she not shake her head in scorn and look down on Israel as if her people were no better than thieves? Did she not ridicule Israel and rejoice over the sufferings of her people?

²⁸"Now Moab's cities will be destroyed and her people will be the ones to suffer. Let them leave their cities and flee to the rocks. Let them be like a dove that builds

its nest at the entrance to a cave. ²⁹Moab is arrogant. I have seen how proud and conceited her people are, the haughtiness of their hearts and how much they think of themselves. ³⁰I know how insolent they are. I have listened to their boasting, but it accomplishes nothing. ³¹I weep over Moab and sorrow for her people. My heart mourns for the men who will do battle at Kir Hareseth.

³²I weep for the people of Sibmah even more than the people across the Dead Sea in Jazer will weep over the loss of Sibmah's beautiful vineyards. Her summer fruit and ripened grapes will be destroyed. ³³Joy and gladness will be taken from the orchards and fields of Moab. Wine will stop flowing from her wine presses, and no one will have reason to shout for joy.

³⁴"The people of Heshbon and Elealeh will cry out in pain. Their cry will be heard in Jahez and Zoar, and from as far as Horonaim and Eglath Shelishiyah. The waters of Nimrim will dry up and all the vineyards will die. ³⁵I will put an end to those people in Moab who burn offerings in high places and offer sacrifices to their gods. I, the Lord, have spoken. ³⁶I hear the funeral song of a flute and my heart mourns for the people of Kir Hareseth who have lost what they had. The beauty and wealth of Moab is gone.

³⁷"Every head will be shaved and every beard cut off. People will cut their bodies in grief, and everyone will put on sackcloth and weep. ³⁸On all the housetops in Moab and in all her public squares, there will be nothing but mourning. I will break Moab like an old, unwanted jar. ³⁹People will cry out, 'Moab has been shattered! Moab has fallen! She has turned her back in shame!' Moab will become an object of ridicule and the nations all around will laugh at her.

⁴⁰"A nation from afar will swoop down on her like an eagle. It will come against her with outstretched wings. ⁴¹Her cities will be captured and her strongholds taken. Her warriors will be as frightened

as a woman who has difficulty giving birth. ⁴²Moab will be destroyed because she has defied me. ⁴³Only terror, traps and pits await her people. I, the Lord, have set the time for Moab's destruction. ⁴⁴Whoever escapes the terror will fall into a pit, and whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in a trap. The year of Moab's punishment has come.

⁴⁵"Her refugees will flee to the great city of Heshbon for safety, the city once ruled by King Sihon, but they will find her in flames. Fires will rage in the mountains of Moab. It will burn her forehead, and her boasting will be gone. ⁴⁶Woe to the people of Moab! The people who worship Chemosh will be destroyed. Her sons will be taken into exile and her daughters into captivity. ⁴⁷But I will restore the fortunes of Moab and she will prosper again." This is the message the Lord gave me concerning the judgments of Moab.

A Prophecy Against Ammon

49 Then the Lord gave me a message for the descendants of Lot in Ammon, saying, "Has Israel no sons? Is there no one to defend their land? Why have they allowed the Ammonites, those who worship Molech, to come and take the land that belongs to the tribe of Gad? ²The time is coming when I will sound the battle cry against Rabbah, the capital of Ammon. She will hear the noise of battle and will be left in ruins. Her settlements will be set on fire. Israel was forced out of the land of Gad, and now she has taken it back.

³"People of Heshbon, cry out, for Ai is destroyed! People of Rabbah, cry out, for your city is laid waste. Put on sackcloth and mourn. Cut your bodies in grief. Your god Molech will be taken and carried into exile with his priests and attendants. ⁴Why do your people boast so much of your beautiful valleys? You trust in your riches to save you. You say to yourselves, 'Who will dare to attack us?' ⁵I, the Lord, will bring terror on you from every side. Every one of you will run for

your life, and there will be no one to gather the fugitives.

⁶“But I will bless Ammon and she will prosper again. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

A Prophecy Against Edom

⁷Then the Lord gave me this message for the descendants of Esau in Edom, saying, “Has Edom lost her good judgment? Is there no more wisdom in the city Teman? Where are their counselors? Have they nothing to say?

⁸“People of Dedan, turn and flee! Get down low! Run to the caves! Disaster is coming on Edom. Esau’s descendants will not be spared, because the time has come for me to punish them for their sins. ⁹If you hired grape pickers to harvest your vineyards, wouldn’t there be a few grapes still left on the vine? If thieves broke into your house, wouldn’t they take only the things they wanted? ¹⁰But I will take everything from the descendants of Esau. I will uncover their hiding places, and their children. Their relatives and their next door neighbors will perish. Edom will be no more. ¹¹But I will protect the orphans and widows. Let them put their trust in me.

¹²“If those who are innocent suffer, should the guilty go unpunished? They will drink the cup of my punishment. ¹³I have sworn by myself that Bozrah will be destroyed and become an object of ridicule and cursing. All her nearby settlements will be destroyed with her. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

¹⁴In vision I saw that the Lord sent an angel to tell the nations to assemble their armies, to rise up for battle and attack Edom. ¹⁵The Lord will destroy you, O Edom, and make you a weak and despised nation. ¹⁶Your pride has deceived you. No one fears you as much as you think. Though you live in the cliffs of Sela (later called Petra) and make your nest as high as the eagles, the Lord will bring you down.

¹⁷The Lord says, “Edom will become an object of horror. Everyone who

passes by will be horrified at what they see and will hiss at you. ¹⁸Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring cities were destroyed, so the cities of Edom will be destroyed, and no one will live in them again. ¹⁹As a lion springs out of the thicket and attacks the sheep in the pasture, so I will spring on Edom. I will chase the people of Edom away from their rich pastures and appoint whom I will to rule over what’s left. Who is like me? Who will challenge me to a fight? Who is the shepherd who can stand up against me defending his flock?”

²⁰Listen to the plan the Lord has made against Edom and what He has in mind for those who live in Teman. Their children will be dragged away and taken into captivity. Everyone will be horrified at what they see taking place. ²¹When Edom falls, the impact will be such that the surrounding nations will fear, and cries of alarm will be heard as far away as the Gulf of Aqabah by the Red Sea. ²²The enemy will attack Bozrah like an eagle swooping down on its prey. In that day the warriors of Edom will be as frightened as a woman in difficult labor.

Judgment on Damascus

²³Next the Lord gave me a message for Syria, saying, “The people in the cities of Hamath and Arpad are worried because they’ve heard the bad news. Their hearts are troubled and fear is rolling over them like the waves of the sea. ²⁴Damascus has become feeble and her people have fled. Panic has gripped them; anguish and pain have suddenly come upon them like a woman in labor. ²⁵Why has this famous city been forsaken and this place of joy left empty? ²⁶Her young men will be killed in the streets. Her warriors will be silenced. ²⁷The walls of Damascus will be set on fire and the palaces of Benhadad will be burned down. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

Judgment on Kedar and Hazor

²⁸The Lord sent a message to the people of Kedar and the cities which would

be conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. To Nebuchadnezzar, He said, "Rise up and attack the people of Kedar. Take the territories toward the east. ²⁹Take their tents and flocks and goods and carry them off, together with their camels. The people will cry out, "There's confusion in the camp and terror all around us!" ³⁰People of Hazor, flee for your lives! Hide in the caves! Nebuchadnezzar will come against you and will take your city.

³¹"Arise, O king, and attack a nation at ease. Their cities have no gates or bars, and they are unprotected. ³²Take their tents and their camels. Scatter the people who have square-clipped beards and shave the sides of their heads. Bring disaster on them from every side. ³³Hazor will become an empty city, a desolate place where jackals love to roam. No one will live there again, neither will anyone ever settle there. I, the Lord, have spoken."

A Prophecy Against Elam

³⁴After Zedekiah became king of Judah, the Lord gave me a message for Elam, the eastern province of Babylon where our people had been taken as captives. He said, ³⁵"I will break the mighty bow of Elam. Her bowmen, the mainstay of her might, will all be chased and killed in battle. ³⁶The time will come when the winds of war will blow against Elam from all directions. Her people will be so scattered that there will be no country to which they have not gone. ³⁷I will make Elam afraid of her enemies, terrified by those who seek her life. I will see that Elam is destroyed and the sword will pursue her people until I have made an end of them all. ³⁸I will exercise my sovereignty over Elam and will destroy her king and all his officials. ³⁹Yet in the days to come, I will restore the fortunes of Elam, and once again she will prosper. I, the Lord, have spoken."

A Prophecy Against Babylon

50 After this, the Lord gave me a message for Babylon and for my people exiled there. He said, ²"Announce it to all the nations! Proclaim it everywhere! Tell the news to everyone! Hold nothing back! Say to them, 'Babylon will fall! Her gods Bel and Marduk will be destroyed! Her idols will be put to shame and her images will be smashed!' ³A nation from the north will come and attack Babylon and make her place desolate. Men and animals will flee and no one will ever live in Babylon again.

⁴"When that time comes, the people of Israel and Judah will seek the Lord together. They will come and seek Him with weeping. ⁵They will ask to go home to Zion and turn their faces toward their own land. They will accept anew the conditions of my covenant and determine to fulfill the destiny God planned for them.

⁶"My people are like lost sheep forsaken by their shepherd. They have wandered from one mountain to another and have forgotten where their home is. ⁷Whoever has seen them has attacked them. Their enemies have said, 'They have sinned against the Lord their God; therefore, we are not guilty no matter what we do to them. Their ancestors trusted in the Lord their God, but these people have not done the same.'

⁸"But soon the time will come for my people to leave Babylon. So be ready to pack up and head for home. Be like rams, eager to lead the flock. ⁹I will stir up and bring against Babylon a company of nations in the land of the north. They will line up in battle against her, and she will be taken. These people are skillful warriors—their arrows never miss their mark. ¹⁰Babylon will be looted, and those who conquer her will help themselves to whatever they want until they're satisfied.

¹¹"Babylon, you have plundered many nations. You enjoyed it and went about like a frolicking young bull and a neighing young stallion. ¹²But you will be brought

down to the ground and your city will be humiliated. Babylon will not only become the least of all nations, but will eventually become a wilderness, a dry land, a desert. ¹³Because of her pride and arrogance, no one will be left in Babylon. No longer will she be inhabited. She will sit in ruins. All who go by will be appalled at what they see and will scoff at her wounds.

¹⁴"Come, you people from the north, take up your positions around Babylon. All you who bend the bow, shoot at her and spare no arrows, for the great city has sinned against the Lord. ¹⁵Raise the war cry against her from all sides. She surrenders! Her towers fall! Her walls are broken! This is the punishment of the Lord. Give to Babylon as she has given to others. ¹⁶Stop the sower from sowing and the reaper from gathering the harvest. Let every foreigner living in Babylon go free. Let them return to their own country and go back to their own people.

¹⁷"The children of Israel are among the foreigners. They are like a scattered flock that lions have chased from home. First, the tribes in the northern kingdom were attacked by Assyria, then the tribes in the southern kingdom were attacked by Babylon. ¹⁸I will punish the king of Babylon as I punished the king of Assyria. ¹⁹I will bring my sheep back to their pasture. They will feed on Mount Carmel and in Bashan, in the hills of Ephraim and in the land of Gilead, and their hunger will be satisfied. ²⁰In those days you will look for the guilt of Israel and the guilt of Judah but will not find it. I will forgive my people their sins for they will turn to me with all their hearts. I will spare the remnant for they will renew my covenant.

²¹"Come, you people to the north, come and attack Babylon. Attack those who live in the territories of Merathaim and those in Pekod and utterly destroy them. Carry out everything I have commanded you. ²²The sound of battle is in the land, the noise of great destruction.

²³Babylon has hammered the world around her to pieces, but the hammer will be broken. Babylon will become desolate, and the nations will be astonished at what happens to her. ²⁴I will set a trap for you, O Babylon, and you'll be caught before you know what has happened. You will be found and captured because you challenged the Lord and stood up against Him. ²⁵I have opened the place where my weapons are stored. I have taken them out and have gone to Babylon because I have work to do. ²⁶Attack Babylon from every side and destroy her harvests and her granaries; gather all her treasures; destroy everything; leave no one alive. ²⁷Kill all the young bulls which she has set aside to be sacrificed to her gods; slaughter her troops; have no mercy. Babylon is doomed; her probation is closed; her day has come.

²⁸"Listen to the stories of the refugees who have come back to Zion. Listen to them tell how the Lord has punished Babylon for her sins and for the anger she has shown against Him while destroying His Temple.

²⁹"Call together the archers and those who bend the bow. Tell them to surround Babylon and not let anyone escape. Pay her back for all that she has done because she acted with pride and defied the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. ³⁰In that day her young men will be killed in the streets and her armies will be destroyed. I, the Lord, have spoken.

³¹"Babylon, you are filled with pride; therefore, I am against you. Your day has come, the time for you to be judged. ³²The proud and arrogant will stumble and fall. There will be no one to help you. I will set your cities on fire and everything in them will be destroyed.

³³"The descendants of Israel and Judah are oppressed. Their captors hold them fast and refuse to let them go. ³⁴But their Redeemer is strong. The time has come for them to be free. I will defend their cause and rescue them. I will bring them

back to their land and give them rest. But there will be no rest for those in Babylon.

³⁵“The sword of war will come against the people who live there, against her wise men and against her rulers. ³⁶The sword will come and devour her false prophets. How foolish they have been! It will come and devour her armies. How frightened they will be! ³⁷The sword will destroy her horses and chariots. It will kill her mercenaries. How weak they are! It will destroy her treasures and take them away. ³⁸A sword will come on her land and the great river Euphrates will be dried up. Babylon is a land full of idols, and her people have lost all reason because of them.

³⁹“She will become a city of ruins and the creatures of the desert will inhabit her. Jackals and owls will make their home in her ruins. ⁴⁰The same thing will happen to Babylon as happened to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. No one will ever live there. I, the Lord, have spoken.

⁴¹“Look! An army is coming down from the north, a great nation made up of many kings. They are all preparing for war. ⁴²They are armed with bows and spears. They are cruel and without mercy. As they ride their horses across the plains, they sound like a roaring ocean. They’re coming in battle formation ready to attack.

⁴³“The king of Babylon has heard the news, and his hands go limp and his knees shake. He is gripped by fear as a woman in labor is gripped in pain.

⁴⁴“I will suddenly come on Babylon as a lion comes out of the thickets of Jordan into a pasture full of sheep. The people will run from the city as sheep run from a lion. I will set over Babylon a ruler of my own choosing. Who will dare to challenge me? What shepherd can stand up against me? ⁴⁵Listen to what I have planned against Babylon. Listen to what I have prepared against her people. Her little ones will be taken away and her pasturelands will be destroyed. Everyone will be appalled at what has

happened. ⁴⁶At the news of Babylon’s capture the earth will tremble. The cry of her fall will be heard among all nations.”

Destruction of Babylon

51 The Lord further said, “I will bring a destroying wind against Babylon and against her people. ²I will bring armies and mercenaries against her. They will destroy her as easily as wind separates chaff from the wheat when harvesters throw it into the air. They will attack her on every side. The day of her disaster has come. ³The city will be taken so quickly that her archers won’t even have time to string their bows, nor will her troops have time to put on their armor. Her young men will not be spared, and her army will be utterly destroyed. ⁴Throughout the land her troops will fall and her young men will die in the streets defending her cities.

⁵“I have not forgotten the descendants of Israel and Judah. Though they are guilty of leaving the Holy One of Israel, I have not left them. ⁶Flee from the city of Babylon to save your lives. The time of judgment has come upon her. She will be given what she deserves. ⁷Babylon was like a golden cup in my hand from which I made the nations drink the wine of destruction. Now the time has come for her to drink. The nations I’m sending against her have tasted the same wine and are going mad, ready to destroy her. ⁸Babylon will suddenly fall and be broken. Cry over her. Get some medicine to relieve her of her pain. Perhaps she can be healed. ⁹The captives will say, ‘We tried to heal Babylon, but she wouldn’t listen. Now it’s too late. Let’s leave her and go back to our own country. Her guilt reaches to the sky. Her judgment has come. ¹⁰But the Lord has saved us. Come, let’s go back to Zion and tell the people what the Lord has done.’

¹¹“I will stir up the kings of the Medes to come and destroy Babylon. Their officers will shout to their men, ‘Sharpen your arrows! Take up your shields!’ I will

punish those who have shown such anger against me as to destroy my Temple. ¹²The flag of the Medes will be raised over Babylon. The enemy will bring up reinforcements. He will send out his frontline troops and make a surprise attack. I will do to Babylon what I said I would do. ¹³Babylon is a land of many rivers and is rich with treasures. But her time as a nation is up and her life will be cut short. ¹⁴The Lord of hosts has sworn to fill her land with troops who will descend on her like a swarm of locusts. They will shout over her in triumph."

¹⁵The Lord made the whole world by His own power. By His wisdom He created the earth and stretched out the sky. ¹⁶At His command, thunders roar. He makes clouds rise from the earth. He sends lightning and rain. He brings wind from His storehouse. ¹⁷Men are senseless and know so little. They turn to their idols for help, but are ashamed, for their gods are lifeless and unable to defend them. ¹⁸Their idols are worthless—the work of delusion. The time of their judgment will come. ¹⁹The Lord is not like these gods. He is the living God. He is the Creator of heaven and earth and the One who chose Israel as His very own. The Lord Almighty is His name.

²⁰The Lord said, "Babylon was once my hammer of war. She was my weapon of battle. She crushed nations and destroyed kingdoms. ²¹She destroyed horses and riders, chariots and drivers. ²²She did not spare men or women, old men or young men, the youth or the young maidens. ²³She slaughtered the shepherd and his flock, the farmer and his oxen, the king and his officials. ²⁴I will punish Babylon for all the unnecessary cruelty with which she treated Jerusalem. ²⁵Babylon, you are like a fiery mountain which spews out hot lava, destroying the nations around you. But I, the Lord, will take hold of you and turn you into a burned-out volcano. ²⁶No one will take a stone from you to use for building a new city. You will be desolate

forever. I, the Lord, have spoken.

²⁷"Let the commanding officers give the signal to attack. Blow the trumpet for all to hear. Prepare the armies of the nations for war against this great city. Call together the kings of Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz for the attack. Let the commanders send their horsemen against her like a swarm of bristling locusts. ²⁸Send the kings of Media and their armies against her. Let the governors and rulers of many lands mobilize their people. ²⁹The land trembles because the Lord has decided to carry out His purpose against Babylon to make it a city where no one lives. ³⁰Babylon will not be able to fight off her enemies. She will hide in her fortress. She has lost her strength and become like a young girl trembling with fear at the men of war. Her gates are broken down and she's been set on fire. ³¹One messenger follows another to bring the news to the king of Babylon that the enemy is coming into the city from every side and the battle is lost. ³²The river crossings have been captured, the fortresses set on fire and her troops have lost their courage to fight. ³³The enemy is cutting them down and trampling on their bodies like kernels of grain on the threshing floor. The time of her harvest has come. I, the Lord, have spoken.

³⁴"When Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon, he cut up Jerusalem and devoured her. He turned the city upside down and emptied her as a man empties a jar. Like a huge snake he swallowed her and filled his stomach with what he wanted and spit out the rest. ³⁵The people remaining in Zion said, 'May the cruelty done to us be visited on Babylon. May she be held responsible for the unnecessary suffering we received at her hand.' ³⁶I, the Lord, will take up your cause and make Babylon taste the same cruelty she has brought on you. I will dry up her rivers and springs and will empty her wells of water. ³⁷Babylon will become a heap of ruins, a place where jackals live. She will become an object of horror and hissing, and no one will live there again.

³⁸"Babylon roars like a lion and her people growl like baby lions. ³⁹I will set out their drink and make them drunk, and when they're merry and rock with laughter, the enemy will come and take the city. They will be killed and will not wake up. ⁴⁰They will be killed as lambs brought to the slaughter, as rams and goats brought for sacrifice. I, the Lord, have spoken.

⁴¹"The city that the whole world admired and praised will be captured. She will become an object of horror and hissing among the nations. ⁴²The sea will rise and cover her. Angry waves will crash up against her. ⁴³Her cities will become as a waterless desert where no one lives and where no one cares to travel. ⁴⁴I will punish Bel, the god of the Babylonians, and make him give up the goods he stole from my Temple. The nations will no longer fear Babylon because her walls will fall and the city will be taken.

⁴⁵"Come out of her, my people. Come out of her and save your lives. Run from the anger of the Lord that He will bring upon Babylon. ⁴⁶Don't lose your courage or be afraid. You will hear all kinds of rumors about what this king or that king will do. Rumors come and go. One rumor comes this year, another next year, rumors of one ruler fighting another.

⁴⁷"The time will come when I will punish Babylon and her idols. The whole country will be put to shame. Her people will be killed, and their bodies will lie in the streets. ⁴⁸Heaven and earth will shout for joy because Babylon has fallen. The destroyers from the north will come and attack her and she will fall. ⁴⁹Babylon must fall because of her pride and because of the cruelty with which she treated all the nations she has conquered. I, the Lord, have spoken.

⁵⁰"You who are captives in Babylon, you've escaped being killed by the sword of war. So leave for home and don't wait. Even though you're in a distant land, hold on to my promise and think about a renewed Jerusalem. ⁵¹You say, 'But our na-

tion has been disgraced; we've been insulted and shamed. We have felt forsaken and helpless because foreigners invaded our land and entered the Temple, even the Most Holy Place, where no one but the high priest was allowed to go.'

⁵²"The time is fast coming when I, the Lord, will destroy the idols of Babylon; throughout the land her wounded will groan in disappointment over what has happened to their glorious city. ⁵³Even if Babylon had defenses that reached to the sky and prepared herself for war, I will send destroyers against her, and she will fall. I, the Lord, have spoken.

⁵⁴"Listen to the sound of a cry coming from Babylon, the sound of mourning for the destruction of the land. ⁵⁵The Lord will destroy Babylon and silence her noisy worship. Waves of enemy troops will come against her with loud shouts and she will fall. ⁵⁶A destroyer from the north will come against her, and her warriors will be captured and their bows broken. I am a God of justice and will not stand by and let sin and rebellion go on forever. ⁵⁷I will make the rulers of Babylon drunk, together with her men of wisdom, her governors, officers and troops. The city will be taken, and they will be killed and will not wake up. I, the Lord, the King of all the earth, have spoken.

⁵⁸"The mighty walls of Babylon will come down and her gates will be set on fire. The people of Babylon have worked for nothing. What they have done to protect themselves will go up in flames."

Jeremiah's Message to God's People in Babylon

⁵⁹These are the messages that I gave to Seraiah to take to Babylon before Jerusalem fell. He was the king's staff officer and had gone with Zedekiah in the fourth year of his reign to see Nebuchadnezzar who had summoned him to Babylon to renew his oath of allegiance. ⁶⁰I wrote the above messages as well as similar ones on another scroll describing all the things that will come upon Babylon.

⁶¹I said to Seraiah, "When you get to the city of Babylon, be sure to read these messages to our people who live there. ⁶²Then conclude your reading with this prayer, 'Lord, we believe what you have said—that you will destroy this city so that neither man nor animal will live here, and it will be desolate forever. Amen.' ⁶³When you finish praying, roll up the scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates river and say, ⁶⁴'This is the way Babylon will sink into oblivion. She will never rise again because of the destruction the Lord will bring upon her.'"

The prophecy of Jeremiah against these nations ends here.

Jeremiah Reviews the Fall of Jerusalem

52 This is a postscript about Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, and about the Temple. When Zedekiah was twenty-one years old, he became king and ruled for eleven years. His mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of a man named Jeremiah who lived in the city of Libnah. ²Zedekiah did evil in the eyes of the Lord just as Jehoiakim had done before him. ³Because of this, the Lord was displeased with the king and with the people of Jerusalem and Judah. After years of warning, He disciplined them by sending them into captivity, banishing them from His sight.

Then Zedekiah was appointed king over the weakened nation by Nebuchadnezzar, but later he rebelled against the king of Babylon. ⁴Near the end of Zedekiah's ninth year, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem a third time. His troops surrounded the city and laid siege against it. ⁵The siege lasted until the eleventh year of Zedekiah. ⁶By the ninth day of the fourth month of that same year, the famine inside the city had become so severe that there was nothing left for the people to eat. ⁷Then the Babylonians broke through the city walls and all the troops in the city fled. Even Zedekiah and his body guards fled. They

left the city at night through the gate that leads between the walls to the royal gardens and fled towards the Jordan Valley.

⁸But the Babylonians spotted them and pursued King Zedekiah and his men and caught up with them near Jericho. His troops left him and ran, and he was taken captive. ⁹They took him to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who had set up his headquarters at Riblah in the territory of Hamath, and that's where Nebuchadnezzar passed sentence on him. ¹⁰It was at Riblah that Nebuchadnezzar had Zedekiah's sons killed before his eyes and also killed all the officials of Judah. ¹¹Then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him in chains and took him to Babylon. There he remained in prison until the day he died.

The Temple and City Destroyed

¹²On the tenth day of the fifth month in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, the worst thing of all happened. The king of Babylon sent Nebuzaradan, the commander of his army, to Jerusalem to destroy the Temple. ¹³Then he came and set fire to the Temple, the royal palace and the houses of all the important people left in Jerusalem. ¹⁴He also ordered his troops to break down all the walls around Jerusalem. ¹⁵Then he took some of the poorest people, those who had surrendered and all the skilled craftsmen he could find and marched them back to Babylon. ¹⁶He left the rest of the poor behind to work the vineyards and the soil.

¹⁷Nebuzaradan also took the Temple furniture and then set the Temple on fire. He broke in pieces the two bronze pillars by the entrance of the Temple, the bronze carts that were used in the service of the Temple and the large tank called the Bronze Sea and carried all this to Babylon. ¹⁸He took the ash containers and shovels used in cleaning the altar, the tools used in tending the lamps, the containers used for catching blood from the sacrifices, the bowls used for burning incense and all the other bronze articles

used in the services of the Temple.

¹⁹He also took with him everything made of gold or silver, such as the small bowls, the pans used to carry live coals, the bowls for holding the blood of the sacrifices, the containers to hold the ashes, the golden lampstands, the bowls used for incense and the bowls used to pour out drink offerings. ²⁰The bronze from the two pillars which had stood at the entrance of the Temple, as well as the bronze from the laver called the Bronze Sea, the twelve bulls holding it up and all the moveable stands which Solomon had made for the Temple, was more than could be weighed. ²¹Each pillar was thirty-three feet high and twenty-two feet around according to the measure of the Sanctuary. They were hollow, but the metal was more than three inches thick. ²²On top of each pillar was a crown four-and-a-half feet high and seven-and-a-half feet across, decorated with bronze pomegranates. ²³Each crown had one hundred pomegranates on it, ninety-six of which could be easily counted.

The People Taken to Babylon

²⁴Nebuzaradan also took with him Seraiah, the chief priest; Zephaniah, the priest next in rank; and three other Temple officials. ²⁵Of those still in the city, he took the officer who had been in command of the troops, five personal advisers to the king and two of their assistants, also the commander's assistant who had been in charge of military

records, and sixty other important men.

²⁶He took all these to Nebuchadnezzar who was headquartered at Riblah in the territory of Hamath. ²⁷The king of Babylon had these officials whipped and executed. So the kingdom of Judah was destroyed and her people taken into exile just as the Lord had said.

²⁸This is the total number of people Nebuchadnezzar took, which arrived in Babylon at different times: In his seventh year, three thousand and twenty-three from Judah arrived there; ²⁹in his eighteenth year, eight hundred and thirty-two from Jerusalem arrived; ³⁰in his twenty-third year, seven hundred and forty-five arrived. Altogether, four thousand, six hundred survived the march to Babylon.

Jehoiachin Released From Prison

³¹After Nebuchadnezzar, Amel-Marduk became king of Babylon. He showed kindness to Jehoiachin, king of Judah, who was still in prison in Babylon from a previous capture. He ordered him released on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month (and on the twenty-seventh day Jehoiachin was actually set free) in the thirty-seventh year of his exile. ³²Amel-Marduk treated him kindly and honored him as he had done for other kings who were captured and imprisoned. ³³So Jehoiachin was permitted to change from his prison clothes, and he ate from the king's storehouse for the rest of his life. ³⁴Each day he was given a regular allowance for his other needs until the day he died.

LAMENTATIONS

The Sorrows of Jerusalem

1 How deserted lies the city once so full of people! Once honored by the world, she is now a widow. Once a queen among the cities of the earth, she is now a slave.

²All night she cries bitterly. Tears run down her cheeks. Of all her former friends, not one remains to comfort her. They all have turned and become her enemies. ³Judah has gone into captivity. She was taken away as a helpless slave, forced to leave her homeland. She lives in a foreign land and finds no rest. They caught her and she has no way of escape.

⁴The roads into Zion mourn, for no one comes to her appointed feasts or to worship at the Temple. Her gates are desolate; her priests groan; and her maidens weep. Zion is suffering bitter anguish. ⁵Her enemies have become her masters. They hold her in their power with ease. The Lord has allowed this to happen because of her many sins. Her children have been taken away; they have gone into captivity.

⁶The splendor of Jerusalem is a thing of the past. Glory has departed from the daughter of Zion. Her princes are as deer without pasture, who have no strength to run from the hunter. ⁷Jerusalem is in ruins. In her affliction and misery she recalls her days of glory. Then she fell into her enemies' hands and there was no one to help her. Her enemies laughed at her destruction.

⁸Jerusalem has sinned and become unclean. That's why she has been destroyed. All who honored her now despise her. They have seen her naked; she weeps and hides her face in shame. ⁹She has clung to her sins and selfish ways. She wrapped her skirts around her and did not consider the future. Her downfall was terrible. No one can comfort her. Her enemies won. She cries to the Lord in her affliction.

¹⁰Her enemies robbed her of all her

treasure. Foreign nations entered her Temple. They went into the Sanctuary where they were forbidden by the Lord to go. ¹¹Her people groan from hunger as they look for something to eat. They exchange their treasures for food to stay alive. They cry to the Lord asking Him to consider their misery and how intensely they're hated.

¹²Jerusalem cries out to those who pass by, "Is it nothing to you? Don't you care? Look at me! Is there any suffering like mine? This is how the Lord afflicted me in the day of His displeasure. ¹³He sent a fire that reached into my bones. He set a trap for me and took me into captivity. He abandoned me and left me in pain.

¹⁴"He took my sins and made them into a yoke around my neck. I grew weak beneath the weight and my strength was soon gone. Then He handed me over to my enemies and I was helpless against them. ¹⁵The Lord tossed aside the best of my troops. He sent an army to destroy the pride of the nation. He crushed the daughter of Zion as grapes in a winepress. ¹⁶My eyes overflow with tears, but there is no one to comfort me. There is no one to restore my spirit. My enemies have conquered me and my children are destitute."

¹⁷Jerusalem reaches out her hands for help, but no one comforts her. Her closest neighbors have become her enemies. They have turned on her from all sides. She has become an unclean thing to them. ¹⁸She says, "The Lord is just, for I have disobeyed Him and rebelled against His commandments. Listen, all you people! Look at me in my misery! My young men and women have gone into exile. ¹⁹I called on my friends to help me, but they all have betrayed me. My priests and elders were slaughtered in the streets while looking for food to keep themselves alive.

²⁰"Lord, look how distressed I am; look at my agony and anguish of soul! My

heart is broken in sorrow for my sins. I have been so rebellious. Outside is the sword, and inside is only darkness and death.²¹ Everywhere they have heard my groaning, but no one has come to comfort me. All my enemies see my distress. Yet, they rejoice at what you let happen to me. May the day come when they suffer for their sins just as I suffer for mine.²² Let also their wickedness displease you. Be as just with them as you have been with me. My pain is more than I can bear, and I am sick at heart."

The Punishment of Jerusalem

2 The Lord has humbled the daughter of Zion. He has thrown the glory of Israel to the ground and abandoned His Temple. He has forgotten His footstool.

²The Lord has shown no mercy and has permitted all the villages of Judah to be swallowed up. He has torn down the strongholds that defended the land. He has brought disgrace to the kingdom and shamed its princes and rulers.³ In His anger He has cut off the strength of Judah and has refused to help them against their enemies. He has been like a burning fire throughout the land of Jacob, destroying everything in its path.

⁴Like an enemy, He has strung His bow and aimed His arrows at Jacob. Like an enemy, He has slain all who were Judah's joy and delight. He has poured out His wrath like fire on the tents of the daughter of Zion.⁵ The Lord has become like an enemy. He has destroyed Israel. He has left her palaces and strongholds in ruins. He has brought endless sorrow on the daughter of Jerusalem.

⁶He crushed His Temple where He came to meet with His people. He put an end to holy days and special Sabbaths. Both kings and priests have felt His anger.⁷ The Lord has rejected His altar and forsaken His Temple. He has allowed the enemy to tear down its walls and give a shout of victory where His people once worshipped in joy at the appointed feasts.

⁸The Lord determined that the walls of

Zion should fall. He marked them off and made sure they were destroyed.⁹ The gates lie buried in rubble and their bars have been broken and destroyed. The king and noblemen are now in exile. The law is no longer taught, and prophets are without visions from the Lord.

¹⁰Old men sit on the ground in silence. They sprinkle dust on their heads and wear sackcloth on their bodies. Little girls walk along with their heads bowed toward the ground.¹¹ My eyes are worn out with weeping, and my soul is tormented within me. I'm exhausted with sorrow at the hurt of my people as I see children fainting in the streets, crying because they're hungry.¹² They beg their mothers for bread and water. They fall in the streets as wounded soldiers. Their lives ebb away in their mother's arms.

¹³What can I say to comfort the daughter of Zion? What can I say to Jerusalem? No one has suffered like you. Your wounds are deep, as deep as the sea. There is no one who can heal you and remove your pain.¹⁴ The false prophets you loved told you nothing but lies. Their visions were false and their preaching deceived you by not exposing your sins. Their teachings were misleading and they made you think you didn't need to repent.¹⁵ All who pass by look at you and clap their hands and laugh. They look at you in scorn and shake their heads. They say to each other, "Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the pride of the whole world?"

¹⁶All your enemies ridicule you and glare at you with hatred in their hearts. They curl their lips in scorn and sneer. "We have destroyed her! This is the day we've been waiting for, and we have lived to see it happen!"¹⁷ The Lord has done what He said He would. He followed through on His warnings and destroyed His city. He gave her enemies the strength they needed for victory. He gave them joy at Judah's defeat.

¹⁸The hearts of the people cry out to the Lord for help. O daughter of Zion, let

your tears flow to relieve your heart. Let them flow day and night as a river. Give yourself no relief and your eyes no rest until the Lord hears and comes back to you. ¹⁹Cry out to the Lord all through the night. Pour out your heart to Him and ask Him for mercy for you and your children, these precious little ones who are starving everywhere I look.

²⁰Jerusalem cries out, "Lord! Look at our suffering! Women are killing their babies, the offspring of their own bodies, and eating them. Priests and prophets are murdered in the ruins of the Temple. ²¹Young and old lie next to each other in the dust of the streets. Young boys and girls have been killed by the sword. You have let them be slaughtered without pity. ²²You allowed our enemies to hold a carnival of terror. No one has escaped the day of your visitation. Even my own offspring, the young ones I cared for and helped raise, they, too, have been destroyed by the enemy."

The Prophet's Anguish

3 I speak as a man representing Judah. I have seen much affliction. I know what it is to be disciplined by the Lord. ²He has driven me away and brought me into darkness rather than light. ³He has taken His hand to me and has not spared the rod. He has done this again and again.

⁴He has left my flesh open and raw and has broken my bones. ⁵He has besieged me with armies and brought me bitterness and tribulation. ⁶He has made me taste darkness like those who are dead.

⁷He has put me in chains. He has walled me in so I cannot escape. ⁸Even when I cry aloud for help, He does not answer. ⁹He has hedged me in with blocks of stone. He has closed my way of escape.

¹⁰He has waited for me like a lion and pounced on me like a bear. ¹¹He has dragged me from the road, mangled me and left me to die. ¹²He has drawn His bow and made me a target for His arrows. ¹³His arrows have pierced my inmost parts, deep into my heart. ¹⁴I have be-

come the laughingstock of my people. They even mock me in song. ¹⁵The Lord has given me a bitter cup to drink and has filled my body with pain.

¹⁶He has broken my teeth and pushed my face in the dirt. ¹⁷I have forgotten what peace and happiness are and what it's like to laugh. ¹⁸I said, "My strength is gone and there is no hope from the Lord." ¹⁹The thought of my affliction and pain is a bitter pill, a poison to my soul. ²⁰When I think of what has happened, my heart sinks in despair.

²¹But there is one thing I recall that brings back a glimmer of hope: ²²the Lord's continuous love and His boundless compassion. That's why He didn't totally destroy me. ²³His great faithfulness is new every morning, as refreshing as the dew and as sure as the sunrise. ²⁴The Lord is all I have, so I have put my hope in Him. ²⁵The Lord is good to those who put their hope in Him, to those who seek Him. ²⁶It is good to quietly wait for the Lord and trust Him to help us. ²⁷It is good for a man to bear the burden of exile while he is still young and to place his hope in the Lord.

²⁸When we suffer because of our sins, let us quietly bear the pain but hold on to the Lord. ²⁹Let us bow in submission before Him, for He is our hope. ³⁰Let us learn to offer the other cheek to those who strike us, to those who want to disgrace us.

³¹The Lord is full of compassion and does not cast us off forever. ³²He permits a lesser evil in order to prevent the greater evil that would follow. He brings sorrow, but His love and mercy are abundant. ³³He does not willingly bring grief to the children of men.

³⁴The Lord knows when our spirits are crushed and how we suffer when in prison. ³⁵The Lord knows when we're denied the rights He gave us when He made us. ³⁶He knows when justice is perverted and man is deprived of protection by the law.

³⁷No one can make anything happen unless the Lord allows it. ³⁸Good and evil

alike are subject to His command. ³⁹Does man have a right to complain when he's suffering for his own sins?

⁴⁰Let us examine our ways and turn back to the Lord. ⁴¹Let us as a people lift up our hands and hearts to the God of heaven and say, ⁴²"We have sinned against you and been rebellious, and you have not overlooked it.

⁴³"You disciplined us to save us. Your mercy was hidden because of your anger. ⁴⁴You covered yourself with a thick cloud so that not one of our prayers could get through. ⁴⁵You allowed us to become the scum and garbage of the nations. ⁴⁶We are mocked and insulted by all our enemies without pity. ⁴⁷We have suffered destruction and devastation because of our sins." ⁴⁸My eyes flow with rivers of tears over the destruction of my people. ⁴⁹My tears will flow without ceasing; there will be no letup. ⁵⁰I will not stop weeping until the Lord of heaven looks down and sees. ⁵¹My heart is grieved when I see what has happened to our city and to our women.

⁵²But when I spoke to our people about their sins, they regarded me as their enemy and hunted me like a bird. ⁵³They tried to end my life by lowering me into a narrow well and covering it over with a stone. ⁵⁴The water in the pit rose over my head as I sank in the mud, and I thought the end had come.

⁵⁵Out of the pit I cried and called on the Lord for help. ⁵⁶Lord, you heard my cry when I called out to you, when I asked you not to close your ears and ignore my plea. ⁵⁷You came near when I cried out and you told me not to fear. ⁵⁸You took up my case and came to my rescue. You saved my life. ⁵⁹Lord, you have seen the wrongs the people have done against me. Judge rightly on my behalf. ⁶⁰You know that my enemies still plot against me; you know how strong their hatred is.

⁶¹Lord, you have heard their insults and threats. You know what is in their minds. ⁶²You know what they whisper in secret and the plans they openly make to

get me. ⁶³From morning until night they talk against me and ridicule me.

⁶⁴Lord, let them taste suffering and rejection according to what they have done. ⁶⁵Let them taste sorrow and what it's like to be cursed by their own people. ⁶⁶Show your displeasure with what they have done. If they continue to rebel, destroy them for the sake of those who love you.

Jerusalem After the Fall

4 How quickly gold can lose its luster and fine gold its glitter! The sacred stones of the Temple lie scattered in the streets. ²The precious sons and daughters of Zion, worth their weight in gold, are treated as common pots of clay.

³Even jackals and wolves nurse their young, but our people have become as cruel as an ostrich who abandons her eggs. ⁴The tongue of the thirsty child sticks to the roof of its mouth and our mothers ignore them. The children cry for food and beg for bread, but they're pushed aside and no one cares. ⁵Those who ate nothing but gourmet foods and feasted on delicacies lie starving in the streets. Those raised in luxury and dressed in purple are sitting by the garbage dump hoping to find food.

⁶The punishment of my people is greater than Sodom and Gomorrah which perished in a moment without pain. ⁷Our princes were once morally as pure as new snow. Their bodies were vigorous and strong, glowing with health like rubies in the sun. ⁸Now they walk the streets unknown, their faces covered with dirt. Their skin has shriveled on their bones and become as dry as wood or a piece of old leather.

⁹Those who were killed are better off than those who are alive, who are slowly starving to death while looking for food.

¹⁰Women who were once loving mothers now cook their own infants for food. The compassion and sensitivity of my people has been destroyed.

¹¹The Lord has shown His displeasure. He has released His fury against sin. He

has kindled a fire in the gates of Jerusalem that has consumed the city.

¹²The kings of the earth and the people of other nations did not believe they would ever be able to conquer our people and enter Jerusalem.

¹³But it happened because of the sins of our false prophets and the wickedness of our priests who killed the innocent to sustain their cause. ¹⁴Now these men wander through the streets, groping their way along as if they were blind. They're so defiled by shedding innocent blood that people treat them as cursed and no one dares to touch them. ¹⁵People shout at them, "Get away from me! You're unclean! Don't come near us!" So they've become fugitives and wander about from nation to nation seeking asylum, but no one wants them. ¹⁶The Lord has scattered them; He no longer protects them. They are shown no favor and are no longer honored, no matter where they go.

¹⁷Our people looked for help, but help never came. From the towers they searched for some nation to come and save us from our enemies. ¹⁸The enemy watched our every move. We couldn't walk out into the open squares of the city. Every step we took outside was dangerous. We knew that the end was near, our days were numbered. They had surrounded us.

¹⁹Our enemies were faster than eagles. When we fled the city they chased us over the mountain and spotted us in the desert. ²⁰They captured our king, the symbol of our strength. The enemy pursued him as he fled. He was caught in their traps. We thought that under his leadership we would be protected from other nations.

²¹Laugh on, you people of Edom and those who live in the land of Uz. The cup of God's displeasure will also be passed on to you. You, too, will stagger and be stripped naked for others to see your shame. ²²The daughter of Zion has had to pay for her sins, but the Lord will not keep us in exile forever. The daughter of Edom also has had to pay for her sins, but she

will perish because of her wickedness.

A Prayer for Mercy and Restoration

5 Lord, remember what has happened to us. Look at us and see our disgrace. ²Our property is in the hands of foreigners. Our homes are inhabited by aliens. ³We've become orphans. Our fathers have been killed and our mothers are widows.

⁴We have to buy the water we drink and pay for the wood we need for fuel. ⁵We work like animals with yokes on our necks. We are weary, but cannot stop and rest. ⁶We made an agreement with Egypt and Assyria just to get enough food to eat.

⁷Our fathers sinned and are gone, but we have to suffer for their sins. ⁸We're ruled by men who themselves are slaves. There is no way to escape from them, and no one can free us. ⁹Murderers roam the countryside and we risk being killed when we go out to look for food.

¹⁰Our skin has become as dry and hot as an oven, feverish from hunger. ¹¹Our women have been raped on Mount Zion, and in every village our daughters have been forced to submit. ¹²Our princes have been strung up by their hands and our old men treated with cruelty.

¹³Our young men are forced to push millstones to grind grain, and our young boys stagger under heavy loads of wood. ¹⁴Our elders no longer sit to judge our affairs at the city gates, and our young men have stopped singing. ¹⁵Joy has gone from our hearts, and our dancing has turned to mourning.

¹⁶The crown has fallen from our head and been given to another. Woe to us, for we have sinned! ¹⁷Our hearts are sick, and our eyes grow dim. ¹⁸Mount Zion is desolate. Jackals prowl through her ruins.

¹⁹But you, O Lord, are King forever. Your rule never ends. It goes on from generation to generation. ²⁰Why have you forsaken us so long? Will you ever remember us again? ²¹O Lord, restore us to yourself! Take us back home! Restore us and renew our days as of old.

²²Have you utterly rejected us? Will you ever be pleased with us again?

EZEKIEL

Ezekiel's Vision

1 On the fifth day of the fourth month of the thirtieth year of my life, while I was living with the exiles by the Kebar River in Babylon, I was taken in vision and saw the heavens open and the glory of the Lord. ²This was the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, in Babylon. ³I had been taken with our king and others to Babylon as one of the captives. It was by the Kebar River that the power of the Lord came upon me.

⁴I looked and saw a windstorm coming down from the north. Lightning flashed from a gigantic cloud, which seemed encased in brilliant light. The center of the cloud of fire glowed like hot metal. ⁵As it came closer I could see inside four living beings shaped like men, ⁶but each had four faces and four wings. ⁷Their legs were straight like the front legs of a bull and their feet were like those of a calf, gleaming like polished bronze. ⁸Under each wing appeared to be a man's hand holding it up. All four of them had faces and wings. ⁹They stood opposite each other with their wings spread out, touching each other and forming a square. They could move straight forward in any direction without turning their heads.

¹⁰The front face of each being looked like the face of a man. To the right, its face looked like a lion; to the left, its face looked like a bull; and toward the back, its face looked like an eagle. ¹¹Two wings of each being stretched out and up and touched the wing tips of the being on either side, while the other two wings were folded against its body. ¹²As a group, the four beings could move straight forward without turning their heads because each had four faces like those on the banners of the four lead tribes of Israel. And the beings moved under the direction of the Holy Spirit without turning. ¹³Their appearance resembled burning coals or flaming torches. Flames moved back and forth among the beings and flashes of

lightning issued from the flames. ¹⁴The beings themselves moved back and forth like bolts of lightning.

¹⁵As I looked I saw a wheel which touched the ground under each creature. ¹⁶Each wheel glistened like a precious stone and had another wheel crosswise inside of it. ¹⁷This way each set of wheels could move in any one of the four directions the beings faced. ¹⁸The rims of the wheels were huge and were covered with eyes, representing the watchful wisdom of God. ¹⁹When the beings moved, the wheels moved, and when the beings rose up from the earth, so did the wheels. ²⁰Wherever the Spirit told the beings to go, they would go and so would the wheels, because the power of the Spirit was in the wheels. ²¹When the beings moved, the wheels moved; when the beings stopped, the wheels stopped; when the beings went up, so did the wheels, for through the beings the Spirit guided the movement of the wheels, representing the affairs of nations.

²²Above the beings was what looked like a massive platform of sparkling crystals which was awesome. ²³The beings stood under this broad platform with two outstretched wings, each touching the wing tips of the being on either side of it, and with two wings folded against its body. ²⁴When the beings moved I heard the sound of wings like the roar of a mighty waterfall, like the voice of God when He speaks, like the sound of a marching army. When the beings stopped flying, they lowered their wings. ²⁵Then I heard a voice coming from the platform of crystals under which the four beings stood with folded wings.

²⁶Up high above the crystal platform was what looked like a throne made of sapphire, and on it sat a figure that looked like a man. ²⁷From His waist up, His body looked like glowing bronze as if it were on fire, and from His waist down, His body looked like flames of fire. An in-

credible splendor surrounded Him. ²⁸Above the throne a brilliant rainbow radiated all its glistening colors as if it had rained.

What I had seen was the glory of the Lord! When I saw it, I fell face down to the ground and then heard the voice of the Lord speaking to me.

Ezekiel's Call to the Prophetic Ministry

2 He said, "Son of man, stand up on your feet. I want to talk to you." ²The power of the Holy Spirit came upon me and stood me on my feet, and the Lord said, ³"Son of man, I am giving you a message for the captives of Israel, a very rebellious people. They have rebelled against me just as their fathers did, and in their hearts they're still rebellious. ⁴They're obstinate, stubborn and proud. Go and tell them what I have to say to them. ⁵whether they will listen or not. They're a stubborn and rebellious lot. But they will soon know that a prophet of the Lord is among them. ⁶Don't be afraid of them even though you'll feel as if you're surrounded by briars and thorns and living among scorpions. ⁷I want you to speak to them whether they will listen to you or not. As I said, they're very rebellious. ⁸Don't rebel against me as they do, but listen to what I have to say. Open your mouth and eat what I give you." ⁹Then His hand reached out toward me, and in it was a scroll. ¹⁰He unrolled it, and I saw that on both sides were words of mourning, grief and pain.

3 He said to me, "Son of man, take this scroll and eat it. Then go and speak to the children of Israel for me." ²I opened my mouth and He fed me the scroll. ³He said to me, "Eat and fill your stomach with it." So I ate the scroll, and in my mouth it tasted as sweet as honey.

⁴Then he said to me, "Now go to the children of Israel and tell them what I've told you. ⁵I'm not sending you to a people who speak another language and can't understand what you're saying, but

to the children of Israel, your own people. ⁶If I were to send you to people who spoke another language, they would listen and try to understand. ⁷But the children of Israel will refuse to listen to you because they're not willing to listen to me. They're stubborn, rebellious and very defiant.

⁸"But I will make you as stubborn and unyielding as they are. ⁹I will make you as solid as stone, as hard as a diamond, so that nothing can weaken my message. Don't be afraid of them, no matter how rebellious and defiant they are. ¹⁰Listen carefully to what I have to say and take to heart everything I tell you. ¹¹Go to your fellow exiles and tell them what the Lord says, whether they will listen to you or not."

¹²Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon me and I heard behind me a voice like the sound of a mighty wind which said, "Glory to the Lord! Praise Him in His dwelling place!" ¹³I also heard the sound of wings brushing against each other and the sound of rushing wheels behind me like a strong wind. ¹⁴The Spirit of the Lord was upon me and I went to speak to my fellow exiles with dread in my heart. I felt sick at my stomach and angry over what I had to do, but the power of the Lord drove me on. ¹⁵I went to speak to the exiles in Tel Abib near the Kebar River and sat among them, stunned, for a whole week, overcome by what I had seen and what the Lord had told me to do.

Ezekiel Appointed as a Watchman

¹⁶At the end of that week the Lord said, ¹⁷"Son of man, I have called you to be a watchman for the house of Israel. So listen to what I have to say, and then warn the people for me. ¹⁸When I give you a message for a wicked man, such as, 'You will surely die unless you change your ways,' and you don't warn him and he dies in his sins, I will hold you accountable. ¹⁹But if you warn him, and he doesn't repent of his wickedness and change his ways, but dies in his sins, you have saved yourself and will not be held

accountable. ²⁰Or, if a righteous man turns from doing what is right and does wickedly, and I place an obstacle in his way to help him wake up, and you don't go and warn him for me and he dies in his sins, I will hold you accountable. All the good things he has done will not be remembered. ²¹But if you go and warn him for me and he repents and turns from his wicked ways, then he will surely live, because he took to heart what I had to say. You have saved yourself and will not be held accountable. ²²I want you to go out to the open plain because I want to talk to you there."

²³So I got up and went out to the wide open plain, and there I saw the glory of the Lord come and fill the valley. It was the same glory that I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell face down to the ground. ²⁴Then the Spirit came upon me and stood me on my feet, saying, "Now that you've seen the glory of the Lord again, go back and lock yourself in your home. ²⁵Then prepare yourself to go out and speak to the people. When you do, the people will be standing in front of you with ropes, ready to tie you up and put you away to keep you from going out among them. ²⁶But I will take away your voice so you won't argue with them or say something in anger against their sins, even though they are a rebellious lot. ²⁷Later I will help you talk to them in the right spirit, telling them exactly what I've told you. Whoever will listen, keep working with them, but those who will not listen, leave them alone, for they are still rebellious."

The Siege of Jerusalem Illustrated

4 While I was still at home getting ready to go, the Lord spoke to me again, saying, "Take a large clay tablet and draw a map of the city of Jerusalem on it. ²Draw on it siege works against its walls, a ramp up to it, trenches around it, camps of enemy troops, and show battering rams against it. ³Take a flat iron pan used for cooking and put it between you and the drawing. The iron pan repre-

sents the shields behind which the enemy troops will attack the city. You will represent the one besieging it. This will be an illustration to the children of Israel in captivity, that Jerusalem will again be attacked and taken.

⁴"Take the drawing and the iron pan and set them up among the exiles. Then lie on your left side in front of it to represent the length of time Israel and Judah will be punished because of their sins. ⁵Do this at different times each day for three hundred and ninety days, representing the years of the punishment of Israel for her sins, beginning with the year Jeroboam separated from Judah and set up the golden calves in the Northern Kingdom, and extending to the present time. ⁶After this, lie down again, this time on your right side each day for another forty days, representing the years of the punishment of Judah for her sins, beginning with the time of Josiah when the people rejected the last attempt at reform, and extending to the present. The years to the end of Judah's captivity are not included. Each day you do this represents a year, just as a prophetic day equals a year. ⁷As you lie there, fix your eyes on the drawing and bare your arm and shake your fist at Jerusalem and prophesy against it. ⁸Say to it, 'I will tie you up with ropes so that you cannot escape the siege until your enemies have taken you.'

⁹"Then I want you to take some wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt; mix them together and store them in a vessel to use in making bread for yourself. This is what I want you to eat during the three hundred and ninety days of preaching. ¹⁰Eat only half of a pound of bread each day, and eat from it at set times. ¹¹Also, limit yourself to two-thirds of a quart of water, and drink from it at set times during the day. ¹²Build a small fire using dried human excrement for fuel, bake your bread over the fire, then eat it. Do this where everyone can see you. ¹³This is to illustrate to the exiles what

the people of Jerusalem will have to go through in the upcoming siege, and the unclean food they'll be given as exiles."

¹⁴Then I said, "No, Lord! I have never done anything contrary to the law of Moses, such as using human excrement for fire. All my life I've been careful to follow Moses' teaching. I've never even eaten meat from an animal that died or was killed by other animals, no matter how hungry I was, because that meat makes us unclean." ¹⁵The Lord said, "All right, I'll let you use dried cow manure. You can make a fire and bake your bread that way. ¹⁶But I want you to know that I will cut Jerusalem's food supply, and in utter despair the people will ration the bread they eat and the water they drink. ¹⁷They'll eventually run out of bread and water and begin wasting away. They'll look at each other and be shocked at the sight of each other. All this will come on them because of their sins."

Ezekiel Shaves His Head

5 The Lord spoke to me again, saying, "Son of man, take a small sharp sword and use it as a razor to shave your head and your beard. Then weigh the hair on a set of scales and divide it into three equal parts. ²At the end of the time of your siege, take the drawing you made of Jerusalem on the large clay tablet, lay it down on the ground, put a third part of the hair on it and set the hair on fire. Take another third of the hair, spread it around the drawing, then chop it up with your sword. Throw the last third of the hair up into the air and let it be blown away by the wind. ³Keep back a few hairs and tuck them into the folds of your clothes. ⁴Then take a few of these out and throw them into the fire and burn them up. The hairs represent the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the people of Judah, for fires will sweep throughout the land of Israel."

⁵Then the Lord said, "I set Jerusalem in the center of powerful nations. ⁶But she rebelled against me and became more

wicked than the countries around her. She disobeyed my commands and rejected my laws. ⁷This is what I have to say about Jerusalem:

"You have been more wicked than any other country around you. You refused to keep my commandments and laws and have not even lived up to the moral standards of the surrounding nations. ⁸Therefore, I will come against you and execute judgment against you in the sight of the nations. ⁹Because of your wickedness and idol worship, I will discipline you as I've never disciplined you before and will never do again. ¹⁰During the coming siege, parents will eat their own infants, and children will eat their dead parents. I will punish you and scatter those who survive to the four winds.

¹¹"I am the Lord. Because you have defiled my Sanctuary with your disgusting images and immoral practices, I will withdraw my favor and cut you off without mercy. ¹²A third of your people will die of sickness, disease and starvation. A third of you will fall by the sword as you try to defend your city. And a third of you will be scattered to the four winds, pursued by the sword of war. ¹³My displeasure with your wickedness will not stop until I have corrected you. You will feel what it's like to be without me. This will finally convince you how strongly I felt about your wickedness and that I am the Lord.

¹⁴"I will make Jerusalem a reproach, and all who pass by will sneer at her. ¹⁵She will become an object of ridicule to the nations around her. They will be terrified by what I will do to my own city. They will look at you with disgust and will rebuke you for turning against your own God. ¹⁶I will cut off your supply of food. I will shoot you with my deadly arrows of famine and destroy you. ¹⁷I will send wild animals among those who live in the country, and they will attack and kill your children. Disease and murder will sweep through the city and across the land. The sword of war will be against you.

"I, the Lord, have spoken."

Judgment on Judah

6 ²The Lord spoke to me again, saying, ²“Son of man, look west toward the mountains of the kingdom of Judah and give them this message:

³“Mountains of Judah, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord says to the mountains, hills, plains and valleys of Judah:

“I am about to bring the sword of war against you. I will destroy your high places of idol worship, ⁴demolish your pagan altars and smash your altars of incense. You will be killed in front of your own idols. ⁵Your dead bodies will lie before your lifeless idols and your bones will be scattered around the pagan altars. ⁶All cities and towns of Judah will be laid waste. Your places of pagan worship, your idols, and your altars of incense will all be smashed. Everything you have worshiped will be gone. ⁷Your people will fall by the sword, and those who survive will know that I am the Lord.

⁸“I will let some of you escape and be scattered as exiles among the nations. ⁹Those scattered will remember how pained I was by your rebellion, your adulterous minds and your lustful eyes as you went after your idols. You will hate yourselves for your immoral practices and for the disgusting things you did during your pagan worships. ¹⁰Then you will know that I am the Lord and that I didn’t threaten in vain to bring this calamity on you.”

¹¹The Lord said to me, “Go out into the street, strike your hands together, stamp your feet and cry out:

“Because of all the wicked and disgusting things the children of Israel have done, they will fall by the sword, die in the famine or die from disease. ¹²Those far from the city will die of disease, those nearby will fall by the sword, and many of those who remain inside the city will die from the famine. They will feel the force of my displeasure. ¹³Their dead bodies will lie among their idols and around their pagan altars. Their corpses

will be scattered on every high hill and on the tops of every mountain and under every spreading oak where they offered sacrifices to their gods. Then the children of Israel will know that I am the Lord. ¹⁴I will destroy their country and turn it into a wasteland, all the way from the wilderness in the south to Riblah in the north. Not one place where they live will be spared.

Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

The End Has Come

7 The Lord spoke to me again, saying, ²“Son of man, this is what the Lord has to say concerning the land of Judah:

“The end has come! ³The land of Judah as my people have known it will come to an end. You will feel my displeasure as you have never felt it before. I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable evils. ⁴I will have no pity, but will punish you for every disgusting thing you have done, and then you will know that I am the Lord.

⁵“Tell the children of Israel that this is what the Lord says:

“Disaster! Unimaginable disaster is coming! It’s on its way. ⁶The end has come! It has come! The end of your city and your country has come! Doom has come against you! ⁷This is the end for those of you who live in the land. The days of celebration and joy at your pagan mountain shrines are over. Only confusion and panic remain. ⁸It won’t be long until you feel the force of my displeasure. I will judge you for what you have done and will see to it that you get what you deserve for your disgusting behavior. ⁹I will have no mercy and will spare no one. Everyone will be punished for what they have done. Then they will know that I am the Lord and that I will punish even those I love.

¹⁰“The day is here. Your doom has come. The rod of discipline is ready. Arrogance has blossomed and wickedness is everywhere. ¹¹Violence will come on the land to punish the wicked, the likes of which have never been seen. The

Babylonians are the rod of my punishment. No one and nothing will be left. All the wealth and splendor of Jerusalem and Judah will be gone. ¹²The time has come. It is here. The buyer will not rejoice over his gain nor the seller grieve over his loss, for the Lord's displeasure is on the whole land. ¹³No one will recover the land that he sold as long as he lives. There will be no Year of Jubilee when land is returned to the owner. The prophecy is certain and will not be reversed. Because of their wickedness no one will be able to save the land or preserve his life.

¹⁴They will blow the trumpet and prepare for war, but no one will leave the city to march out to battle because my displeasure is against all of them. ¹⁵Outside the city the sword is waiting for them, and inside, disease and hunger stalk their footsteps. Those in the country will fall by the sword and those in the city will die of hunger and disease. ¹⁶Those who escape and make it to the mountains will be like frightened doves, moaning in grief over their sins. ¹⁷Their arms will hang limp and their knees will shake. ¹⁸They will put on sackcloth and live in terror. They will shave their heads and cover their faces in shame.

¹⁹They will throw their money in the streets as if it were something unclean. It will not save them from my displeasure. It will not buy off their enemies or put food in their stomachs. Money made them stumble into sin. ²⁰They took pride in their jewelry and freely used their silver and gold to make idols for themselves. I will make them hate their jewelry and their silver and gold, and their money will become repulsive to them. ²¹I will give their money to strangers and their silver and gold to their enemies. The wicked will come and loot the city and defile it. ²²I will turn my face away from my city and let the wicked desecrate my Temple. Like robbers they will break into my Sanctuary and take away the sacred things.

²³Prepare chains, because everywhere in the city there will be bloodshed, and the streets will be filled with violence. ²⁴I will let the most wicked of your enemies come in and take your houses. Your strongest men will not be able to defend themselves. Your honored places of worship will be defiled by those who hate you. ²⁵In all this terror, you will look for peace but will see nothing but despair. ²⁶One disaster will follow another. You will long for a prophet to give you good news, but there will be none. No one will tell you the right thing to do and no elders will be there to counsel you. ²⁷The king will mourn, princes will despair and the people will shake with fear. I will punish you for all you have done and will judge you according to your behavior.

"Then you will know that I am the Lord."

Spiritism in the Temple

8 On the fifth day of the sixth month in the sixth year of our captivity, while the leaders of the exiles were visiting me in my house, the Spirit of the Lord came upon me and I was taken off in vision. ²I looked and saw the figure of a man. From His waist down, He looked as if He were on fire, and from His waist up, His body glowed like polished bronze. ³He reached out, took me by the hair and lifted me high above the earth. He took me to Jerusalem and set me down by the north gate that goes from the court of the people into the court of the priests. There in the inner court I saw the idol that provoked the Lord to jealousy. ⁴While still in vision, I saw the glory of the God of Israel just as I had seen while in vision by the Kebar River.

⁵Next, I found myself standing in the courtyard of the Sanctuary where the priests minister, and the Lord said to me, "Son of man, take a good look at this image standing by the north entrance." I did and noticed how revolting it looked. Then I knew how God felt and became jealous for the His honor and for His Temple. ⁶The Lord said, "Son of man, if you think

this is bad, let me show you something you will not believe. My people are driving me out of my own house. What you will see is even more revolting.”

⁷Then He took me to the entrance of the inner court which was surrounded by a number of rooms. As I looked I saw a small hole in one of the walls. ⁸The Lord said, “Dig into the wall and enlarge the small hole and then crawl inside.” So I did and went inside and there I saw a door. ⁹He said, “Go ahead; open the door. Go in and see what other disgusting things they’re doing in my house.”

¹⁰So I opened the door and went in. All over the wall were paintings and carvings of many grotesque-looking animals, snakes, crawling things and also large murals depicting the idols of Israel. ¹¹As I stood there in amazement, I saw seventy elders of Israel standing in front of the wall with censers in their hands worshipping these grotesque-looking animals and idols trying to contact the dead. I also noticed that one of the elders was Jaazaniah, whose father Shaphan had been faithful to the Lord God of Israel under King Josiah’s reign and had served as his royal secretary. ¹²The Lord said to me, “Son of man, do you see what these elders of Israel are secretly doing? In reality, they’re worshipping demons and telling themselves that the Lord can’t see them because He has left the country. ¹³Now let me show you something even more revolting.”

¹⁴He took me back out to the north gate and I saw women standing by the entrance to the inner court weeping over the death of Tammuz (who supposedly dies each year at the beginning of the dry season and is later resurrected when the crops begin to flourish again). ¹⁵The Lord said, “Do you see what these women are doing? Well, let me show you something even more disgusting.”

¹⁶He then took me back to the inner court of the priests and there between the altar of sacrifice and the entrance to the Holy Place stood twenty-five priests,

the high priest and the heads of all twenty-four sets of priests. They had their backs toward the Holy Place and were facing the rising sun, bowing down to it and worshipping it as if it were a god.

¹⁷The Lord said, “Son of man, do you see all these things? Is it a small matter for the children of Judah to be doing this? Do they have to go on displeasing me and filling the land with violence? They insult me when they turn their backs on me in my own house and worship the sun as if it were God. ¹⁸Twice I have gently disciplined them by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, but this time I will not spare them nor will I pity anyone. Even if they shout in my ears, I will not listen to them.”

The Angel With a Writer’s Kit

9 Still in vision in the inner court, I heard the Lord call out in a loud voice, “The investigative judgment of this matter is over. Call in the guards of the city and have them bring their weapons with them.” ²Then I saw six men come through the north gate into the court of the priests, each with a weapon in his hand. One of them was dressed in white linen, such as the high priest wears on the Day of Atonement, and he had a writer’s kit strapped to his side. They all came in and stood by the bronze altar.

³I then saw the dazzling light of the presence of the Lord rise up from between the two golden cherubim in the Most Holy Place of the Sanctuary and move to the entrance of the courtyard. The Lord called to the man dressed in white linen with the writer’s kit strapped to his side, ⁴“Go through the city ahead of the others and put a mark on the forehead of those who are distressed and praying about all the things happening in this city.”

⁵I heard Him say to the others, “Follow him through the city and kill everyone who doesn’t have the mark on his forehead. Have no pity on anyone. ⁶Kill the old and the young, men and women, pregnant

mothers and children. But don't touch anyone who has the mark. Start right here at my Temple." So they began with the elders and priests. ⁷Then the Lord urged them to continue into the other courtyards, saying, "Go! Fill the Temple courts with the dead bodies of people." So they went through the Temple and then through the city doing what the Lord had asked them to do. ⁸While they were going through the city, I was left alone. I threw myself face down to the ground and cried out, "O Lord, most Sovereign King, isn't there to be a remnant? Are you going to destroy everyone?"

⁹He said, "The children of Israel are guilty of some terrible things. The land is full of violence and murder; the city, full of corruption and injustice. They think that I don't care what they do or notice what's going on. ¹⁰So I'll do what they think. I won't notice what they do or be concerned over what happens to them. I'll be as unmerciful to them as they have been to others. But those who have the mark on their foreheads I will spare."

¹¹Then the man with the writer's kit strapped to his side came back and said, "Lord, we have done as you commanded."

God's Glory Departs From the Temple

10 Still in vision, I looked again and saw a throne of sapphire high above the four beings with four wings. ²The Lord spoke from there to the man dressed in white linen, "Go among the intersecting wheels under the four beings and fill your hands with burning coals from the fire. Then go and scatter the hot coals over the city." And I saw him go in.

³Now the four beings were standing south of the Temple when the man went between the wheels and a huge cloud filled the inner court. ⁴Then the dazzling light of the presence of the Lord, which I had seen leave its place between the two golden cherubim in the Most Holy Place, began to leave the entrance to the Temple. A huge cloud covered the

Temple and the courtyard was filled with the glory of the Lord. ⁵I heard the sound of the wings of the four living beings as they began to move away from the Temple, much like the voice of God when He speaks.

⁶When the Lord told the man in white linen to go among the wheels and fill his hands with fire, he went in and stood by one of the wheels. ⁷Then one of the beings reached into the fire, took some of it and put it into the hands of the man, who took it and left. ⁸As I looked, I again noticed what appeared to be a man's hand under the wings of each of the beings.

⁹I took another look at the wheels. One pair of intersecting wheels was under each being, and each set of wheels sparkled like diamonds in the sun. ¹⁰Each of the four pairs of intersecting wheels were alike, one wheel intersecting another. ¹¹As the wheels moved, they would go in whatever direction the beings wanted to go. The four living beings and the wheels could move straight ahead in any direction without having to turn. ¹²I noticed that their bodies, including their backs, hands and wings, were covered with eyes, representing the watchful wisdom of God. ¹³I heard them call the wheels The Whirling Wheels. ¹⁴Each of the beings had four faces: the face of a man, a bull, a lion and an eagle, representing the four leading tribes of Israel.

¹⁵Then the same beings I had seen in vision by the Kebar River began to rise. ¹⁶When they moved, the wheels moved with them, and when they spread their wings and rose from the earth, so did the wheels. ¹⁷When they stopped, the wheels stopped. Whenever the beings moved, the wheels moved because the power of the Spirit was in the wheels, and He would tell the beings where to go.

¹⁸Then the dazzling light of the Lord's presence left the entrance of the Temple and rested over the four living beings. ¹⁹They spread their wings and lifted from the earth and the wheels went with them. They hovered briefly over the eastern gate

with the glory of the Lord above them.

²⁰These were the same four living beings I had seen beneath the glory of the Lord while in vision by the Kebar River.

²¹Each being had four faces, four wings and what looked like a human hand under each of its wings. ²²Their faces were the same as I had seen in vision by the Kebar River, and each of them could move straight forward without turning.

Condemnation of Wicked Counselors

11 Then the Spirit of the Lord picked me up and took me to the eastern gate of the Temple where I saw twenty-five leading men, among whom were Jaazaniah, son of Azzur, and Pelatiah, son of Benaiah. ²The Lord said to me, “Son of man, these men are plotting evil and giving bad advice to the people of this city. ³They’re telling the people that they should go ahead and plan to build new houses for themselves. They’re giving the people a false sense of security by telling them that they’re as safe inside the walls of the city as meat in a cooking kettle is kept from being burned by fire. ⁴I want you to prophesy against these leaders. I’m going to give you a message to send to them.”

⁵Then the Spirit of the Lord came on me and told me to write, “This is what the Lord says:

“You men are plotting evil and giving wrong advice to the people. I know the way you think. ⁶You have sentenced many innocent people to death in this city and have filled the streets of Jerusalem with violence. ⁷Therefore, the Lord says: The only meat in the kettle that will not be burned by fire are those who are dead. But I will drive you out of the city and you will die on the other side of these walls which you think will protect you. ⁸You’re afraid of the sword and are trying to convince yourselves that nothing will happen to you, but I will bring the sword of war against you. ⁹I will drive you out of the city and hand you over to your enemies and punish you for what you did.

¹⁰“Your enemies will come and carry out my judgments. Some of you will fall by the sword just outside the city, and others will be executed on the borders of Judah. Then you will remember that I am the Lord. ¹¹The walls of the city will not protect you, not even as much as a cooking kettle keeps meat from being burned by fire. I will bring some of you to the borders of Judah where you’ll be executed. ¹²You will then know that I am the Lord and that you have not kept my laws or followed my instructions, but you have chosen to conform to the idolatrous practices of the countries around you.”

¹³In vision I saw Pelatiah, son of Benaiah, who was one of the wicked leaders in Jerusalem, suddenly die. Then I threw myself face down on the ground and cried out, “O Sovereign Lord! Is this a sign that you’re going to let the very last remnant of Judah be destroyed?”

God’s Promise to the Exiles

¹⁴The Lord said, ¹⁵“Son of man, your relatives and others who are with you in exile in Babylon are looked down on by the people in Jerusalem who think they’re more righteous than you who were taken captive and they were not. They’re telling themselves that the Lord loves them because He has given them your properties. ¹⁶Give this message to your relatives and the other exiles: This is what the Lord says:

“Though I have sent you far from home and scattered you among many countries, I have been watching over you and protecting you and will continue to do so. ¹⁷I will gather you from the countries where I’ve scattered you and bring you back home. I will return the properties that are yours.

¹⁸“When you come back home you will remove for me all the grotesque images and idols that are left in the land. ¹⁹I will give the remnant of my people an undivided heart and put a unity of spirit within them. I will take out their stubborn hearts of stone and give them

hearts of compassion and obedience. ²⁰Then they will be careful to keep my commandments and obey my laws. They will be my people and I will be their God. ²¹But as for those who do not repent, whose hearts are still attached to their idols and who continue to worship their detestable gods, I will surely punish them for what they are doing.”

²²Still in vision, I saw the four beings, with the wheels underneath them and the presence of God above them, spread their wings for flight. ²³Then the dazzling light of the presence of the Lord left Jerusalem and hovered over the Mount of Olives east of the city. ²⁴While I was still in vision, the Spirit of the Lord picked me up and carried me back to Babylon, and the vision ended. ²⁵I told the leaders of the exiles visiting in my house everything I had seen and what the Lord had told me.

Unbelieving Exiles

12 Afterward the Lord spoke to me again, saying, ²“Son of man, you’re living among some very rebellious exiles. They have eyes to see but don’t see. They have ears to hear but don’t hear, for they’re a very stubborn lot. ³I want you to pack your belongings as you did when you were taken into exile. Do it during the day when people can see what you’re doing. Leave as if you’re going to another place to live. Maybe this will catch their attention and get the message across that more people from home will be carried into exile, which they don’t want to believe. ⁴While they’re watching, bring your belongings outside, and then just before dark, leave like someone going into exile. ⁵Don’t take your belongings out the door, but break a hole through the wall and take your things outside that way. ⁶Then put your pack on your shoulder, cover your face so that you can’t look back, and walk out at sunset. This will be an object lesson that those back home will cover their faces in shame as they go into exile.”

⁷I did what the Lord told me to do. During the day I packed my things, and in the afternoon I dug a hole in the wall of my house. As the people watched, I took my belongings outside through that hole, put them on my shoulder and walked away just as it was getting dark.

⁸The next morning the Lord said to me, ⁹“Son of man, didn’t those rebellious exiles who watched you yesterday ask you what you were doing? ¹⁰Go back and tell them that the Lord says:

“This is what will happen to King Zedekiah and the children of Israel living in Jerusalem. ¹¹Tell them that what you did was a sign of what will happen to the people back home. They, too, will be taken into exile as captives. ¹²King Zedekiah will pack some of his belongings and they will dig a hole in the palace wall for him to go through. He will put his pack on his shoulder, cover his face and leave the city. ¹³But I will spread out my net for him and catch him, and he will be taken to Babylon. However, he will not see it, for Nebuchadnezzar will put out his eyes, and he will die there.

¹⁴I will scatter to the four winds all those around him, his officials, his staff and his troops. I will send the sword after them and pursue them wherever they go. ¹⁵Then they will know that I am the Lord when they see what happens to them and to their beloved city, and they are scattered among the nations. ¹⁶I will let some of them survive the sword, famine and disease to tell their tale of shame and to let the nations know that it was not a weakness on my part which brought about the fall of Jerusalem, but their own wickedness.

“Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

Judgment Will Not Be Postponed

¹⁷After this the Lord spoke to me, saying, ¹⁸“Son of man, I want you to eat your bread and drink your water in the sight of the people. Tremble when you eat and shake in fear when you drink. ¹⁹Then say to the people: ‘This is what the Lord says

about those back home living in Jerusalem and Judah:

“They will tremble as they eat their bread and shake with fear as they drink their water. Their land will be stripped of everything because of its violent inhabitants. ²⁰Their cities will be destroyed, and their country will be devastated to look like a wilderness. Then they will realize that I am the Lord.”

²¹The Lord also said, ²²“Son of man, what is this proverb that the people back home keep quoting to themselves, ‘Time goes on and the prophecies of the Lord mean nothing’? ²³Tell them this is what the Lord says:

“I will put an end to that proverb and it will never be quoted again. Soon every prophecy will be fulfilled. ²⁴There will be no more false visions of peace and flattering prophecies of Israel by your self-appointed prophets. ²⁵What I say will be fulfilled without further delay. You are a rebellious lot. In your lifetime, you will see events happen exactly as I have said.”

²⁶Then the Lord spoke to me once more, saying, ²⁷“Son of man, the people back home are telling themselves that your visions must be for the distant future and your prophecies for many years ahead. ²⁸Send them this message: The Lord says:

“My prophecies will not be delayed any more. Whatever I have said will be fulfilled.”

Woe to False Male and Female Prophets

13 The Lord said to me, ²“Son of man, prophesy against the self-appointed prophets, and say to them: Hear the word of the Lord! ³The Lord God says:

“Woe to those who appoint themselves as prophets and follow their own ideas when they have seen no vision.

⁴They’re like jackals that prowl among ruins to hunt and kill. ⁵They have done nothing to fortify the city, to repair the walls or to help the people stand in the day of battle. ⁶Their visions are false and their prophecies are lies. They say, ‘The

Lord has sent me,’ and then expect their prophecies to come true. ⁷Their predictions are lies and their visions are false. They say that I have spoken to them when I have not.

⁸“The Lord God says:

“Because of your lies and your fabricated visions, I have taken a stand against you. ⁹I will punish all those who have false visions and tell prophetic lies. Their names will not be listed among the leaders or the remnant who survive and return to Israel. Then the people will know that I am the Lord. ¹⁰They led my people astray by declaring ‘Peace!’ when there was no peace. My people built a flimsy wall of false expectations, and then these self-appointed prophets painted the wall white to make it look good. ¹¹Tell them that no matter how beautiful their wall looks, it will fall. I will send torrential rains against it, hailstones to pound it and a violent wind to blow on it. ¹²Your wall will collapse and the people will wonder how this could happen to their beautifully painted strong wall.

¹³“The Lord God says:

“I will use torrential rain, hailstones and a violent wind to bring down your wall, ¹⁴the wall that you painted so beautifully. I will level it to the ground and lay its foundation bare. When Jerusalem is destroyed, the prophets who gave the people such false hope will also be destroyed, and you will know that I am God. ¹⁵I will send my wrath against your wall and against those who made it look so beautiful and strong. Your wall of false expectations will be gone and so will those who painted it white. ¹⁶Those self-appointed prophets who saw visions of peace when there was no peace will fall with the city.”

¹⁷Then the Lord said to me, “Son of man, speak against the daughters of Judah who prophesy from their imagination. ¹⁸Tell them that the Lord says:

“Woe to women who wear magic charms on their wrists and magic

scarves on their heads. How long will they continue to entrap my people and enrich themselves by their lies? ¹⁹You have lowered me in the eyes of my people by selling your visions and prophecies for a few handfuls of barley and pieces of bread. Your lies have killed those who should not have died and spared those who should not have lived.

²⁰“Therefore the Lord says:

“I hate those magic charms which you use to ensnare my people as a bird is ensnared in a net. I will tear these magic charms from your arms. ²¹I will take the magic scarves from your heads and save my people from your delusions, and they will no longer listen to you. Then you will know that I am the Lord. ²²You have disheartened the righteous with your lies and brought them grief, which didn’t come from me. You encouraged the wicked in their wickedness and didn’t try to stop them. ²³Your visions and divinations are over. I will rescue my people from your influence, and you will know that I am the Lord.”

God Condemns Idolatry

14 One day the leaders among the exiles came to me to ask about the Lord’s will for His people. ²While they were visiting, the Lord said to me, ³“Son of man, these men love to worship idols and they’re living in sin. Do you think I should answer them? ⁴Give them this message for me: The Lord God says:

“When anyone comes to inquire of the Lord but loves idols and is living in sin, if he sincerely goes to a prophet for advice, I will answer him myself. ⁵I will do this to rescue my people from their idols and recapture their hearts though they had turned away from me.

⁶“Now go to the people and tell them that this is what the Lord says:

“Turn away from your idols and repent of your sins. ⁷When any Israelite or foreigner in Israel turns away from me and begins to worship idols and live in sin, then mockingly goes to a prophet for ad-

vice, I will answer him myself. ⁸I will turn my back on him and make an example of him to the people, and he will become a byword. I will cut him off from my people, and then they will know that I am the Lord.

⁹“If a self-appointed prophet gives a false prophecy, it will be because I have not interfered but have allowed him to do so for a reason. I will show that his prophecies are wrong and will then destroy him from among my people. ¹⁰Both the false prophet and those who consult him will be guilty, and I will destroy them from among my people. ¹¹Then my people will know that I am the Lord. They will no longer turn against me or defile themselves with idolatrous practices. They will be my loyal people, and I will be their God.”

Even Noah, Daniel, and Job Can’t Help

¹²The Lord spoke to me again, saying, ¹³“Son of man, if a whole country sins against me and is unfaithful to me, I will stretch out my hand against it and cut off its food supply. The resulting famine will cause both men and animals to die. ¹⁴Even if men like Noah, Daniel and Job lived there, they could only save themselves by their goodness, not a whole city and certainly not an entire country. ¹⁵Or, if I sent wild animals against the people in such a country and the land became desolate because no one wanted to live there or pass through it, ¹⁶even these three men could not save their sons and daughters by their goodness, only themselves. ¹⁷Or if I brought the sword against that country and let the ravages of war kill men and animals alike, ¹⁸these three men could only save their own lives by their goodness, not anyone else’s, not even their own relatives. ¹⁹Or, if I sent an epidemic into the land and in my displeasure, men and animals began to die, ²⁰as surely as I live, even if Noah, Daniel and Job lived there they could only save themselves by their goodness, not anyone else, not even their own grandchildren. ²¹This is what the Lord says: I will send these four judgments on Jerusalem—famine, wild ani-

mals, war and disease. They will kill men and animals alike.

²²“But there will be some who will survive, both sons and daughters. They will be brought as captives to Babylon, and you will see their bad conduct and understand why I must discipline them. ²³You will see by their attitude and actions why I must discipline Jerusalem and Judah and that it is not without a cause. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

The Parable of the Vine

15 The Lord spoke to me again, saying, ²“Son of man, is a vine better than a tree? Is Judah better than any other nation that I should not discipline her? ³Does anyone ever go to a vine to find wood for making anything? People don’t even use it to make pegs. A vine is only good for bearing grapes. ⁴If a vine is thrown into the fire and both ends are burned and it’s charred in the middle, it’s even more useless. ⁵If it was useless before, it’s certainly more useless now. Will it ever be used for anything?

⁶“Therefore I say,

“Just as people use the wood of a dried-up vine only for fire, that’s what I’ll do to the people of Jerusalem who were once a fruit-bearing vine. ⁷I will turn my back on Jerusalem and this time will give her completely over to the fires of war even though she’s been charred twice before by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar. ⁸I will turn the land of Judah into a wilderness because the people have sinned against me and have been unfaithful to their own God. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

God’s Love for Jerusalem

16 Later the Lord said to me, ²“Son of man, I want you to confront Jerusalem and point out to her the disgusting things she’s doing. ³Tell her that this is what the Lord says:

“Your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. You were born a Canaanite, and they named you Jebus until I redeemed you and renamed you

Jerusalem. ⁴When you were born they threw you out in the field while you were still covered with blood. Your umbilical cord was not properly cut and tied. You were not washed, rubbed with salt or wrapped in a blanket. ⁵No one took pity on you or had compassion enough to save you and clean you up. You were thrown in the open field because no one wanted you, and there you lay.

⁶“Then I passed by and saw you covered with blood. I stopped and said to you, ‘Don’t cry, little one. I’ll take care of you, and you will live.’ ⁷I made sure you were taken care of, and you grew up like a healthy plant set in the most fertile soil. You grew to be tall and strong. Your breasts were well-formed and your hair was beautiful, but I saw that you were naked and bare.

⁸“Later when I came by, I saw that you were old enough to marry, so I put my coat over your body to cover you. I promised to marry you, and you accepted. I took an oath to be yours, and together we entered the marriage covenant, and you became mine. ⁹I remembered how I had found you in the field, washed off the blood, and anointed you with oil.

¹⁰“Years later when you pledged to be mine, I gave you richly embroidered dresses, fine leather sandals and a costly silk cloak for your shoulders. ¹¹I gave you expensive ornaments—bracelets for your wrists and a chain of pure gold for your neck. ¹²I gave you small jewels for the side of your nose, earrings for your ears and a beautiful crown for your head. ¹³You were adorned with gold and silver. You had clothes made of the finest linen, expensive fabrics and embroidered cloth. You ate nothing but the best—bread made of the finest flour, the choicest honey and the purest olive oil. You became very beautiful and soon rose to be queen. ¹⁴The nations heard how perfect and beautiful you were. They saw that I had surrounded you with riches, and you became the most desired among them.

Jerusalem's Pride

¹⁵“But you put your trust in your beauty and used your international fame to entice many lovers. You became a prostitute and lavished your favors on anyone who wanted them. ¹⁶You took the beautiful clothing I had given you and used them to decorate the places you had built for your gods. You worshiped them and prostituted your body to honor them. ¹⁷Such things should never have happened. You took the expensive ornaments and the gold and silver which I had made especially for you, and made male idols which you worshiped, and you committed prostitution with them. ¹⁸You took the costly fabrics and embroidered dresses I had given you and made clothes to decorate your idols. You took the oil and incense I had supplied for you and offered them to your gods. ¹⁹You took the food I had provided for you—bread from fine flour, the choicest honey and the purest olive oil—and offered it to your idols as a sacrifice. I, the Lord, your husband, saw all this.

²⁰“To make things worse, you took your infant sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them to your idols, as if your prostitution were not enough for your gods. ²¹You placed my babies in the arms of these idols and then burned them to death as a sacrifice. ²²While giving yourself to idols and prostituting your body for them, you forgot about your birth, when you lay naked in the field covered with your own blood.

Jerusalem's Prostitution

²³“Woe be to you because of all the evil you have done. In addition to all your wickedness, ²⁴you built a pagan shrine in every public square to market your prostitution. ²⁵Soon you had a pagan shrine on every street corner and offered your favors to anyone who passed by. ²⁶You committed adultery with every lustful neighbor who wanted you, including the Egyptians and any others who came along. You shamed

me with your increasing promiscuity.

²⁷“I removed some of my blessings and handed you over to the Philistines who came into your land. Their women were shocked at your open immorality and sexual lewdness. ²⁸You committed adultery with the Assyrians also, but this didn't satisfy you. ²⁹You also committed adultery with the rich merchants of Babylon, but you still weren't satisfied. ³⁰You have become a slave to your own passions. You're open and bold in your shameless prostitution.

³¹“On every street corner and in every public square, you've built shrines for your gods. You're unlike other prostitutes because you offer yourself for nothing. ³²You're like an adulterous wife who loves to have sex with strangers while letting her husband support her. ³³All prostitutes offer their bodies for a fee, but you not only offer yourself for nothing, you give your lovers gifts and even bribe them to come to see you. ³⁴You're different from other prostitutes. You run after your neighbors, and you end up paying your lovers for sex—they don't pay you.

Jerusalem's Lovers Will Invade the Land

³⁵“So listen to the word of the Lord, you prostitute:

³⁶“Because you have exposed yourself to your lovers and squandered your wealth on them, and because of all the revolting things you have done to worship your disgusting idols, even sacrificing your own infants to them, ³⁷I will bring all your lovers together, those you liked and those you didn't, and in their presence I will strip you naked. ³⁸I will pass down the same sentence on you that judges hand down to any woman brought into court for adultery and infanticide. I will let you know how you've hurt me by what you've done. I have no choice but to punish you for your own good.

³⁹“I will hand you over to your lovers. They will invade your land, tear down your pagan shrines in which you have

committed adultery, take your ornaments and expensive clothes and leave you totally naked. ⁴⁰They will stone you for your adulteries and cut you to pieces with their swords. ⁴¹They will burn down your houses and punish you in the sight of many women. I will put an end to your prostitutions and stop you from paying your lovers. ⁴²Then my jealousy for you will subside and my punishment will end. You will once again belong to me and me alone. ⁴³Because you forgot all about me and what I had done for you when I found you in the field, I will punish you to help you remember what I've done for you. Why did you add prostitution to all your other detestable sins?

Jerusalem More Wicked Than Sodom

⁴⁴“People will quote this proverb about you, ‘Like mother, like daughter,’ meaning you’re no different than the Jebusite city you conquered. ⁴⁵You’re a true daughter of your mother city who hated both her husband and her children. You’re also like your sisters, Samaria and Sodom. They, too, hated their husbands and children. You and your immoral sister come from the same Hittite mother and Amorite father. ⁴⁶Your older sister Samaria and her children lived just north of you. Your younger sister Sodom and her children lived south of you. ⁴⁷You weren’t satisfied to do what they had done—you had to outdo them and become worse than they were.

⁴⁸“As surely as I live, your sister Sodom and her suburbs never did the outrageous things you have done. ⁴⁹She and the little cities around her had plenty to eat and lots of leisure, but they became proud and paid no attention to the poor and needy. ⁵⁰They did some detestable things in my sight and even did so arrogantly. They had reached a point of no return, and so I had to destroy their cities. ⁵¹Samaria and the little cities around her didn’t sin half as much as you have. You’ve done much worse things than she ever did. You made both of your sisters

look good compared to you. ⁵²I will discipline you and shame you in the eyes of your sisters because you gave reasons to justify their immoral behavior.

⁵³“Nevertheless, I will have mercy on all of you. I will restore the descendants of Lot who lived in Sodom. I will restore the descendants of Samaria and prosper them. ⁵⁴But first I will discipline you and let you bear your shame because you comforted your sisters in their sinning. ⁵⁵Nevertheless, I will have mercy on all three of you, on the descendants of Samaria and Sodom and on your descendants. They will return to their own land and prosper as they did before. ⁵⁶In the height of your sinful arrogance and pride you wouldn’t even speak to the descendants of your sister Sodom. You made fun of them because they were not as bold as you were. ⁵⁷You laughed at her destruction. Now the daughters of Edom and Philistia will hate you. ⁵⁸You will suffer the consequences of your immorality, from the lewd and disgusting things you have done.

God’s Everlasting Covenant

⁵⁹“This is what the Lord says:

“I will punish you as you deserve because you’ve turned against me, your husband, and broken the marriage covenant we had made together. ⁶⁰But I won’t forget you. I will remember the covenant we made when you were young. I will not discard that covenant but will renew it as an everlasting covenant with you. ⁶¹The day will come when you will look back on what you have done and how you laughed at the misfortunes of your sisters. You will be ashamed of your deeds and will welcome their descendants as if they were your own. I will gladly welcome them, even though my covenant was made with you.

⁶²“I will renew the marriage covenant I made with you and you will know that I am still your husband. ⁶³I will make an atonement for you and for all the sins you committed. Then you will remember

what I did for you, and you'll feel ashamed of what you have done and will never repeat it.

"I, your Sovereign Lord, have spoken."

The Parable of the Eagles and the Vine

17 The Lord spoke to me again, saying, ²"Son of man, I want you to present this parable to the children of Israel. ³Tell them that the Lord God says:

"A huge eagle with beautiful long feathers of various colors and powerful wings flew to the mountains of Lebanon and broke off the topmost shoot of a cedar tree. ⁴He took this shoot and carried it to a land of trade and planted it in the middle of a city of merchants. ⁵Then he flew to the land of Israel and picked up a seed and planted it like a willow near plenty of water. ⁶It sprouted and grew into a spreading vine. Its branches reached out toward the eagle and spread its roots under him to get water. It became a beautiful vine with many branches and leaves.

⁷Then another large eagle came along which also had beautiful feathers and powerful wings. The vine turned its shoots and leaves toward this eagle and spread its roots, hoping to find more water than where it was planted. ⁸It had been planted in excellent soil and had all the water it needed to become the most beautiful of all the vines and to produce the best fruit.

⁹"Ask the people these questions: Will the owner let the vine live? Will he not uproot it, strip it of its fruit and leaves and let it dry up and die? It will not take many people or much strength to do it. ¹⁰It will not be transplanted. When the hot east winds blow, it will dry up in its own land."

¹¹Then the Lord said, ¹²"Go to the rebellious children of Israel and ask if they know what all this means. If they don't know (and they won't), say to them, 'King Nebuchadnezzar went to Jerusalem, carried off her king and her officials and took them to Babylon. ¹³Then he took a little-known member of the

royal family, made him king, made a peace treaty with him and had him take an oath to keep it. But he took some of the leaders with him as hostages ¹⁴to make sure that the kingdom would stay weak and keep his treaty. ¹⁵But the new king rebelled and sent envoys to Egypt to get horses and hire a large army of mercenaries. Will the new king succeed? Will the king of Babylon let him get away with it? Will he let him break the treaty without paying for it?'

¹⁶"As surely as I live," says the Lord, "the new king will be taken captive and carried to Babylon where he will die. He will die in the land of the king who put him on the throne because he broke the treaty and the oath he took to keep it. ¹⁷Not even the powerful army the new king hired from Egypt will be able to help him. The king of Babylon will come and build ramps and siege works against the city and kill many people. ¹⁸The king of Judah has broken the treaty he made with the king of Babylon. He took an oath to keep it, but he didn't keep his word. He will not escape the consequences.

¹⁹"As surely as I live," says the Lord, "I will punish him for breaking the covenant he made with the king of Babylon and swore in my name to keep. ²⁰I will throw out my net to catch him, and he will be caught in my snare. I will see to it that he's brought to Babylon and punished for his lies and the disgrace he has brought on me. ²¹His best troops will be killed in battle and those who survive will be scattered in all directions. Then he and his men will know that I have spoken.

God Gives His People Hope

²²"This is what the Lord says:

"I will take a tender twig from a different cedar and plant it on Mount Zion. ²³I will plant it on the heights of Israel. It will grow branches and become a great cedar. All kinds of birds will come to find shade and to nest there. ²⁴It will rule over all the trees of the forest and they will know that I cut down proud and stately

trees and make lowly ones grow tall. I will dry up flourishing trees and turn dry ones green. I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will do what I have said."

A False Proverb Rejected

18 Again the Lord spoke to me, saying, ²"Son of man, what do the people mean when they quote this proverb: 'The parents ate sour grapes and the children grit their teeth because of the taste'? ³As surely as I live, they will not use this proverb in Israel. ⁴The life of every individual is in my hand, the parents and each child. The person who sins will die. The children will not die for the sins of their parents.

⁵"Suppose there's a really good man who is honest and does what is right. ⁶This man doesn't look to idols for help. He doesn't eat at the mountain shrines where they serve meat offered to idols. He doesn't seduce his neighbor's wife or have sex with a woman during her period. ⁷He doesn't take advantage of anyone. He pays his debts and gives back what he took as a pledge on a loan. He doesn't steal, but provides food for the hungry and clothes for the naked. ⁸He doesn't charge his brother interest on money he loans him. He refuses to do wrong and gives unbiased decisions in disputes between people. ⁹He loves my laws and keeps my commandments. He's considered righteous and will surely live. I, the Lord, have spoken.

¹⁰"Now suppose this man has a son who lies and steals and kills. He does all the wicked things his father would never do. ¹¹He's not at all like his father. He has his idols. He likes to go and eat at the mountain shrines, seduce his neighbor's wife, ¹²take advantage of the poor, cheat people and keep the pledge someone gives him for a loan even after the man has paid it off. He looks to his idols for answers and takes part in the most disgusting pagan rites. ¹³He makes loans only if he can make excessive profit. Will I consider him righteous and let him live? I will

not! He has done all these wicked things and will surely die. He will have no one to blame for his death but himself.

¹⁴"Suppose this son has a son who sees all the wicked things his father has done and decides not to follow his example. ¹⁵He doesn't have idols. He doesn't go to eat at mountain shrines or sanction what is going on there. He doesn't try to seduce his neighbor's wife. ¹⁶He doesn't take advantage of people or require a pledge before he makes a loan. He doesn't steal from others. He gives food to the hungry and clothes to the naked. ¹⁷He refuses to do evil and charges his fellow Israelites no interest. He loves my law and keeps my commandments. He will not die because of his father's sins. He will live. ¹⁸His father will die because of his sins, but he will not. His father was the one who took advantage of people, robbed his brothers and did what was wrong.

God Judges Everyone Individually

¹⁹"You ask me, 'Why doesn't the son share in the guilt of his father?' The son has done what is just and right and has kept my commandments and my laws. He will surely live. ²⁰The man who sins is the one who will die. The son doesn't inherit the guilt of his father nor does the father share in the guilt of his son. The good things a man does will be credited to him and the wicked things a man does will be charged against him.

²¹"Suppose a wicked man turns from his wicked ways and keeps my commandments and does what is right. He will live. He will not die. ²²None of the wicked things he did will be charged against him, and because of the good things he's now doing, he will live. ²³Don't you think that I rejoice when I see the wicked turn from their ways and live! ²⁴On the other hand, if a good man stops doing good and starts doing the same bad things the wicked do, will he live? Absolutely not! None of the good things he did will be remembered. He will die because of his sins.

²⁵“You say to me, ‘That’s not fair!’ Listen. Is the God of Israel unjust? You are the ones who are unjust. ²⁶If a good man stops doing good and starts doing evil, he will die because of what he’s doing. ²⁷But if a wicked person turns away from his wickedness and does what is right, he will live. ²⁸Because he stops and realizes that what he’s doing is wrong, and turns from it, he will live. He will not die. ²⁹Still the people say that the Lord isn’t fair. Are my ways not fair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?”

³⁰“Listen to me, O Israel. I will judge everyone individually according to his deeds. You need to repent and turn away from your wickedness. Your sin is your downfall. Don’t let it destroy you! ³¹Change your ways and come to me to for a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die? ³²I am not pleased when people die. I want you to live. So repent and change your ways.”

A Funeral Chant

19 The Lord said to me, ²“Take up this funeral chant for the two kings of Judah, Jehoahaz who was taken as a captive to Egypt and Jehoiachin who was taken to Babylon:

“Your mother Jerusalem was like a lioness, and a fearless one at that. She raised her cubs in the midst of the fiercest lions. ³One of her cubs grew to be a strong lion. He went after his prey without fear but then began to eat people. ⁴The nations heard about it and came and trapped him in a pit. They pulled him out with hooks and dragged him to Egypt.

⁵“When the lioness saw that her hope for him was not fulfilled, she took another cub of hers and trained him to be a fearless lion. ⁶When he grew up he walked proudly among the lions. He learned to hunt and also went after his prey without fear, but then he began to eat people. ⁷He broke into strongholds and terrorized cities. Every time he roared, people shook with fear. ⁸The na-

tions came and fought against him. They came from everywhere to spread their nets, and they caught him in their trap. ⁹With hooks they pulled him into a cage and took him to the king of Babylon. He was put in prison and his roar was no longer heard in the mountains of Judah.

¹⁰“Your mother, Jerusalem, was like a grapevine planted in good soil and given plenty of water. It was full of branches and fruitful because of an abundance of water. ¹¹Its stem was strong and became a royal scepter. It towered above all the other vines and had many branches and rich foliage. ¹²But enemies came and pulled it up in fury and threw it to the ground. The east wind blew on it, dried it up and stripped off its fruit. Its strong branches withered and were burned with fire. ¹³Then they took what was left and replanted it in a dry and thirsty land. ¹⁴Fire broke out from its stem and consumed its branches and its fruit and no stem was left for a royal scepter.

“This is a funeral chant for Jerusalem and her kings, and should be used as such.”

The Defiance of the Leaders in Exile

20 On the tenth day of the fifth month in the seventh year some of the leaders of the exiles came to see me. They wanted to know if I had a message for them from the Lord. ²Then the Lord said to me, ³“Son of man, tell the elders of Israel that this is what the Lord says: ‘You have come to see if I have any counsel for you. As surely as I live, I have nothing more to say to you. I’ve given you my counsel again and again, but you won’t listen to me.’ ⁴Son of man, are you ready for me to pronounce sentence on them? Are you ready to confront them with the detestable things they and their fathers have done?”

⁵“Tell them that this is what the Lord says:

“When I chose Israel as my people I made a covenant with them. I revealed myself to them when they were still in

Egypt and said, 'I am the Lord, your God.'⁶ I promised to bring them out of Egypt into a land I had chosen for them, a rich and fertile land, glorious and beautiful.⁷ I said, 'Get rid of your vile images and stop defiling yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.'⁸ But they refused to listen to me. They didn't get rid of their idols or give up their evil practices. I decided to continue disciplining them by keeping them in Egypt.

⁹"However, for the sake of my reputation in the eyes of nations among whom they lived, I knew it was time to bring my people out of Egypt, but not because of their goodness or that they had put away their idols.¹⁰ So I brought them out of bondage into the wilderness to be with me and to make them into a better people.¹¹ There I gave them my laws and my commandments which bring life to those who keep them.¹² I also told them that the Sabbath would be a sign of the bond between us to remind them that I am the Lord their God and that I am the One who set them apart and made them a holy people.

¹³"But they rebelled against me in the wilderness and did not obey my law or keep my commandments, even though they knew that obedience would bring them life. They also desecrated my Sabbath. I would have destroyed them right there in the wilderness,¹⁴ but for the sake of Moses and my reputation among the nations in whose sight I brought them out, I would not do it.¹⁵ Then I took an oath not to bring them into that rich and fertile land so full of beauty that I had promised to give them.¹⁶ I did this because they had disobeyed me, broken my laws and desecrated my Sabbath. And they were still attached to their idols.¹⁷ I took pity on them and showed them mercy and did not destroy them in the wilderness.

¹⁸"I said to their children, 'Don't follow the example of your parents and do what they did or defile yourselves with the same immoral practices.¹⁹ I am the Lord

your God. Keep my laws and my commandments.²⁰ Keep my Sabbath, because it's a sign of the bond between us, and it will remind you that I am the Lord your God.'

²¹"But the children also rebelled and didn't listen to me. They didn't keep my laws and my commandments which bring life to all who obey them. They also desecrated my Sabbath, the sign of a bond between us. I was ready to let them feel my displeasure and to carry out my righteous anger right there in the wilderness.

²²"But I decided not to do so for the sake of my reputation among the nations who knew about the covenant I had made with my people and the promises I had given them.²³ I took an oath that if I needed to, I would scatter them among the nations,²⁴ because they had not listened to me but had followed the example of their parents. They worshiped idols, did the same disgusting things their parents had done and desecrated the Sabbath.²⁵ So I allowed them to make laws that were not good for them and commandments that would not bring them life.²⁶ I let them defile themselves through immoral practices, worshiping idols and sacrificing their own infants to these gods. This was the only way they could comprehend the wickedness of their deeds and return to me, for I am the Lord.

²⁷"Son of man, tell the elders of the people that this is what the Lord says:

"That was not the only time your ancestors and their children turned against me.²⁸ After I brought them into the land I had promised to give them, they continued their idolatrous worship. They brought offerings to their gods, burned incense to them and poured out drink offerings in front of them. They offered sacrifices to them on every high hill and under every spreading oak.²⁹ I asked them why they went to these high places to offer sacrifices instead of coming to the Temple. So they called these sites High Places, as if they were sacred, because that's what I had called them."

³⁰Then the Lord spoke to me again, saying, "Son of man, go and tell the children of Judah that this is what the Lord says:

"How long will you do what your ancestors did and continue to lust after their gods? ³¹Even while in exile you defile yourselves with the same idols and don't hesitate to sacrifice your infants to them in the fire. Then you dare to turn around and send your elders to ask me what my will is for you? As surely as I live, I have nothing more to say to you. I've given you all the counsel you need and more, but you still don't listen.

³²"You always want to be like the people of the nations around you who worship idols made of wood and stone, something you can see. But they will always identify you with me.

God Disciplines and Forgives

³³"As surely as I live," says the Lord, "I will discipline you with an iron hand, using all the power I need to do the job.

³⁴I will show you what I can do when I bring you back home from all the countries where you've been scattered, and I'll do so with a mighty hand. ³⁵But first I will discipline you among the nations by letting you taste the consequences of your sins. ³⁶Just as I judged your ancestors in the wilderness of Sinai, so I will judge you. ³⁷I will make you pass under my rod and will take firm control of you and bring you back into my covenant. ³⁸I will purify you by sifting out those who are rebellious. I will have them released from captivity but will prevent them from coming home to Israel. Then you will see that I am the Lord.

³⁹"Go ahead, suit yourselves. Serve your idols. But the time will come when you will not profane my holy name in the sight of nations as you're doing now by offering sacrifices to these lifeless gods.

⁴⁰"When you're back home in Israel, all my people will come to my holy mountain in Jerusalem and worship me, and I will accept you. You will bring me your choicest sacrifices, offerings and gifts. ⁴¹I will

take you from the countries where you are and bring you back home as my people. I will show myself on your behalf in the sight of all the nations. ⁴²When I bring you back to Israel, the land that I promised to your ancestors, then you will know that I am the Lord your God. ⁴³Then you will recall all the evil things that you have done and how you have polluted yourselves. You will hate yourselves for the grief you have caused me. ⁴⁴You will know that I am the Lord your God who loves you when I discipline you, not according to your evil deeds, but according to my mercy. I, the Lord, have spoken."

Fire in the Forests of Judah

⁴⁵Then the Lord said to me, ⁴⁶"Son of man, go and look toward the south. Then prophesy against the forests and mountains of Judah. ⁴⁷Tell them that this is what the Lord says: 'I am about to set you on fire. I will burn up your trees, those that are green and those that are dry. Your cities will be set on fire from north to south and people both small and great will die in the war. ⁴⁸Everyone will know that I started this fire of war. The fire will not go out until it does what I sent it to do.'"

⁴⁹I said, "Lord, don't make me give a message like that! The people will hear me talking to trees and mountains and it'll sound like I'm speaking in riddles. They're already accusing me of doing that."

Babylon, a Sword in the Hand of God

21 Then the Lord said to me, ²"Son of man, do what I asked you to do. Go and look toward Jerusalem and the Temple and prophesy against the forests and mountains of the kingdom of Judah. ³Also tell Jerusalem that this is what the Lord says:

"I am against you. I will take my sword from its sheath and the innocent, as well as the guilty, will be killed in the war. ⁴My sword of war will come out of its sheath and cut off both the righteous and the wicked from north to south. ⁵Then the

people will realize that I have drawn the sword against them and will not put it away until it has done its appointed work. ⁶Son of man, weep and groan in spirit. Grieve bitterly over Jerusalem and weep from a broken heart. ⁷When the exiles ask you why you're weeping and groaning, say to them, 'I am weeping because of what's coming. When you hear the news about what has happened to Jerusalem and Judah, your hearts will melt, your hands will hang limp, your knees will be as weak as water and your courage will be gone. It is coming! It will take place!'"

The Lord Has Spoken

⁸The Lord spoke to me again, saying, ⁹"Son of man, prophesy to the people and tell them that this is what the Lord says:

"A sword is coming against Jerusalem, a sword sharpened and polished. ¹⁰It's sharpened for slaughter and polished to flash as lightning. My son, Judah, despised my counsel, shrugged off my discipline and disobeyed my laws. ¹¹The sword is sharpened and polished for war. It's ready to be put into the hands of your enemies.

¹²"Son of man, cry out in pain, for the sword is coming against my people. It is coming against the king and princes of Judah. They will die by the sword like the rest of the people. Beat your chest in grief and weep for Jerusalem. ¹³The testing time is coming. Why have the people refused my counsel and correction? Why do they continue to despise the rod of my discipline? Why do they refuse to repent and turn from their wicked ways?"

¹⁴"So go and prophesy to them. Bring down your clenched fist to illustrate the striking of a sword. Twice before, it has struck Jerusalem, and now it will strike a third time. But this time it will totally destroy. It is a sword of great slaughter and will close in on my people from all sides. ¹⁵Hearts will melt with fear and many will fall. I have ordered the sword to come against Jerusalem, against all her gates.

It has been sharpened for slaughter and polished to flash as lightning. ¹⁶I have ordered it to cut to the right and to the left and in whatever direction it takes to do the job. ¹⁷I will bring down my fist, and the sword of war will strike Jerusalem. Only then will my displeasure with their wickedness subside and my discipline stop. I, the Lord, have spoken."

¹⁸The Lord spoke to me again, saying, ¹⁹"Son of man, make a drawing of the two roads that the king of Babylon will take, both starting from the same point in his land. Draw a signpost where the roads fork going to different cities. ²⁰Point one sign to the road going to Rabbah, the capital of the Ammonites, and the other sign to the road going to Jerusalem. ²¹The king of Babylon will try to decide which city to attack first and will ask his god for a sign. He will use divination, cast arrows as lots and ask his priests to examine the lines on the liver of a sheep that has been sacrificed.

²²"He will reach for one of the arrows using his right hand and will come up with the one marked for Jerusalem. That's where he will direct his army first. He will take his battering rams and order his men to use them against the gates. He will tell them to build siege works against the city and to attack and kill without mercy. ²³When the people of Jerusalem hear about the message you give the exiles, they will consider it a false prophecy because of the peace treaty the king of Babylon has made with them. But he will come against them because of their sin against him in breaking the treaty.

²⁴"Therefore, this is what the Lord says to His people in Jerusalem:

"Everyone knows how guilty you all are. The Babylonians have seen your wickedness and open rebellion against your God. Your sins have been discovered, and that's why you will be taken captive and join your brothers in exile. ²⁵As for you, you wicked prince and king of Judah, your day has come. The time of your punishment has arrived.

²⁶“This is what the Lord says:

“Take off your crown; remove your turban. Nothing will ever be the same again. The poor will be lifted up and the rich will be brought low. ²⁷There will be ruins everywhere because I will overturn many kingdoms, including Jerusalem. It will not become a new city until He comes who can rightfully claim it, for I have given it to Him.

A Prophecy Against the Ammonites

²⁸“Son of man, prophesy against the Ammonites and say this to them:

“A sword is drawn for slaughter. It’s sharpened to kill and polished to flash as lightning. ²⁹The visions that your prophets say they had are not true. They have lied to you. Their predictions are false. Your day is coming. You have been vile and wicked, and the day of your punishment is here. ³⁰Put your sword back in its sheath. I will judge you in your own land, in the place where you were born. ³¹You will taste my displeasure with your wickedness as I bring the sword of war against you. I will turn you over to brutal men, men skilled in slaughter and experts at destruction. ³²You will be like fuel added to a fire. Your blood will flow in the streets, and you will disappear as a nation. You will not be remembered any more. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

The Violence of Jerusalem

22 The Lord spoke to me again, saying, ²“Son of man, are you ready to judge Jerusalem for me, a city full of violence and bloodshed? I want you to confront her with all the wicked and detestable things she has done and continues to do. ³Tell her that this is what the Lord says:

“Because you have shed the blood of so many of your own people and become the murder capital of Judah, and because you continue to defile yourself by worshipping idols, ⁴I am holding you responsible for all the violence and murders committed in your streets and for all the

immoral practices connected with your idol worship. You have brought your days to a close and your end has come. I will let the nations laugh at you and the countries sneer at you. ⁵Those near and far will mock you because you can’t control the lawlessness in your own country.

⁶Look at how your princes and leaders misuse their power and execute those who oppose them. ⁷You treat your own parents with contempt. You take advantage of the aliens among you and mistreat widows and orphans. ⁸You hate what I have deemed holy and desecrate my Sabbath. ⁹You protect evil men who shed innocent blood, and you continue to visit your mountain shrines to eat and satisfy your sexual lusts. ¹⁰Some of you have sex with your own mothers, and others of you force women to have sex during their period. ¹¹You think nothing of forcing your neighbor’s wife or your sisters and daughters-in-law to have sex with you. ¹²Some of you kill for pay. Others get rich by charging interest on loans to your fellow Israelites, which I have forbidden because it exploits the poor.

¹³“I will bring down my fist against your unjust gain and against the innocent blood you have shed. ¹⁴When I come against you, your strength will melt away and your courage will be gone. I, the Lord, have spoken and I will do it. ¹⁵I will scatter you among the nations and disperse you throughout many countries. I will put an end to your wickedness. ¹⁶You will reap what you have sown and when you have lived in shame among the nations you will know that I am the Lord.”

God’s Refining Furnace

¹⁷Later the Lord said to me, ¹⁸“Son of man, the people of Judah are like useless metals. They’re like the copper, tin, iron and lead left over in the furnace after smelting. They’re like what’s left after silver has been refined. ¹⁹This is what the Lord says:

“The furnace is Jerusalem and you, my people, are the ore. ²⁰As men put silver,

copper, tin, iron and lead into the furnace to melt it down or refine it, so I will make sure that you stay inside Jerusalem to melt you down. ²¹I will blow on you with the fires of war and refine you with punishment for your wickedness. ²²As silver melts in the furnace so will you melt in the fires of war that come against Jerusalem. Then you will know that I am the Lord.”

The Sins of Israel's Leaders

²³The Lord spoke to me again, saying, ²⁴“Son of man, prophesy against the kingdom of Judah, saying,

“Your land has become unholy. It has received no rain because of your wickedness. ²⁵Your princes and leaders act together like lions attacking their prey. They brazenly kill to get the money and property they want, leaving behind innumerable mourning widows. ²⁶Your priests can't tell the difference between what is holy and what is not. They break my commandments. They don't teach the people the difference between clean and unclean. They shut their eyes to the importance of the Sabbath, and I am profaned among them. ²⁷Your local officials act like wolves tearing apart the prey they've just killed. They shed innocent blood to get what they want. ²⁸Your self-styled prophets whitewash everything the people do, covering their sins with false visions and lying prophecies. They tell the people that the Lord has given them these visions when God has not spoken to them. ²⁹The wealthy take advantage of the aliens, the poor and the needy. They lie and cheat and deny justice to the people.

³⁰“I looked for someone to stand in the breach where the wall of decency and obedience has been broken down, and repair the wall to keep my people from being destroyed. But I found no leader willing to turn the nation around. ³¹So, I will turn against Jerusalem and destroy my own city and my own Temple. I will discipline my own people for what they have done.

“I, the Lord, have spoken.”

Two Sisters Become Prostitutes

23 Later the Lord said to me, ²“Son of man, once there were two sisters, both from the same mother. ³While they were still young and living in Egypt they both turned to prostitution. They let men come and fondle their breasts and caress their bodies. They gave up their virginity without hesitation. ⁴The older sister's name was Oholah and the younger one's name was Oholibah. These two sisters represent Samaria and Jerusalem. I brought them out of Egypt and made them mine.

The Older Sister, Samaria

⁵Oholah left me and again took up a life of prostitution, going this time after Assyrian lovers. ⁶The Assyrian troops wore sharp looking blue uniforms, and the commanders and governors wore purple. Their cavalry officers were all handsome young men. ⁷She gave herself to all of them and in her lust even worshiped their gods by offering her body to anyone who wanted to have sex with her. ⁸She went right back to the kind of prostitution she had practiced in Egypt while she was still young, when she let men sleep with her, fondle her breasts, and pour out their lust on her. ⁹Finally I had to let her go and gave Samaria over to her Assyrian lovers after whom she lusted so much. ¹⁰They came and stripped her naked, took away her sons and daughters and killed her with the sword. She became a byword among the nations, and women everywhere began talking about how she had been punished.

The Younger Sister, Jerusalem

¹¹Oholibah saw what had happened to her sister but she didn't change her ways. In fact, she became worse than Oholah. ¹²She, too, went after the Assyrians, after those men in blue uniforms, the commanders and governors in purple and the young handsome officers riding on horses. ¹³She also worshiped the Assyrian gods by offering her body to

anyone who would have sex with her. I saw that she was just like her sister. ¹⁴In fact, she was worse than her sister. She did things her sister had never done. She saw pictures of the Babylonians and went after them.

¹⁵“Their chariot officers were dressed in red, with sashes around their waists and turbans on their heads. ¹⁶As soon as she saw their pictures, she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Babylon to come and visit her. ¹⁷They came and had sex with her and used her for their own pleasure, but soon she hated them and turned to others. ¹⁸She continued with her prostitution openly and without shame. She exposed herself publicly to make sure that everyone knew the kind of woman she was. I was pained with what I saw her doing to herself, just as I had been with her sister. I finally turned away from her in disgust. ¹⁹Then she thought back to the days when she was a young prostitute in Egypt, and she tried to recapture those days by becoming even more bold. ²⁰She went after oversexed men who were as lustful as donkeys, whose emissions were like horses. ²¹She longed for the days of her youth when men loved to fondle her breasts, caress her body and pour out their lust on her.

Judgment on the Younger Sister

²²“This is what the Lord said to her:

“I will stir up your Babylonian lovers, those you hated and turned away from, and bring them against you from every side. ²³I will not only bring the Babylonians against you but also men from Pekod, Shoa, Koa and other parts of the former Assyrian empire. High-ranking commanders, governors and handsome young cavalry officers will come against you from all sides. ²⁴They will come against you from the north with a large, well-equipped army, all of them wearing helmets and carrying shields. They will come with chariots, supply wagons and all the necessary equipment and

weapons of war they need. I will turn you over to them and they will judge you by their own laws. ²⁵I will let them punish you in their anger and will not interfere. They will cut off the noses and ears of your people and many others they will kill. They will take your sons and daughters, and your infants will be thrown into the fire. ²⁶They will strip you of your expensive clothes and your fine jewelry. ²⁷In this way I will put a stop to your lust and the prostitution you began in Egypt when you were young. Never again will you be attracted to idols or long for the days in Egypt.

²⁸“This is what the Lord says:

“I will hand you over to your Babylonian lovers, the ones you hated and turned away from in disgust. ²⁹They will hate you and take away everything you own and leave you standing in the street naked with the shame of your prostitution exposed. ³⁰You brought all this on yourself by offering your body as a prostitute to the nations and by defiling yourself with their gods. ³¹You have followed in your sister’s footsteps, so I will give you the same bitter cup to drink that I gave her. ³²You will drink from the same cup of punishment as your sister, a cup big and deep. It will bring you mockery and scorn from all your neighbors. ³³You will stagger with sorrow and grief. It will be a cup full of desolation and ruin. It’s the same cup your sister Samaria had to drink. ³⁴You will drink it and drain it dry. Then you’ll smash it to pieces and tear at your breasts in pain. I, the Lord, have spoken. ³⁵Since you have turned your back on me and rejected me, you will suffer the consequences of your wickedness and prostitution.”

God’s Judgment on Both Sisters

³⁶Then the Lord said to me, “Son of man, I want you to judge Oholah and Oholibah for me. I want you to summarize their sins and write them out so everyone can read about their wickedness. ³⁷They have prostituted their bodies in front of

their idols and sacrificed the sons and daughters they bore for me as food for their gods. ³⁸They have also defiled my Temple and desecrated my Sabbath. ³⁹The same day after they sacrificed their children to their gods, they came to my Sanctuary and profaned it by pretending to worship me! ⁴⁰Again and again the two sisters sent messengers to men everywhere to come and visit them. Then they would bathe themselves, put on eye shadow and jewelry, ⁴¹and sit on elegant couches waiting for their lovers. In front of them would be a table of good things to eat, incense and oil that I had given them.

⁴²Then a carefree crowd made up of all kinds of sordid men, would come in from the desert, put bracelets on the arms of the sisters and beautiful crowns on their heads. Soon the sound of revelry and drunkenness would be heard. ⁴³They would have sex with both sisters, even with the older one who was worn out from her illicit life. ⁴⁴They slept with Oholah and Oholibah as men do with prostitutes and returned to see them again and again.

⁴⁵But men from Assyria and Babylon who are more upright will come and charge the sisters with adultery. They will judge them as harshly as those who commit murder because they also have shed innocent blood.

⁴⁶"This is what the Lord says:

"Bring these men against the sisters and give Samaria and Jerusalem into their hands to terrorize and plunder. ⁴⁷Let these men stone them to death, cut them down with swords, kill their children and burn down their houses. ⁴⁸This will put an end to the prostitution in the land and be a warning to the nations not to imitate the two of you. ⁴⁹You will reap what you have sown and pay the penalty for your idolatry and your adulteries. Then you will know that I am the Lord."

The Corroded Cooking Pot

24 On the tenth day of the tenth month in the ninth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity since we had been

taken to Babylon with him, the Lord said to me, ²"Son of man, write down today's date because today the King of Babylon is beginning the siege of Jerusalem. ³Go and give this parable to your fellow exiles and tell them that this is what the Lord told you to do:

"Set a cooking pot on the fire and fill it with water. ⁴Put the best meat in it, the rump and the shoulders, and fill the pot with the choicest bones. ⁵Then pick the best sheep from the flock, slaughter it, put logs on the fire, bring the water to a boil and thoroughly cook the meat and the bones."

⁶The Lord said, "Jerusalem is a corroded pot, still full of meat. Woe to Jerusalem! The city is doomed! Now empty your pot one piece at a time without casting lots. That's what will happen to the people of Jerusalem. They will either be killed or carried away as captives to Babylon. ⁷The city is full of violence and bloodshed. She didn't pour the blood on the ground and cover it with dirt, but splashed it on the rock for everyone to see. ⁸Therefore I will spill her blood on the rock and do it openly for all to see.

⁹"This is what the Lord says:

"Woe to Jerusalem, a city full of violence and murder. I, too, will pile up wood for burning. ¹⁰Put more wood on the fire, cook your meat well, add the spices, and make sure the bones are well cooked. ¹¹Now empty the pot of water and set it back on the fire until it becomes hot, its copper glows and its rust is burned away. ¹²Jerusalem has spurned all efforts to save it. But the first fires did not remove all her impurities. ¹³Jerusalem, you are like a deeply rusted pot, covered with evil. I tried to cleanse you, but you wouldn't let me. So now you'll feel the full force of my fire and not be clean again until you have been punished. ¹⁴I, the Lord, have spoken and the time for me to act has come. I will not overlook your wickedness, nor will I have mercy. You will be judged according to what you have done."

The Prophet's Wife Dies

¹⁵Then the Lord said to me, ¹⁶"Son of man, your wife will die from her illness. The delight of your eyes and the joy of your heart will be taken away. I want you to know that I'm letting this happen, and I don't want you to cry or shed any tears. ¹⁷I don't want anyone to hear you sobbing, and I don't want you to go bare-headed or barefooted to show your grief. Grieve quietly and alone. When you go out, don't cover your face or look down in grief as you walk along. Don't have a funeral meal with mourners as people usually do."

¹⁸So in the morning I shared the illustration of the pot with the people, and that evening my wife died. The next morning when I went out, I didn't cry. I held back my tears as the Lord had asked me to do. ¹⁹Then the people said to me, "Won't you tell us why you're not crying and what all this is supposed to mean?"

²⁰I said to them, "The Lord spoke to me and this is what He said:

²¹"Tell the children of Israel that I am about to destroy the Temple, which has been your strength and pride, the delight of your eyes and the joy of your heart. It will not be able to save the sons and daughters whom you left behind. ²²When you hear about it, I don't want you to shed tears over Jerusalem and the Temple or eat the food of mourners. ²³Keep your turbans on your heads and your sandals on your feet. I don't want you to mourn over the death of your people, but mourn over your sins and groan over your wickedness. ²⁴Ezekiel is an example to you. Do as he has done. When all this happens, then you will know that I am the Lord."

²⁵Then the Lord said, "Son of man, I will destroy my Temple and take away from them the delight of their eyes and the joy of their hearts, the one thing they are so proud of. I will also take away many of their sons and daughters who still live there. ²⁶When this happens, you will hear about it because someone for-

tunate enough to escape will come and tell you the news. ²⁷I am about to take away your voice, but I will give it back to you and you can go and speak again for me to your fellow captives. You will be a sign to the people to confirm that what I have said to them has happened. I, the Lord, have spoken."

A Prophecy Against Ammon

25 Later, after I had buried my wife, the Lord said to me, ²"Son of man, prophesy against the Ammonites, the descendants of Lot, and tell them that this is what the Lord says:

³"You were thrilled when you saw the kingdom of Judah devastated, my people taken captive and my Temple destroyed. ⁴Therefore I will let the desert tribes from the East come against you. They will invade your country, pitch their tents among you and live off the land. They will eat your food and drink your milk. ⁵I will turn the city of Rabbah into a place for camels and your country into a place for sheep. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

⁶"This is what the Lord says:

"Because you clapped your hands and jumped for joy over what happened to my people and despised the children of Israel, ⁷I will hand you over to other nations, and they will come and plunder your cities and your land. I will cut you off and destroy you so completely that you will never be a nation again. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

A Prophecy Against Moab

⁸"Son of man, now prophesy against the Moabites, who are also descendants of Lot, and tell them that this is what the Lord says:

"You have said that Judah is no different from other nations and that their God is no different from other gods. ⁹Therefore I will attack the fortified cities on your borders such as Beth Jeshimoth, Baal Meon and Kiriathaim, which are the pride of your country. ¹⁰I will let desert

tribes from the East come against you and invade your country, pitch their tents there and live off the land, just as they will in Ammon, and you will never be a nation again. ¹¹I will bring judgment on Moab and you will know that I am the Lord.

A Prophecy Against Edom

¹²“Son of man, prophesy against the Edomites, descendants of Jacob’s brother Esau, because of their continued hostility toward Judah which has brought lasting guilt on them. ¹³Tell them this is what the Lord says:

“I will stretch out my hand against Edom, and her men and animals will be slaughtered, her cities from Teman to Dedan will fall and her people will be killed by the sword. ¹⁴I will punish Edom by the hand of Israel and let her feel the strong hand of my discipline. I am the Lord.

A Prophecy Against Philistia

¹⁵“Son of man, prophesy against the Philistines and tell them that this is what the Lord says:

“You took revenge on my people and tried to spitefully destroy them when they were under my direction to drive you out of the land because of your terrible wickedness. ¹⁶Therefore I will stretch out my hand against you and destroy the Cherethites who live in the southern part of your country along the Mediterranean coast. ¹⁷I will punish Philistia and they will know that I am the Lord when they feel the extent of my great displeasure.”

A Prophecy Against Tyre

26 On the first day of the first month in the eleventh year of King Jehoiachin’s captivity and our exile, the Lord said to me, ²“Son of man, the people in Tyre are saying, ‘Aha! The city that traded with nations will soon be broken and her commercial gates be shattered. When she lies in ruins we will prosper.’ ³Therefore, this is what the Lord says:

“I will destroy you, city of Tyre. I will bring many nations against you, and they

will come at you successively like the waves of the sea. ⁴They will destroy your walls and pull down your towers. I will even have them scrape away your rubble and sweep up your dust until you’re as bare as a rock. ⁵You will become a place where fishermen spread out their nets to dry. I, the Lord, have spoken. Yes, you will be plundered by the nations.

⁶“Your surrounding developments will be ravished by the sword. Then you will know that I am the Lord. ⁷I will bring the Babylonians down from the north and Nebuchadnezzar, that great king, will come against you with horses, chariots and a very large army. ⁸He will come against you on the mainland, set up siege works against you, build ramps against your walls and raise his shields in defiance of you. ⁹He will attack your gates with his battering rams and your towers with his weapons of war.

¹⁰“He will come with so many horses that you will be covered with clouds of dust. The noise of his chariots and wagons coming through the breached walls will cause them to shake. ¹¹The horsemen will ride through your streets killing everyone in sight. The mighty pillars decorating your city will be thrown down. ¹²They will loot your stores, take your wealth, destroy your houses and throw the stones, timber and rubble into the sea. ¹³I will put an end to your lewd and noisy songs. The music of your stringed instruments will cease. ¹⁴I will make you as bare as a rock and you will become a place where fishermen spread their nets. You will never be rebuilt. I, the Lord, have spoken.

¹⁵“When you fall, those who live along the coast will tremble with fear. The slaughtered will lie in your streets and groan. ¹⁶The kings of the seafaring people will step down from their thrones, take off their royal robes and embroidered shirts and sit on the ground in fear and trembling, clothed with terror. ¹⁷They will sing this funeral song over you: ‘The famous city of Tyre has been

destroyed! That renowned city has fallen! Her ships were the power of the seas. They've all been swept away. All who live along the coast were afraid of her. Now she's gone.'

¹⁸"The coast lands tremble at what might happen to them. The islands of the sea are stunned. They are shocked at your destruction and sit there terrified. ¹⁹I, the Lord, have spoken. I will turn you into a ghost town and no one will live in you ever again. Ocean waves will wash over you, and you will be no more. ²⁰I will bring you down to the grave and you will be numbered among the dead. You will lie among the ancient ruins and never again return and take your place in the land of the living. ²¹I will put an end to you and you will be no more. They will look for you but will not find you.

"I, the Lord, have spoken."

A Funeral Chant for Tyre

27 Then the Lord said to me, ²"Son of man, mourn for the city of Tyre, ³that city by the Mediterranean full of busy merchants doing business on many coasts. This is what the Lord says:

"Tyre, you took pride in your beauty. You thought you were perfect.

⁴"Like a beautiful ship you sat in the midst of the sea. Your builders made you look beautiful. They did a perfect job. ⁵They made you out of the best timbers. They used fir from Mount Hermon for your sides and cedar from Lebanon for your masts. ⁶They used oak from Bashan for your oars and cypress trees from Cyprus for your deck and inlaid it with ivory.

⁷"They made your sails of embroidered linen from Egypt and your awnings from the finest blue and purple cloth from Sicily. You were easily recognized wherever you went. ⁸Your oarsmen came from Sidon and Arvad, your sailors and captains from your own people, ⁹and your carpenters and ship caulkers came from Byblos. All the ships and sailors pulled into your port to trade their wares.

¹⁰"Mercenaries from Persia, Lydia and Libya made up your army. They hung their shields and helmets on your walls. They brought glory and victory to your city. ¹¹Mercenaries from Arvad manned your walls and those from Gamad, your towers. They also hung their shields and helmets on your walls. They made your beauty perfect.

¹²"You did business in Spain. They gave you silver, iron, tin and lead in exchange for your goods. ¹³You also did business in Greece, Tubal and Meshech. You exchanged your goods for slaves and vessels of bronze. ¹⁴You traded goods for work horses, war horses and mules from Beth Togarmah. ¹⁵The people of Rhodes also traded with you and the men of Dedan paid for your goods with ivory and ebony. ¹⁶The Edomites did business with you and offered you fine linen, purple cloth, embroidery, emeralds and rubies in exchange for your merchandise.

¹⁷"Israel and Judah traded with you and paid for your goods with wheat, confections, olive oil, honey and spices. ¹⁸Syria did business with you and paid you with wine from Helbon and wool from Zahar. ¹⁹The Greeks and the people from Uzal brought you iron and holy oil in exchange for your merchandise. ²⁰Dedan traded saddle blankets for your goods. ²¹The princes of Arabia and Kedar paid for your merchandise with lambs, rams and goats. ²²The merchants of Sheba and Raamah gave you gold, precious stones and the finest spices in exchange for your goods. ²³Merchants from Haran, Canneh, Eden, Asshur and Kilmad in Assyria and Babylon also traded with you. ²⁴They brought you beautiful garments, purple cloth, embroidered rugs and multicolored carpets made with twisted cords tightly knotted. ²⁵The huge cargo ships of Tarshish transported your goods to distant lands. You now sit in the harbor like a beautiful ship laden with riches.

²⁶"Your oarsmen will take you out to sea, but a strong wind from the East will

come and break you to pieces. ²⁷All your riches and your merchandise, your carpenters and caulkers, your sailors and your captain, all your crew and troops on board will be lost when your ship sinks into the sea.

²⁸"The shouts of drowning men will be heard on shore, and those who hear them will shake with fear. ²⁹The oarsmen and seamen from other nations along the shore will weep and mourn over the loss of so beautiful a ship. ³⁰They will weep bitterly over you. They will sprinkle dust on their heads and roll themselves in ashes. ³¹They will shave their heads in grief and put on sackcloth to show their sorrow. They will weep over you in bitterness of soul.

³²"As they weep and mourn they will chant this funeral song: Who can be compared to you, O city of Tyre, now so silent in the sea? ³³Your goods went everywhere, here and overseas. You satisfied many nations and enriched many kings. ³⁴Now you've been broken by the sea and your riches and merchandise have gone down with you. Your goods and all who worked for you are gone. ³⁵Everyone along the coast who hears will be stunned by what has happened to you. Their kings will be terrified and their faces filled with fear. ³⁶The merchants of the world will hear and be terrified. They will hiss at you and are afraid that they will share your fate and be no more."

A Prophecy Against the King of Tyre

28 The Lord continued, ²"Son of man, prophesy against the prince of Tyre and tell him that this is what the Lord says:

"You tell yourself that you are a god, that you sit on your throne in the midst of the seas like a god. But you are only a man. ³Do you know more than the prophet Daniel? Do you think that no secret of the future can be kept from you? ⁴It's true that by your wisdom and understanding you made yourself rich and acquired huge amounts of gold and sil-

ver to store in your treasury. ⁵By your business skills you increased your profits and because of your success you became proud.

⁶"Therefore, this is what the Lord says: "Because you think you know as much as God and can lay out the future for yourself, ⁷I will bring the most ruthless nation against you. They will draw their swords and destroy your beauty and everything you have acquired with your wisdom and skill.

⁸"They will bring you to your knees and kill you. You will die a violent death and be buried in a watery grave. ⁹What will you say to those who are ready to take your life? Will you tell them that you are a god? To them you're nothing but a man, and they won't hesitate to kill you. ¹⁰You will die the death of the proud, of the uncircumcised in heart. You will die like a dog at the hands of foreigners. I, the Lord, have spoken."

A Prophecy Against the Evil One

¹¹The Lord spoke to me again, saying, ¹²"Son of man, record this mournful prophecy against the Evil One who works behind the scenes to work through men like the prince of Tyre.

"This is what the Lord says:

"When I created you, you were perfect, full of wisdom and beauty. ¹³You were in heaven with God and talked with Him like those who lived in the Garden of Eden. You were anointed head of the cherubim, the one who stood next to God and wore the highest insignias of heaven. Every precious stone was yours—rubies, diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, topaz, chrysolite, onyx, jasper, turquoise and beryl. All these were available for you to wear, including ornaments of solid gold. I gave you all these things the day I created you.

¹⁴"You were the anointed angel, the one who stood at my right hand. You lived with me on my holy mountain and walked in the fire of God's presence. ¹⁵You were flawless and blameless from the day I created

you until sin sprang up in you, and you became evil.

¹⁶“Your nature changed, and you were filled with jealousy and violence. You spread evil to all who would listen. So I expelled you from heaven, and you fell from the holy mountain of God. I had to force you to leave my presence even though you had stood next to me. ¹⁷You had become proud of your wisdom and beauty. Your high opinion of yourself led you into sin, and you rebelled against me. You let the beauty and wisdom I gave you corrupt you.

“So I cast you out of heaven, and you walked the earth in shame. ¹⁸But you continued sinning, offering your evil to all nations and trading your sinful wares with them. You desecrated my Sanctuary and trampled the truth about God in the dust. So I will bring fire down on you and destroy the global city you built for yourself. You will be reduced to ashes in the sight of all those watching. ¹⁹The people who bought the goods you sold them will be shocked when they see who you really are. You will come to your end and will be gone forever.”

A Prophecy Against Sidon

²⁰The Lord spoke to me again, saying, ²¹“Son of man, prophesy against the city of Sidon. ²²Tell her that this is what the Lord says:

“I have set my face against you. People will praise me for doing what I will do to you. They will know that I am the Lord when I execute judgment on you. ²³I will send diseases on you and the sword of war. Blood will flow in your streets. The sword will come at you from all sides. Then you will know that I am the Lord. ²⁴Israel will no longer be looked down on and scorned by her neighbors such as you. They will no longer be thorns in her sides. The nations will know that I am the Lord when I again bless Israel.

A Secure Future

²⁵“This is what the Lord says:

“I will bring my people back home from the places where I have scattered them. When the nations see this they will know that I am the Lord. I will bring my people back to the land that I have given them. ²⁶They will build houses, plant vineyards and live in safety. I will bring judgments on their neighbors for looking down on my people and treating them with scorn. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord.”

A Prophecy Against Egypt

29 On the twelfth day of the tenth month in the tenth year after we had been taken with King Jehoiachin to Babylon, the Lord spoke to me about Pharaoh, king of Egypt. I had this vision before the vision about Tyre, and over the next two years the Lord gave me a number of visions about Egypt which I will group together.

The Lord said to me, ²“Son of man, prophesy against Pharaoh and the people of Egypt. ³This is what the Lord says:

“I am against you, Pharaoh, king of Egypt. You’re like a monstrous crocodile lying beside the river Nile. You tell yourself that the river is yours and that you made it. ⁴I will put a hook in your jaws and make the fish of your rivers stick to your scales as I pull you out. ⁵I will take you to the desert and leave you there, you and all the fish who stuck to you. You will die in the open field and remain unburied. I will give your body to the animals and birds to feast on.

⁶“Then everyone living in Egypt will know that I am the Lord. When the kingdom of Judah asked you for help against the Babylonians you were nothing more than a thin reed for my people to lean on. ⁷When Judah did lean on you, you snapped and pierced her shoulders; when she leaned on you, you broke and wrenched her back. ⁸Therefore, this is what the Lord says: I will bring the sword of war against you. Your enemies will come and slaughter your people and your animals. ⁹Your country will become

a wasteland. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

“Because you told yourself that the Nile was yours and that you made it, ¹⁰I am against the Nile and all her rivers. I will turn your country into a wasteland from the city of Migdol in the north to the city of Aswan in the south and as far as the border of Ethiopia. ¹¹No one will live in these cities for forty years. No man or animal will pass through their ruins. ¹²The great cities of Egypt will lie in ruins for forty years. I will scatter your people among the nations. They will flee as refugees to many countries.

¹³“But the Lord also says,

“At the end of forty years I will bring the Egyptians back from the nations among whom they were scattered. ¹⁴I will bring them back to their cities and restore the fortunes of Egypt. But she will never rise to her former glory. ¹⁵She will be a weaker kingdom among the nations. She will never be strong enough to exalt herself above other countries nor rule over their people. ¹⁶Judah will never again depend on Egypt for help. No longer will she see you as a source of strength. You will remind them of the sin they committed by depending on you instead of me. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

Babylon Will Invade Egypt

¹⁷Almost seventeen years later, on the first day of the first month in the twenty-seventh year of our exile and Jehoiachin’s captivity, the Lord spoke to me about Egypt again, saying, ¹⁸“Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, has ended his thirteen-year siege, destroying the city of Tyre without taking her adjacent island. Every soldier’s head was rubbed bare and every shoulder raw from carrying siege works. Yet neither he nor his men were rewarded. ¹⁹Therefore, I will give Egypt to him as a reward. He will defeat Pharaoh, loot the cities and plunder the country. He will take the wealth of Egypt, pay his men and carry the rest of the treasure back to Babylon.

²⁰I will give him Egypt as payment for his services because he and his men were working for me. I, the Lord, have spoken.

²¹“Son of man, when the days of exile end and Judah begins to put her trust in me, the horn of her strength will grow again. I will give you a respected place among my people, and you will open your mouth and teach them. Then they will listen, for they will know that I am the Lord.”

Egypt Will Fall

30 The Lord spoke to me again, saying, ²“Son of man, write down this mournful prophecy against Egypt. This is what the Lord says:

“Your day of doom has come! ³The day of destruction is here! It is a day of darkness and gloom for many nations. ⁴The sword of war will come against Egypt, and devastation will come to Ethiopia and parts of the Sudan. The slain of Egypt will be many, her land will be plundered and her wealth will be carried away. The whole country will suffer. ⁵Your mercenaries from Ethiopia, Libya, Lydia, Arabia, Persia, Greece and even those from Israel will fall by the sword.

⁶“This is what the Lord says:

“From Migdol in the north to Aswan in the south, all who try to defend Egypt will fall by the sword. Egypt’s proud army will be destroyed. I, the Lord, have spoken. ⁷The land will look like a wilderness and her cities will lie in ruins. ⁸They will know that I am the Lord when I set fire to Egypt and all her defenders are killed.

⁹“Those who flee Egypt will take the news of her defeat everywhere they go, even to countries reached only by ship. The news will frighten countries like Ethiopia out of their complacency and they’ll be terrified. Egypt’s doom is coming. ¹⁰I will put an end to Egypt’s mighty army. I will send Nebuchadnezzar against her and he will strip her of her wealth. ¹¹He and his ruthless troops will come against Egypt, destroy her cities and devastate the land. They will draw the sword

against her and the land will be full of corpses. ¹²I will dry up the canals of the Nile and turn the land over to evil men. Foreigners will come and devastate the land, destroying everything in it.

¹³"I will destroy her idols and take away the false gods in Memphis. Not even a prince will be left in the country. I will spread fear throughout the land. ¹⁴I will lay waste the upper part of Egypt and set fire to the city of Zoan. I will punish the city of Thebes. ¹⁵I will judge the stronghold of Pelusium and take away the wealth of Thebes. ¹⁶I will set Egypt on fire and Pelusium will writhe in pain. Thebes will be taken by storm and Memphis will tremble with fear. ¹⁷Men from Heliopolis, city of the sun, and men from Pi Beseth, city of the cat-headed goddess Bastet, will fall by the sword and many people will be taken captive.

¹⁸"It will be a dark day for the city of Tahpanhes when I break the dominion of Egypt and her proud might comes to an end. It will be a dark day for Egypt when the people of her cities are taken captive. ¹⁹I will bring judgment on Egypt and the nations will know that I am the Lord."

A Prophecy Against Pharaoh

²⁰It was on the seventh day of the first month in the eleventh year of our exile and Jehoiachin's captivity that the Lord spoke to me again about Egypt, saying, ²¹"Son of man, I will break the arm of Pharaoh and no one will put a splint on it or bind it up for healing. It will never be strong enough to hold a sword again. ²²I am against the king of Egypt. This time I will break both his arms, the good one and the one that was broken before, and the sword will fall from his hands.

²³"I will disperse his people among the nations and scatter them throughout the countries. ²⁴I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put my sword in the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and like a mortally wounded man, he will groan in front of his enemy. ²⁵The arms of Nebuchad-

nezzar will be strong but the arms of Pharaoh will hang limp. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord when I strengthen the hand of the king of Babylon and he carries my sword against Egypt. ²⁶I will scatter the people of Egypt everywhere, and then they will know that I am the Lord."

Egypt Compared to a Great Tree

31 On the first day of the third month in the eleventh year of our exile and Jehoiachin's captivity the Lord spoke to me, saying, ²"Son of man, prophesy against Egypt and her people. This is what the Lord says:

"You are a powerful country. What should I compare you to? ³I can compare you to the great empire of Assyria, that great cedar of Lebanon with its beautiful branches shading whole areas of the forest. This cedar was so tall it seemed as if it touched the clouds. ⁴The waters around it made it grow and subterranean springs fed its roots. Streams flowed all around its base and from there they branched out to the rest of the forest. ⁵It towered above the trees. Its branches grew thick and strong and stretched out over the forest because of so much water.

⁶"All kinds of birds nested in its branches and the animals of the field gave birth in its shade. All the great nations lived in the shadow of Assyria. ⁷As a cedar, Assyria was majestic, tall and straight, its huge branches covered with an abundance of leaves and strong roots that went deep into the earth to drink from the springs of water. ⁸It could be compared to the cedars in Eden, the garden of God, whose branches were as thick as pine trees. No tree in the garden of God could match their beauty. ⁹I made the cedar beautiful with many branches. And all the trees in Eden, the garden of God, wanted to be like it.

¹⁰"Because Assyria as a cedar was so proud of its height and in its pride reached for the clouds, ¹¹I handed it over to the king of Babylon to punish it.

Because of its wickedness I cast it aside. ¹²The most ruthless of nations came and cut it down. Its branches fell on the mountains and into all the valleys. Then all the nations under its rule came out from its shadow and left to be on their own. ¹³The birds came and perched on the fallen cedar, and animals walked among its branches. ¹⁴I will let no other trees, no matter how well-watered they are, grow as tall or reach as high in pride for the clouds. All rulers of empires die and go down to the grave to join those already there.

¹⁵“On the day the great cedar went down into darkness I covered the deep springs as a sign of mourning. I held back the rivers and restrained the waters. I brought darkness over the forest of Lebanon and all the smaller trees began to weep and wither away. ¹⁶The nations trembled at the sound of the great cedar falling. They were terrified when they saw it go down. Then trees like those of Eden and the well-watered trees of Lebanon that had gone down because of the cedar, were finally consoled. ¹⁷Its allies among the nations that lived under its long shadow also went down, joining those they had killed by the sword while fighting for the great cedar. ¹⁸Egypt can be compared to Assyria, that mighty cedar of Lebanon, with its splendor and beauty.

“But like this mighty cedar and the mighty cedars in the garden of God, Pharaoh and his people will go down into darkness and join those who have been killed by the sword.

“I, the Lord, have spoken.”

A Funeral Chant for Pharaoh and Egypt

32 On the first day of the twelfth month in the twelfth year of our exile and our king's captivity, the Lord said to me, ²“Son of man, write out this prophecy as a funeral chant against the king of Egypt:

“You think you're like a lion compared to other nations, but you're more like a crocodile thrashing in the Nile. You

churn up the river with your feet and muddy the water of your streams. ³The Lord says: I will throw my net over you in the sight of many nations and let them haul you up and drag you to shore. ⁴I will throw you out on the ground and drag you to the mountains. I will bring the birds and animals to feed on you, and they will gorge themselves on you. ⁵Your flesh will be scattered all over the mountains, and your remains will fill the valleys. ⁶I will drench the land with your blood as it flows down from the mountains; the ravines will be filled with your flesh. ⁷When I do this, I will cover the stars and darken the sky. I will blot out the light of the sun, and the moon will not shine. ⁸All the lights of heaven will go out and your country will be plunged into darkness.

⁹“Nations you never even heard of will tremble when they hear the news of your destruction. Their hearts will fill with terror. ¹⁰People will be shocked, and the hearts of kings will quiver with fear when they hear that I have used my sword against you. They will tremble for their lives.

¹¹“This is what the Lord says:

“I will send the sword of Babylon against you. ¹²Nebuchadnezzar with his ruthless troops will come against you: they will draw their swords and slaughter your people. They will crush the pride of Egypt and destroy her mighty army. ¹³I will destroy your cattle which drink from your streams. No longer will human feet and cattle hooves muddy your waters. ¹⁴I will let the waters settle and become clear again and once more your streams will run calm, as smooth as oil. ¹⁵When I destroy Egypt I will make her land desolate and strike down those who live there. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord. ¹⁶Women of Egypt will chant her funeral song. They will mourn for the land and for her people.”

The World of the Dead

¹⁷On the fifteenth day of the twelfth

month in the twelfth year of our exile and the captivity of Jehoiachin, the Lord spoke to me, saying, ¹⁸“Son of man, weep for the people of Egypt. They will go down to the grave and be with the dead from other nations. ¹⁹They think they’re better than other people and more beautiful, but whatever ideas they have about themselves will not help them. They will be killed and join the rest of the dead, including the ungodly and unclean.

²⁰“The people of Egypt will be killed by the sword and buried in common graves with countless others, and those who were not killed will be dragged away.

²¹The mighty ones of earth with their troops who have gone down to the grave will say, ‘The commanders and troops of Egypt and those of her allies who were killed by the sword have come to join us.’

²²“Assyria and her whole army is already there, surrounded by her dead and all those who have fallen in battle.

²³Her army lies dead around her and all who had spread terror through the land have gone into the pit with her.

²⁴“Elam, that great nation east of Babylon, with all her troops, is in the grave. All of them were killed in battle. They had spread terror through the land, but now they are dead, lying in disgrace with the wicked and the unclean. ²⁵Like Assyria, she sleeps with the dead and lies there surrounded by those killed in battle. Because they spread such terror through the land, they now lie in disgrace with the rest of the dead.

²⁶“Meshech and Tubal also are there, surrounded by their troops, killed in battle. Once they spread terror through the land but now they’re dead. ²⁷They went down to the grave in shame and were not given an honorable burial like the great warriors of old who were buried with their weapons of war, their swords under their heads and their shields over them. Though they had walked with pride through the land, they, too, are dead.

²⁸“Egypt is no different. She will be crushed, and her king will be killed by

the sword and buried with the uncircumcised and the unclean.

²⁹“Edom also is there with her kings and princes and troops killed in battle. They, too, lie with the wicked and with those who are unclean. ³⁰The kings and princes of Syria and Sidon and their men are there. They also went down to the grave in disgrace because they had spread terror through the land. They lie with the wicked and the unclean, all those who have been killed by the sword.

³¹“The king of Egypt and his men will have one consolation: They will be with the kings and armies who have gone before. ³²He was once my sword to discipline other nations and to spread terror through the land, but because of his pride, he and his troops will lie in the grave with the wicked and the unclean. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

These were the visions against Egypt.

The Duties of a Watchman

33 It was the day before a messenger came to me with the news that Jerusalem had fallen, that the Lord said to me, ²“Son of man, tomorrow morning after you hear the news about Jerusalem, go to your fellow exiles and tell them not to be downhearted or discouraged, for this is what the Lord says: ‘When war comes, people of the land choose one of their own as a watchman. ³When he sees the enemy coming against his country, he blows the ram’s horn to warn them. ⁴If someone hears the ram’s horn but doesn’t pay attention to it and the enemy comes in and takes his life, he has no one to blame for his death but himself. ⁵He heard the ram’s horn but didn’t pay attention to the warning the watchman gave, so he has no one to blame for his death but himself. If he had paid attention, he could have saved himself. ⁶But if the watchman sees the enemy coming against his country and doesn’t warn his people by blowing the ram’s horn, and the enemy comes in—though he kills only one person, the people will hold the

watchman responsible for his death, and I will too.'

⁷"Son of man, I have chosen you to be my watchman for the house of Israel. So listen to what I have to say and warn the people for me. ⁸When I give you a message for someone and you don't warn him so he can change his ways and save his life, and he dies in his sins, I will hold you responsible. ⁹But if you warn him and he doesn't pay attention and continues in his ways, he will die, but you will live.

¹⁰"So go and say to your fellow exiles, 'Before the fall of Jerusalem you wouldn't listen to me when I pointed out your sins. You thought you were suffering for the sins of your parents and not your own. No, Jerusalem has fallen because of your sins. Now you've gone to the other extreme and wonder if there's hope left for you. ¹¹As surely as I live, I take no pleasure in seeing sinners die, but I find great pleasure when they turn from their wicked ways and live. Turn away from your sins and come back to me. Why would you want to die?

God Is Just

¹²"The good things a man has done will not save him if he continues to live in sin, neither will the past wickedness of a man condemn him if he turns away from his sins. If the man who did good things returns to his sins, he cannot be saved because of those good things. ¹³If I were to tell a man that he would live because of the good things he did in the past, he would trust in his past good deeds but continue to live in sin. None of the good things he did, will do him any good. He will die because of his sins. ¹⁴If I warn someone who is wicked and tell him that he will die because of his sins, and he turns and does what is right, ¹⁵and gives back the deposit he took as security for a loan, returns the things he's stolen, stops living in sin and does what is right, he will not die but live. ¹⁶Not one of the wicked things he has done will be held against him. He

has done what is right. He has turned to me, and he will live.

¹⁷"Your fellow exiles keep saying that the Lord isn't just. But it's the way they look at things that isn't just. ¹⁸If a good man stops doing good and starts doing evil, he will not live. ¹⁹But if a wicked man turns from his wickedness and does what is good and right, he will live. ²⁰You keep telling me that what I'm doing isn't fair. But it is fair. I will judge every man according to his ways.'

The News of Jerusalem's Fall

²¹On the fifth day of the tenth month of the twelfth year of our exile and Jehoiachin's captivity, two months before the Lord had given me the last prophecy against Egypt, a man who had escaped Jerusalem came and told me that the city had fallen. ²²The night before he arrived, the Lord spoke to me and gave me back my voice so when the man came to me in the morning I could speak to him.

The Cause of the Nation's Ruin

²³The Lord said to me, ²⁴"Son of man, the people living back in the ruined cities of Judah are telling themselves that originally the country was given to Abraham and he was only one man. If that is so, surely the country belongs to us because we are many. ²⁵Send them this message and tell them that this is what the Lord says:

"Some of you are still worshiping idols, eating raw meat with blood in it and killing innocent people. On what basis do you think the land is rightfully yours? ²⁶You continue to rely on your swords, commit adultery with your neighbor's wife and do all sorts of detestable things. What makes you think the land belongs to you? ²⁷As surely as I live, says the Lord, those of you living in these ruined cities will be killed by the swords of those eager to get the goods that are left. Those of you living in the country will be attacked and killed by wild animals. Those of you who have fled and are living

in the caves of the mountains will die of disease. ²⁸I will turn the kingdom of Judah into a wasteland and her pride will come to an end. The mountains of Israel will be filled with such violence that no one will want to pass through them. ²⁹When the land is desolate, then you will know that I am the Lord. You will know that I have done this because of your sins.

Loving the Prophet but Not Obeying

³⁰“As for you, son of man, don’t be deceived by the courteous treatment you will now receive from your fellow exiles and from the new captives arriving from Judah. They’re talking about you as they walk along or stand in the doorway of their houses. They say to each other, ‘Come, let’s go listen to the prophet and hear what his message is from the Lord.’

³¹“So they will come and sit down in front of you to listen to what you have to say, but they have no intention of changing their ways. They talk about their devotion to the Lord and how much they love Him, but they are greedy for money, no matter what it takes to get it. ³²As far as they’re concerned, you’re simply good entertainment, no different from those who sing love songs and play on stringed instruments. They come to listen to what you say, they hear your words, but they will not do them. ³³When this happens, and it will, it will be a sign against them that a prophet has been among them.”

False Shepherds

34 The Lord spoke to me again, saying, ²“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of the flock, those who lead my people, and tell them that this is what the Lord says:

“Woe to those shepherds who only care about themselves and not the flock. ³You eat the finest foods, wear the finest wool and slaughter the choicest animals for yourselves, but you don’t take care of the flock. ⁴You haven’t strengthened the

weak, healed the sick, given comfort to the hurting, brought back the strays, or gone in search of those who were lost. Instead, you have ruled over the flock and treated them cruelly. ⁵So, the sheep have been scattered and became an easy prey for wild animals to kill and feed on. ⁶My sheep wandered all through the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one tried to find them to bring them back home.

⁷“Therefore, shepherds, you had better listen and hear the word of the Lord. ⁸As surely as I live, because my sheep have no shepherd and have become food for every wild animal, and because you haven’t been looking for them to bring them back home, I am against you. You haven’t been feeding the sheep but taking care of yourselves. ⁹Therefore, shepherds, you had better listen to the Lord.

¹⁰“This is what the Lord says:

“I am against you and will hold you accountable for my flock. I will take my sheep away from you and this will stop you from only looking after yourselves. Never again will I let you take care of my sheep and feed on them.

The Good Shepherd

¹¹“I will personally go and search for my sheep and care for them. ¹²As a good shepherd watches over his sheep and takes care of them, so I will watch over my sheep and will take care of them. I will go and look for them and bring them back from wherever they’ve been scattered on a day when there are overhanging clouds and thick darkness. ¹³I will search for them among all countries where they’ve gone and bring them back to their own land. I will lead them back to the hills and streams of Israel and give them quiet pastures in which to feed.

¹⁴“I will watch over them and let them graze safely in the mountain meadows and the valleys of their homeland. They will lie down in rich pastures and rest by the waters of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will be

their shepherd and take care of them. I will have them come and lie down and be at peace. ¹⁶I will look for the lost and bring back the ones who have strayed. I will bind up the brokenhearted, strengthen the weak and heal those who are sick. But I will destroy all those who got fat on my sheep. I will do what is right and I will administer justice.

¹⁷“As for the sheep, this is what the Lord says:

“I will judge between one sheep and another, and between the sheep and the goats. ¹⁸Some of you don’t think it’s enough just to feed in the part of the pasture I assigned to you, but you go and trample down the rest of the pasture with your feet. It’s not enough for you to drink from my streams, but you have to wade in them and muddy the water. ¹⁹Do the rest of the sheep have to eat the grass you trampled in the dirt and drink the water you muddied with your feet?

²⁰“This is what the Lord says:

“I will judge the sheep and separate the proud from the meek. ²¹Some of you like to push your weight around. You shove other sheep with your shoulders, butt them with your horns and push them out of the way by whatever means you can. ²²I will come and save my sheep and they will no longer be harassed and pushed around. I will come and judge between sheep and sheep. ²³I will bring them together under one Shepherd. I will put the Son of David in charge, and He will come and look after my sheep and be their Shepherd. ²⁴I will be their God, and the New David will be their Shepherd. I, the Lord, have spoken.

²⁵“I will renew my covenant with them and guarantee their security. I will rid the land of wild animals so that my sheep can sleep under my trees in safety and feed in my meadows without fear. ²⁶I will bless them and lead them to my holy hill. I will send my people rain during the right season, and there will be showers of blessing for all. ²⁷The trees will bear fruit and the earth will bring forth crops. The people

will live securely in their own land. Then they will know that I am the Lord when I bring them home from the lands where they have been exiled and enslaved.

²⁸“Their enemies will not come and plunder their country, nor will wild animals attack them. There will be nothing to make them afraid. ²⁹I will bless their land and it will be known for its abundant harvests. There will be no more famine or hunger in the land and the nations will no longer look down on them with scorn. ³⁰Then they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them and that they, the house of Israel, are my people. ³¹You, my people, are my sheep. You are my precious flock and I am your God.”

A Prophecy Against Edom

35 The Lord spoke to me again, saying, ²“Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir where the descendants of Esau live and prophesy against Edom. ³Say to them that this is what the Lord says:

“I am against you, you mountains of Edom. I will stretch out my hand against you and turn you into a wasteland. ⁴I will turn your cities into ruins and leave your land desolate. Then you will know that I am the Lord. ⁵You held on to your ancient hostilities and helped the Babylonians slaughter the children of your brother Jacob. That was when I sent Nebuchadnezzar to discipline my people for their sins.

⁶“As surely as I live, I will bring death to your land. Since you were so eager to shed the blood of my people, bloodshed will come to your country. ⁷I will turn Edom into a wasteland and those who go there will be killed. ⁸I will cover your mountains with corpses and your valleys and ditches will be filled with the bodies of those killed in battle. ⁹I will turn your land into a wilderness and no one will live in your cities again. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

¹⁰“You told yourself that the land of Israel and Judah belonged to you and

that you would take it from my people even though you knew that I, the Lord, had given it to them. ¹¹Therefore, as surely as I live, I will repay you for your hatred and anger and jealousy towards my people. Then they will know that I am the Lord when I punish you for what you have done to them.

¹²“I have heard all the terrible things you said against my people. I knew the plans you made, both to invade their land after it had been devastated by Nebuchadnezzar and to take advantage of their weakness by devouring whatever was left. ¹³I have heard you speak against me and boast of what you would do in spite of me. ¹⁴This is what the Lord says: I will bring about your downfall and the nations will be happy that I have done so. ¹⁵Because you were happy over the fall of Israel, people will be happy over your fall. The way you treated your brother Jacob’s children, that’s the way I will treat you. Your whole country will become a wasteland. Then you will know that I am the Lord.”

God’s Blessing on Israel

36 The Lord spoke to me again, saying, “Son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel. Tell those mountains that this is what the Lord says:

²“Your enemies had their day of jubilation when they prided themselves on having taken the ancient hills away from you. ³So tell the mountains of Israel that this is what the Lord says: Your enemies invaded your land and plundered your cities and you became the laughingstock of all the nations around you. ⁴The Lord speaks to the mountains and valleys of Israel, to the plundered cities and empty houses, to the country that has become the laughingstock of nations.

⁵“This is what the Lord says:

“I have spoken to the nations around you, especially to Edom, and will discipline them for what they have done to you. They laughed at your downfall, ravaged your land and plundered your

cities. ⁶This is what the Lord says to the mountains and valleys of Israel and Judah: I am speaking out of jealousy over you because you are mine. You have suffered from the insults of many nations. ⁷Therefore, I promise that the nations around you will pay for their cruelty and will themselves become the laughingstock of other nations.

⁸“Once more trees will grow on the hills and mountains of Israel and bear fruit for my people who will be coming home. ⁹Your land will again be plowed and crops will again be planted. I will look after my people and care for them. ¹⁰I will multiply my people and bless them. They will rebuild their ruined cities and live in them once more. ¹¹I will multiply their cattle and increase their herds and flocks. I will help them settle the land and will prosper them more than before. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

¹²“I will bring my people back home and they will inhabit the land. Never again will their children starve. ¹³The nations say that the land of Israel is a land that is against its own people. ¹⁴But that will no longer be true. The land will no more be against its own people. ¹⁵No longer will it have to listen to the taunts of nations making fun of it. Never again will it let its people down. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

Israel’s New Beginning

¹⁶The Lord spoke to me again, saying, ¹⁷“Son of man, when my people were living in their own land, they defiled it by their immoral behavior. What they did was as unclean and unpleasant in my sight as a woman’s bleeding during her monthly cycle. ¹⁸I disciplined them because of the violence and murders they had committed and because of the filthy practices they had carried out in worshipping their idols. ¹⁹I scattered them among the nations and judged them according to their deeds.

²⁰“Wherever they went, their presence dishonored me because those who lived

there said, 'These are the people who turned against their own God. They were so wicked that they had to leave the land He had given them.' ²¹I was concerned about the honor of my name and what the nations thought about me in lands where my people lived.

²²"Therefore say to my people that this is what the Lord says:

"I will take you out from the nations where you are and bring you back home. I will do this not only for your sake, but also for mine, for the sake of my name that's being so dishonored. ²³I will vindicate the holiness of my name, which you have dishonored among nations, and I will vindicate it to them through you. ²⁴I will take you out of the nations where you now are and bring you back home from the countries where you are living. ²⁵I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from your sins and take away your idols.

²⁶"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I will take away your hearts of stone and give you hearts of compassion and obedience. ²⁷I will put my Spirit into your hearts and He will enable you to keep my commandments and help you to carefully guard my law. ²⁸You will once more live in the land I gave your ancestors. You will be my people and I will be your God. ²⁹I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will bless the land with bountiful harvests and there will be no more famine. ³⁰I will increase the fruit of your trees and the crops of your fields. No longer will you need to be ashamed and go begging among the nations.

³¹"You will recall your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will hate yourself for the sins you committed and the detestable things you have done. ³²I will do this not only for your sake but for the honor of my name. You need to be ashamed of your wickedness and embarrassed by your behavior. ³³After I have cleansed you from your sins, then I will cause the land to be rebuilt and the cities

to be inhabited. ³⁴The land will once more be plowed and farmed, and it will no longer look like a wilderness to those who pass by. ³⁵They will say, 'This place is so lush and fruitful, it's like the Garden of Eden. These cities were in ruins. But just look at them now. They're prosperous, well-fortified and filled with people.'

³⁶"Then the nations around you will know that I am the Lord. They will know that I was the One who destroyed your cities and then rebuilt them, who turned the land into a wilderness and then restored it.

³⁷"This is what the Lord says:

"I will listen to the prayers of my people and make them as numerous as a flock of sheep. ³⁸The cities of Judah will be full of people just like Jerusalem during her festivals when people fill her streets with their sheep brought for sacrifice. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

The Valley of the Dry Bones

37 Then I was taken off in vision and the Spirit of the Lord brought me to a valley full of bones. ²He took me through the valley and I saw the bones of countless men killed in battle and the bones were very dry. ³He said to me, "Son of man, what do you think? Can these bones live?" I said, "Lord, you're the only One who knows."

⁴Then He said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say, 'You dry bones, listen to the word of the Lord!' ⁵This is what the Lord says:

"My breath will enter into you and you will live. ⁶I will put tendons and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will start you breathing and you will be whole and live again. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

⁷I did as I was told and prophesied to the bones. When I did, I heard a rattling sound, and the bones began to come together, bone connecting with bone. ⁸Then tendons, muscles and skin covered the bones and the valley was full of bodies, but they were still lifeless. ⁹The

Lord said to me, "Son of man, now prophesy to the four winds and say, 'This is what the Lord says:

"Come into these bodies and start them breathing again so they can live.'"

¹⁰I did as I was told and prophesied to the four winds and breath came into the bodies and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly large army.

¹¹Then the Lord said to me, "Son of man, the bones you saw in vision represent the bones of the children of Israel. They keep telling themselves that there's no hope for them because, like the city of Jerusalem, I have turned against them and cut them off. ¹²Prophesy to them and tell them that this is what the Lord says:

"Listen to me, my people. I will bring you back home. The time will come when I will open your graves and raise your dead. ¹³I will do this, and you will know that I am the Lord. ¹⁴I will open your graves and put my Spirit in you and you will live. I will settle you safely in your own land. When this happens, you will know that I am the Lord and that what I say, I will do."

One People, One Kingdom

¹⁵Afterward, the Lord said to me, ¹⁶"Son of man, take a stick and write on it, 'For the kingdom of Judah.' Then take another stick and write on it, 'For the kingdom of Israel.' ¹⁷Hold the two sticks together so they look like one stick. ¹⁸When the people see you do this and ask you what this means, ¹⁹say to them, 'This is what the Lord says: I will take the stick representing Israel and join it to the stick representing Judah. In my hand they will become one stick.'

²⁰"Then hold up the sticks you have inscribed so everyone can see them. ²¹Tell them that this is what the Lord says:

"I will take my people out from the nations where I scattered them and bring them back to their own land. ²²They will become one nation with one King over them and never again will they be divided. ²³My people will neither worship

idols nor defile themselves with disgusting pagan practices. I will deliver them from the power of sin and heal all their backsliding. I will purify them, and they will be my people, and I will be their God.

²⁴"The Son of David will rule over them and there will be one flock and one Shepherd. They will joyfully keep my commandments and obey my laws.

²⁵They will live in the land I gave to their ancestors. They and their children and grandchildren will live there and my Servant will rule over them forever. ²⁶I will renew my covenant of peace with them, and it will be an everlasting covenant. I will settle them in their own land and their numbers will not decrease. My Temple will be in their midst forever.

²⁷"I will live with them and be their God and they will be my people. ²⁸My Temple will be in the midst of my people, and it will stand forever. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord and that I am the One who set Israel apart and made my people holy."

Gog, the Wicked Prince, Attacks Israel

38 Then the Lord spoke to me about the enemies of Israel and of God's people at the end of time. He said, ²"Son of man, prophesy against Gog, the head prince of the wicked people from the land of Magog, who, like the people of Meshech and Tubal, are constantly inclined to war. These words apply to all my enemies.

³"Write down this message and tell him that this is what the Lord says:

"I am against you and all those who, like the people from Meshech and Tubal, love to go to war. ⁴I will turn you and your whole army around. I will put hooks in your jaws and drag you and your troops away. I will do this to your horses, your armed cavalry and your men with swords and shields, large and small. ⁵I will do this to your mercenaries from Persia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Libya with their helmets and swords. ⁶And I will do this to the men from the land to the

north belonging to Gomer and his son Togarmah, as well as all the other nations that support you.

⁷“So go ahead and get ready for battle and have all the men under your command prepare for war. ⁸After you have taken all the time you need and feel you’re ready, you will go to war. You will invade the land that has recovered from war, whose people were brought out from many nations and who now live in peace and safety. ⁹You and all your troops and the many nations that support you will overshadow the land like a cloud and come against my people like a storm.

¹⁰“You’ll come up with an evil plan and say to yourself, ¹¹‘I will invade the peaceful land with its unwallled cities and unsuspecting people. ¹²I will plunder their land and loot their cities. They are a people of many nations and have become rich in livestock and properties. They live at the crossroads of the world.’

¹³Then the people who live in Sheba, Dedan and Spain will ask you, ‘Have you come to plunder the land and loot our cities? Have you brought this large army with you to carry away the silver and gold and take our livestock and goods, or have you come to trade?’”

¹⁴Then the Lord said to me, “Son of man, prophesy against the wicked confederacy of Gog, and tell their leader that this is what the Lord says:

“When my people are living in peace and safety, you will come against them. ¹⁵You will come from the far north with a huge army made up of many nations, all of your men riding on horses. ¹⁶You will overshadow the land like a cloud and come against my people like a storm. But I will vindicate my holiness before the nations and show them that I am the Lord by what I will do to you.

¹⁷“This is what the Lord says:

“Are you not the one I spoke about through my prophets long ago when I said you would come against my people but I would destroy you?

Gog’s Armies Destroyed

¹⁸“This is exactly what will happen to you when you attack my people. When that day comes, I will destroy you. ¹⁹In my zeal for my people I will send a great earthquake through the land. ²⁰The fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the animals of the field both large and small and every person on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence. Mountains will fall, cliffs will crumble and every protective wall will collapse. ²¹I will bring great calamities on you and your people and will call for a sword against you throughout the land, and every man’s sword will be against his brother.

²²“I will bring on you and the nations that support you bloodshed and plagues, torrents of rain and hail and fire and sulfur from heaven. ²³I will show the nations my greatness and vindicate my righteousness. I will make my presence known, and they will know that I am the Lord.”

A Prophecy Against the Wicked Prince

39 The Lord continued, “Son of man, prophesy against Gog and tell him that this is what the Lord says:

“I am against Gog, the prince of the wicked people from the land of Magog who, like the people of Meshech and Tubal, are inclined to war. ²I will turn you and your whole army around. I will let you come against Israel from the north. ³Then I will knock the bow out of your left hand and the arrows out of your right hand. ⁴You and your army and the nations that support you will die on the mountains of Israel. Your bodies will be food for the birds and wild animals. ⁵You and your troops will fall in the open field. I, the Lord, have spoken. ⁶I will bring down fire on the land of Magog and also on those who live in safety in the coastlands. When I do this everyone will know that I am the Lord.

⁷“I will make myself known among my people, and they will honor my holy name. I will no longer let my name be dishonored among the nations, for they will

know that I am the Holy One of Israel. ⁸That day is coming—it will surely happen—this is the day that I, the Lord, have told you about.

⁹“My people will go out and pick up your bows and arrows, your clubs and shields and use them for firewood. They will have enough to last seven years. ¹⁰They won’t have to cut trees or gather fuel from the fields because of the large number of weapons they picked up from you. They will plunder you as you had planned to plunder them.

The End of the Wicked Prince

¹¹“On that day I will bury Gog in the land I have given to my people, in the valley east of the Dead Sea. Travelers will not go there anymore because Gog and his men are buried there. It will be called the Valley of the Hordes of Gog. ¹²It will take seven months for Israel to bury your dead and cleanse the land. ¹³Everyone will help to bury them and it will be a day to be remembered. I, the Lord, have spoken.

¹⁴“I will send men throughout the land to make sure that no bodies are left unburied. If there are, they are to bury them and finish cleansing the land. ¹⁵As they go through the country and find a human bone they are to put a marker there so the grave diggers can come and take the bones to the Valley of Hamon Gog and bury them there. ¹⁶The valley will also be called Hamonah, meaning The City of the Dead. This way they will cleanse the land.”

A Festival of Triumph

¹⁷“Son of man, this is what the Lord says:

“Call to the birds and animals and have them come to the sacrifice I have prepared for them on the mountains of Israel. They can come and eat all the flesh and drink all the blood they want. ¹⁸They will eat the flesh of mighty men of valor and drink the blood of princes as if they were slaughtered rams, lambs, goats and fat bulls from Bashan. ¹⁹This is the sacri-

fice I have prepared for them, and they will eat until they’re full and drink until they’ve had enough. ²⁰They will fill themselves with horses and riders, officers and troops. I, the Lord, have spoken.

The Captives Brought Back Home

²¹“I will show the nations my glory and will let them see my power as I lay my hand on them. ²²Then Israel will know without a doubt that I am the Lord their God. ²³And the nations will know that Israel went into captivity because of their sins, because of their unfaithfulness to me, not because I lacked power to protect them. That’s why I hid my face from my people and let their enemies come against them. ²⁴I dealt with them according to their sins and their offenses. That was the reason I let this happen to them.

²⁵“Therefore this is what the Lord says:

I will bring the children of Israel back home from captivity and will prosper their land. I will have compassion on my people and protect the reputation of my holy name. ²⁶They will live in safety and no one will threaten them or make them afraid. They will be forgiven and will forget all about their captivity and shame for having sinned against me. ²⁷When I bring my people back from the nations where I’ve scattered them and from the countries of their enemies, then the nations will know that I am not a powerless, do-nothing God. They will know that I am holy and that I am the Lord. ²⁸They will know that though I let my people be taken into exile, I was the one who brought them back to their own land, not overlooking one of them. ²⁹Never again will I turn my face away from my people. I will pour out my Spirit on all those who love me.”

A New City, a New Temple

40 On the Day of Atonement, the tenth day of the seventh month of the civil year, which is the first month of the religious year, the Spirit of the Lord

came upon me. This was in the twenty-fifth year of our exile and the fourteenth year after the fall of Jerusalem. ²¹I was taken off in vision and shown the Lord's intention for Israel as a nation with the restoration of Jerusalem and its Temple. He took me to a high mountain in the land of Israel and I saw in front of me buildings that looked like a city. ³He took me there, and I saw a man whose body looked like shining bronze standing by the gate of the city with a measuring tape in his hand. ⁴He said to me, "Son of man, listen carefully and pay close attention to what I'm going to show you. When the vision is over I want you to tell your fellow exiles everything you saw. That's why I brought you here."

⁵I looked and saw the new Temple in the city with a wall around it. The man who accompanied me had a measuring rod six cubits and six handbreadths long, which is twelve feet. One of these long cubits and one handbreadth equals two feet. He measured the Temple wall, and it was twelve feet high, twelve feet thick, and one thousand feet long on each of the four sides, making a perfect square.

The Eastern Gate

⁶Then he went over to the gate coming through the Temple wall from the east, walked up seven steps and measured the entrance. It was twenty feet wide and twelve feet deep, the same thickness as the wall. ⁷On the other side of the gate was a twelve-foot long checkpoint with three guard rooms on each side. Each guard room was a perfect square, twelve feet wide and twelve feet long, and the walls between them were ten feet thick. After the checkpoint with its three guard rooms was a beautiful porch facing the Temple courtyard. ⁸Then the man measured this porch. ⁹It was sixteen feet deep and had two columns in the front, each one four feet thick. All this was part of the entryway to the Temple. ¹⁰Coming through the checkpoint we had seen three guard rooms on each side; all were the same

size, and each room had lattice windows.

¹¹Then the man measured the entire hallway. It was twenty feet wide, eighteen feet from the bottom of the steps to the checkpoint, and sixteen feet across the porch to the outer court. ¹²Along the front of each of the guard rooms was a low wall two feet high and twelve feet long. This allowed the guards to step out of their rooms and look up and down the entryway without being hindered by the people. ¹³Then the man measured the entire structure supporting the gate on both sides. It was fifty feet from north to south.

¹⁴All the measurements of the porch leading to the outer court totaled a hundred and twenty feet. This included both widths and lengths and all its sides. ¹⁵The entire entryway from the steps to the outer court was a hundred feet long. ¹⁶The guard rooms on either side of its hallway had lattice windows in the outside walls and in the walls between the rooms. The walls were beautifully decorated with palm trees.

The Outer Court

¹⁷To the left and right of the porch coming into the court were thirty large rooms. They were grouped in blocks of five and set against the outer wall. The pavement that went around the court in front of the rooms was made of stone. ¹⁸The outer court was on a lower level than the inner court. ¹⁹The man measured the depth of the outer court up to the gate leading into the inner court, and it was two hundred feet, the same all the way across.

The Northern Gate

²⁰Then he measured the gate coming into the Temple from the north. ²¹It also had a checkpoint with three guard rooms on each side. Everything was the same as the east gate. The entryway was a hundred feet long and fifty feet wide, taking in the guard rooms on both sides. ²²The walls of the entryway were beautifully decorated with palm trees,

and the measurements of the gateway into the outer court was the same as the one coming in from the east. There were seven steps leading up to the gate from outside, just like the east gate. ²³The depth of the court on this side of the Temple also measured two hundred feet and had a gate into the inner court.

The Southern Gate

²⁴Then the man took me to the south side of the Temple. He measured the gate, and it had the same measurements as the other two gates. ²⁵It also had a checkpoint and guard rooms on each side with latticed windows. The entryway was a hundred feet long and fifty feet wide, including the guard rooms. ²⁶There were seven steps coming up to the gate from outside. The walls of the entryway were beautifully decorated with palm trees, and the guard rooms had little walls in front of them for sentries to come and look up and down the entryway without being hindered. ²⁷The man measured the depth of the court on this side of the Temple, and it also measured two hundred feet.

The Inner Court

²⁸Then he took me through the south gate of the Temple into the courtyard of the Sanctuary where the sacrificial altar is. He measured the inner gate, and it had the same measurements as the gates coming from outside into the Temple. ²⁹Its entryway, walls, rooms and other features were all the same. It was one hundred feet long and fifty feet wide, including the side rooms. ³⁰The entrances into the inner court were fifty feet wide and ten feet deep with porches facing outward. ³¹Palms trees decorated the walls of the entryway. There were eight steps going up to the entrance from the outer court.

³²Then he took me around to the east side and measured the gate, and it had the same measurements as the south gate. ³³Its entryway, walls, rooms and other features were all the same. It was a

hundred feet long and fifty feet wide, including the side rooms. ³⁴Palm trees decorated its walls and it also had eight steps coming in from the outer court.

³⁵Then the man took me to the north side and measured the gate. It had the same measurements as the other two gates. ³⁶Its entryway, walls and other features were exactly the same as the other two entryways. It also was a hundred feet long and fifty feet wide, including the side rooms. ³⁷Palm trees decorated its walls and it, too, had eight steps coming in from the outer court.

Where Sacrifices Are to Be Prepared

³⁸At the northern entrance to this court, there was a large open room on each side, where the burnt offerings were washed. ³⁹These two rooms had four tables, two tables each, on which the animals were killed which were brought for burnt offerings, sin offerings and other kinds of offerings. ⁴⁰There also were four extra tables standing out in the open, two on each side of the stairway. ⁴¹So there were two open rooms with four tables each, two inside and two standing out in the open on each side of the stairway. This made a total of eight tables on which sacrifices were slaughtered.

⁴²The four tables assigned to each room were made of stone and were three feet long, three feet wide and two feet high. Each was equipped with all the utensils needed to kill the animal and prepare it for sacrifice. ⁴³There was a three-inch high rim around the edges of each table. The hooks hung on the walls. The tables were used only for the animals to be sacrificed.

Rooms for Singers and Priests

⁴⁴There were two rooms for priests on the eastern end of the courtyard, one on the corner to the north and one on the corner to the south. ⁴⁵Then the man with the measuring tape said to me, "The room to the south is for the

priests in charge of the Temple, ⁴⁶and the room to the north is for the priests in charge of the altar. Those in charge of the Temple and its altar are the descendants of Zadok, who served under David and was faithful to the Lord. He was a descendant of Aaron through Eleazar. These are the only ones allowed to come near the Lord and to minister to Him.”

The Court and Vestibule

⁴⁷Then he measured the courtyard of the Sanctuary. It was a perfect square, two hundred feet long and two hundred feet wide. The sacrificial altar stood in the middle in line with the Holy Place.

⁴⁸Then he took me into the entryway leading into the Sanctuary going into the Holy Place. The entrance was twenty feet across between two door frames which projected out six feet from each side.

⁴⁹The entire structure supporting the entryway was forty feet wide and twenty-four feet deep. There were ten steps from the courtyard to the entrance of the Sanctuary, with two freestanding pillars at the top of the stairway, one on each side.

The Sanctuary

41 As I said, the man with the measuring tape took me to the entrance of the Holy Place and measured it. The door frame was twelve feet thick and projected six feet out from the wall on each side. ²The entryway was twenty feet from side to side. The Holy Place itself measured eighty feet long and forty feet wide. ³Then he took me into the Most Holy Place and measured it. The wall at the entrance was four feet thick. The doorway was twelve feet wide with fourteen feet of wall on each side, making forty feet. ⁴The Most Holy Place was a perfect square, forty feet long and forty feet wide. The man with the measuring tape said to me, “While the whole Temple is God’s residence, this is called the Most Holy Place because God’s glory is here.”

The Side Rooms

⁵Then he measured the wall around the whole Sanctuary, and it was twelve feet thick, just as thick as the wall of the Temple. There were small rooms against the outside of the wall on both sides and along the back of the Sanctuary. These rooms were eight feet square. ⁶These special rooms were on three levels, one level above another, and thirty rooms on each level. Their support did not come from the Sanctuary wall nor were they recessed into it.

⁷The rooms on the lower level had thicker walls to support the rooms on the two upper levels. There was a stairway going to each of the upper levels and those rooms were larger because their walls were not as thick. ⁸The entire Sanctuary and its side rooms rested on a raised platform twelve feet above the other courts and could be reached only by the front stairway.

⁹There was a ten-foot thick outer wall along both sides and the back of the Sanctuary enclosing the rooms. On the other side of this wall and all around it was an open area between the rooms and the apartments where priests stayed while on duty at the Sanctuary. ¹⁰This open area was forty feet wide from the wall enclosing the side rooms to the priests’ apartments. ¹¹The priests would leave their apartments, walk across this open area and use the small north and south entrances of the enclosure to get to the special side rooms around the Sanctuary.

The Building on the West

¹²A freestanding building butted against the outer wall of the Temple at the rear of the Sanctuary. It was one hundred and forty feet wide, one hundred and eighty feet long, with a wall ten feet thick.

Measurements of the Inside of the Temple

¹³Then the man measured the length of the Sanctuary with its entryway, and

it was two hundred feet. ¹⁴The width and length of the Sanctuary courtyard measured two hundred feet, making a perfect square.

¹⁵The freestanding building at the rear of the Sanctuary was two hundred feet long, including its walls. ¹⁶The entryway to the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place had wood paneling. ¹⁷The paneling in the entryway covered the walls from the floor to the recessed windows set in the wall and along both sides up to the ceiling. In the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, the paneling covered the walls completely from floor to ceiling. ¹⁸The panels had carvings of palm trees and angels on them, alternating with each other all around the room. ¹⁹Each angel had two faces, one of a man looking toward the palm tree on one side and the face of a young lion looking toward the palm tree on the other side. ²⁰This is the way it was all around the inside from the floor to the ceiling, even above the doors.

²¹The doorposts going into the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place were squared. ²²The altar in front of the Most Holy Place was huge, six feet high and four feet square, and was made totally of wood. The man with the measuring tape said to me, "This is the altar of incense with its steps, that stands before the presence of the Lord."

²³There were two sets of double doors, one going into the Holy Place and the other into the Most Holy Place. ²⁴These were huge double doors that swung open in the middle. ²⁵The double doors going into the Holy Place had palm trees and angels carved on them just like the paneling on the walls. And there was a small canopy of wood over the front doors. ²⁶The side walls of the vestibule had recessed windows, and the paneling that ran up to the ceiling on both sides of these windows had carvings of palm trees on them.

Apartments for the Priests

42 Then the man took me to the northern section of the outer court and had me look back at the apartments where the priests stayed. ²The apartment section was two hundred feet long and one hundred feet wide, with an entrance to the north. ³There were three levels of apartments where the priests stayed, with the front facing the forty-foot-wide open area along the side of the Sanctuary, and the back facing the outer court. ⁴There was a twenty-foot wide, two hundred-foot long balcony walkway along the north side of the apartments facing the outer court.

⁵The apartments on the upper level were narrower than those on the middle and lower levels because of the balcony walkway alongside them. ⁶The apartments were on three stories and had no pillars to support them, just like the special rooms against the outside Sanctuary wall. ⁷There was an outer wall extending one hundred feet along the apartment building covering the eastern entrance and providing privacy from the activities in the outer court. ⁸The northern and southern apartment buildings were both attached to the outside wall enclosing the Sanctuary complex. They measured one hundred feet each, for a total of two hundred feet. ⁹The entrance to these apartments was on the east side of the lower level as you enter from the outer court.

¹⁰The southern section had identical apartment sections as those to the north. They, too, faced the Holy Places with their backs to the outer court. ¹¹There was a balcony walkway twenty feet wide and two hundred feet long on the south side towards the outer court. The apartments were the same configuration as those on the north side. ¹²As we came out, the doorway faced south toward the outer court and was at the east end of the passageway.

¹³Then the man with the measuring tape said to me, "The apartments to the north and south facing the Sanctuary are for the priests who come to take their

turns ministering to the Lord. This is where they eat their share of the holy offerings. That's why these places are holy, just as the grain offerings, sin offerings and other offerings are holy. ¹⁴Once the priests leave their apartments and come to serve at the Sanctuary, they are not to go back to the outer court until they change into ordinary clothes and leave in the special little rooms the priestly clothes they wore while ministering to the Lord."

Measurements of the Outside of the Temple

¹⁵When the man finished measuring the inside of the Temple, he took me back outside through the east gate, the same gate we had used when we came in. ¹⁶He measured the outside wall of the Temple on the east side, and it measured a thousand feet. ¹⁷Then he measured the north side, and it measured a thousand feet. ¹⁸Next he measured the south side, and it measured a thousand feet. ¹⁹Finally, he measured the west side, and it also measured a thousand feet. ²⁰The Temple was a perfect square with each side measuring a thousand feet. The walls separated what was holy from what was common.

The Most Holy Place

43 The man with the measuring tape brought me back to the east gate. ²There I saw the dazzling light of the presence of the Lord coming from the east toward the Temple. He spoke and His voice was like the sound of a mighty waterfall and the land was bathed in the light of His glory. ³This was like what I had seen in the first vision at the Kebar River and like what I had seen in vision when the Lord left the city just before He destroyed Jerusalem. When I saw His glory coming toward the east gate, I threw myself face down on the ground. ⁴The glory of the Lord's presence entered the Temple area through the east gate.

⁵Then the Spirit of the Lord picked me

up and took me to the inner court in front of the Holy Place and I saw the glory of the Lord fill the whole Sanctuary. ⁶The man with the measuring tape was standing beside me.

Then the Lord spoke to me from the Most Holy Place, saying, ⁷"Son of man, this is the place of my throne. The whole earth belongs to me. I will live among my people forever. Never again will they and their kings dishonor my name by worshiping idols and committing adultery in my sight, nor will they build monuments to their dead heroes and kings and worship their supposed spirits. ⁸Their kings built the doorway of their palace right up against the doorway of my Temple, with only a wall between. They also came into the inner court reserved for the priests, set up their idols next to my altar and carried out their disgusting practices in my presence. So, I destroyed them. ⁹There will be no more idols and ritual prostitution, nor will there be any more monuments to their dead heroes and kings. I will live among my people and be their God, and they will be mine forever.

¹⁰"Now go and tell your fellow exiles about my plan for the Temple so they may repent of their sins and be ashamed of their lack of faith in me. ¹¹And if they are ashamed of what they have done, share with them the meaning of the Temple, its measurements, design, entrances, exits and the arrangement and order of everything you saw. Also tell them about the rules and regulations governing worship. Draw up plans of the Temple for them so they can see what it will look like just as I have shown it to you while you were in vision. ¹²No measurements will be changed. The whole area surrounding the Temple on the top of the mountain will be most holy. This is the law of the Temple.

The Altar

¹³"First, the man with the measuring tape will measure the altar. Then I will give you the rules and regulations gov-

erning worship. The measurement he will use is the same one he used in measuring the whole Temple, one long cubit and a handbreadth." Then He showed me the altar, and I noticed that it was built in three sections. The base of the altar was two feet thick and had a gutter two feet deep and two feet wide all around it. The gutter had a nine-inch rim.

¹⁴From its base the first section of the altar measured four feet. The next section was set back two feet and was eight feet high. The third section also was set back two feet, and it, too, was eight feet high. ¹⁵On top of it, the sacrifices were to be burned. The horns on the four corners projected out and then turned upward. ¹⁶The top section of the altar was twenty-four feet long and twenty-four feet wide, a perfect square. ¹⁷The middle section was twenty-eight by twenty-eight. The lower section was thirty-two by thirty-two. All sections were square and set back twelve inches on all sides. The steps going to the top of the altar led up on the east side.

Purifying the Altar

¹⁸Then the Lord spoke to me again, saying, "Son of man, now let me give you the rules and regulations to govern worship, sacrificing burnt offerings and sprinkling blood on the altar. ¹⁹Bring a young bull without defect as a sin offering to the priests who are the descendants of Zadok, the descendant of Aaron. They are the ones assigned to minister before me. ²⁰Since you are a descendant of Levi and Aaron, you are to take some of its blood and put it on the four horns of the altar attached to the four corners of the upper section, and on the four corners of the middle section and all around its rim. By doing this you are purifying the altar and getting it ready for regular daily use. ²¹Then you are to take the body of the young bull, the one you brought for a sin offering, and burn it at the appointed place outside the Temple.

²²"The next day you are to bring a

young male goat without defects for a sin offering and with its blood, purify the altar the same way you did the day before with the blood of the young bull. ²³When you finish, offer a young bull and a young ram, both without defects. ²⁴You are to offer them to the Lord, and the priests are to sprinkle their bodies with salt before they burn them on the altar.

²⁵"You are to do this for seven days, first offer a young male goat for a sin offering, then a young bull and a ram; all should be without defects. ²⁶All this is to purify the altar and dedicate it for its regular daily use. ²⁷At the end of the week, on the eighth day, the priests can begin offering the daily whole burnt offerings and the peace offering of the people. I will be pleased with the people and will accept them as mine. I, the Lord, have spoken."

The East Gate

44 The man with the measuring tape brought me back to the east gate of the main court, and it was locked. ²Then the Lord said to me, "Son of man, this gate will stay locked. Never again will it be used for ordinary purposes. People will not be allowed to come in this way because this is the way the God of Israel came in, and He will never leave the Temple again. ³Only the ruler of the people may sit inside this gateway to eat his sacrificial meal while facing the Sanctuary. But he is to come in through one of the other gates and then make his way to this gate."

Admission to the Temple

⁴Then the man took me from the courtyard back outside the Temple through the north gate. From there I could see the light of the Lord's presence filling the Temple and threw myself face down to the ground.

⁵The Lord said to me, "Son of man, pay close attention to what you see and hear, especially to the rules and regulations governing worship. Notice who is allowed to go in and out of the Temple and

who is not. ⁶Tell the children of Israel that this is what the Lord says: 'Enough is enough. You will not go back to your old and wicked practices. ⁷You brought idols into my Temple and let those who were uncircumcised in heart and flesh come in and eat the holy sacrifices. By doing this, you broke the meaning of my covenant. ⁸You also put foreigners in charge of the Temple and the Sanctuary who carried out the ministry you were supposed to perform.'

⁹"This is what the Lord says: 'Foreigners who are not willing to be circumcised as a sign of obedience are not to come into my Temple, not even those living among you.'

Laws of the Priesthood

¹⁰"The Levites are especially guilty because they, too, turned against me and went after idols. They will bear the consequences of their sins. ¹¹They were assigned to serve in the Temple and in the Sanctuary, taking charge of the gates, helping to slaughter the offerings the people brought and serving their families for me. ¹²But because they brought idols into the Temple and worshiped them while continuing to minister to me, they led the people into sin and they will suffer the consequences of what they have done. ¹³They are no longer allowed to serve me as priests, to come near the holy or the most holy offerings, to sacrifice at my altar or to go into my Sanctuary. They are to bear the shame of what they have done. ¹⁴But I will allow them to continue to be in charge of the duties of the Temple and all that needs to be done there.

¹⁵"The descendants of Zadok were faithful and carried out their duties in the Sanctuary when the rest turned away from me. These are the only Levites who are to offer the sacrifices. ¹⁶They are the only ones to come into my Sanctuary, perform the duties of a priest and minister to me. ¹⁷When they come into the courtyard of the Sanctuary, they are to

wear only linen clothes. They are not to wear anything made of wool while they serve me in the inner court. ¹⁸They are to wear linen turbans, linen underwear and a lightweight white linen robe tied at the waist. They are not to wear anything that would cause them to perspire. ¹⁹Before they leave and go into the outer court to meet the people, they are to change their priestly clothes and hang them up in the rooms set aside for them. This is so no one will touch the priestly clothes which are holy and have been set apart from what the rest of the people wear.

²⁰"The priests are not to shave their heads or let their hair grow long, but to keep it the proper length and neatly trimmed. ²¹They are not to touch wine or any other alcoholic beverages or to bring such drinks into my Sanctuary. ²²They are not to marry widows or women who have been divorced. They are to marry only an Israelite virgin or the widow of a priest.

²³"They are to teach my people the difference between what is holy and what is common, between what is clean and what is unclean. ²⁴When a legal dispute comes up among the people, the priests are to serve as judges and decide the cases according to my laws. They themselves are to keep my laws and my commandments and observe all my ordinances. They are to keep the Sabbath and all my appointed festivals.

²⁵"They are not to go near a dead person, thereby making themselves ritually unclean, unless it is a parent, a child, a brother or an unmarried sister. ²⁶If a priest does so innocently and becomes unclean, he must go through the ritual of purification and wait seven days before ministering to me again. ²⁷When he comes back into the Sanctuary, the first thing he must do is to offer a sin offering for himself.

²⁸"The priests are not to own any property in Israel, for I have given the land to the people. Their inheritance is the ministry which is handed down from father to son. ²⁹They will receive their share of the

grain offerings, the sin offerings and everything that has been set aside for me. All this will go to them. ³⁰The firstfruits of the harvests goes to them as well as all the special gifts the people bring to me. The first portion of your ground meal shall be given to the priests, and I will bless you for it. ³¹The priests must not eat any bird or animal that died a natural death or was killed by another animal.'”

The Sacred District

45 The Lord continued, “When you divide up the land to give each tribe its inheritance, set aside a sacred district in the middle of the country that is ten miles square. An eight-mile section to the north will be for the Levites, the priests and the Temple. The two-mile section to the south will be for the city, with gardens and farmland on two sides. ²The eight-mile section will be divided into two four-mile areas, an upper and a lower part. I will build my Temple in the lower part. It will be a thousand feet long and a thousand feet wide with a one-hundred-foot open space all around it. ³The Temple with its courtyards and the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place will be directly north of the city. ⁴All the land in the lower half of the eight-mile area, except for what was set aside for my Temple, will belong to the priests. That’s where they can choose to build their houses and raise their families.

⁵The upper half of the eight-mile area will be set aside for the Levites. Like the priests, they, too, will take their turns serving in my Temple. That’s where they are to settle and raise their families. I have given this land to them forever.

Measurements of the City and the Land

⁶The city will be built in the two-mile section south of the Temple. The city will belong to the people and be two miles long and two miles wide, with gardens and farmlands extending out on both sides.

⁷The land on both sides of this sacred

ten-mile square will belong to the king. It is to extend all the way to the Mediterranean in the west and to the Jordan River and the Dead Sea in the east. ⁸This will make a ten-mile wide strip running through the middle of the country. Except for the sacred district where the Temple and the city will be, this land is large enough for one tribe and is set aside for the king and his government. He will no longer oppress my people, but will respect the property of all throughout Israel.

Laws Governing the King

⁹“This is what the Lord says:

“Enough of you, O kings of Israel. You will no longer oppress the people or treat them violently. You will do what is just and right. You will not force my people off their property to take it for yourself, as has been done before.

¹⁰“You are to see to it that my people use honest scales and measurements throughout the country. ¹¹The homer will be the standard of measure. The next smaller unit will be the ephah, one-tenth of the homer, and will be used to measure what is dry. The bath also will be one-tenth of the homer but will be used for measuring liquids. ¹²The half-ounce silver shekel will be the standard for measuring money. Twenty gerahs will make one shekel and sixty shekels will make one mina. Each shekel is to be accepted at its value, no more and no less.

¹³“The people are to provide for the national offerings. They are to bring special gifts to the king for him to offer to the Lord on behalf of the country. These things are: One-sixth of a bushel of your wheat and of your barley; ¹⁴one tenth of your olive oil, which is to be measured in baths, ten baths making a homer; ¹⁵and one sheep out of every two hundred from the pastures of Israel. All this will be used for grain offerings, burnt offerings and peace offerings on behalf of the people.

¹⁶“This way all the people will have a part in these special gifts given by the king to the Lord on behalf of the nation. ¹⁷It will

be his duty to provide these national offerings on all appointed festivals with their special Sabbaths, including the monthly festival of the New Moon. He is to bring grain offerings, whole burnt offerings and peace offerings for an atonement for the nation as a whole."

Observing the Festivals

¹⁸The Lord also said, "On the first day of the first month of the religious year I want you to take a young bull without defects and purify the Sanctuary. ¹⁹The priest is to take some of the blood of this sin offering and put it on the doorposts of the Holy Place, on the four corners of the altar and on the gateposts coming into the Sanctuary courtyard. ²⁰You are to do the same thing the seventh day of that month for anyone who has sinned unintentionally or out of ignorance. This way you will make an atonement for the Sanctuary to keep it holy.

²¹"On the fourteenth day you are to keep the Passover, followed for one week by the Festival of Unleavened Bread. During this time only bread made without yeast should be eaten. ²²The king is to bring a young bull without defects for a sin offering for himself and for the nation. ²³Each day for seven days all during the Festival of Unleavened Bread he is to bring to the Lord seven young bulls and seven young male sheep as burnt offerings and one young male goat for a sin offering, all without defects. ²⁴With each bull and ram he is to bring a half-bushel of grain and four quarts of olive oil.

²⁵"During the seven days of the Festival of Booths or Shelters that is to begin on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, he is to do the same thing. He is to bring to the Lord sin offerings, burnt offerings and grain and oil offerings for the nation."

Worship

46 The Lord continued by saying to me, "The east gate of the Sanctuary leading into the inner court is

to be kept closed during the six working days of the week, but on the Sabbath and the New Moon Festival it must be kept open. ²If the ruler of my people comes to worship on the Sabbath and the New Moon Festival when the gate is open, he is to stop by the doorposts of the east gate and watch while the priests sacrifice his burnt offerings and his peace offerings. He is not to come into the inner court. When he leaves he is to go out the same way he came in. After the evening sacrifice, the east gate will be closed again.

³"People who come to worship on Sabbath and during the New Moon Festival are to stay in the outer court. They may come up to the steps of the east gate of the inner court, but no farther.

⁴"For Sabbath worship the ruler of the people shall bring six male lambs and one male sheep, all without defects. ⁵Along with the ram he is to bring a half-bushel of grain, and with each lamb any amount of grain he wishes. With each half-bushel of grain, he is to bring four quarts of olive oil. ⁶For the New Moon Festival he is to bring one young bull, six lambs and one male sheep, all without defects. ⁷He is to bring a half-bushel of grain each with the bull and the ram, and with each lamb any amount of grain he wishes. With each half-bushel of grain he is to bring four quarts of olive oil. ⁸The ruler shall come to the gate of the Sanctuary court and watch the priest offer his sacrifices; then he must leave the same way he came in.

⁹"When the people come into the outer court to worship, those who come in through the north gate must go out through the south gate, and those who come in through the south gate must go out through the north gate. No one is to go out the same way he came in. ¹⁰If the ruler comes into the outer court along with the people, he is to go out the same way the people have to go out because he is one of them.

¹¹"Whenever someone from the people brings a bull or a ram to be offered, he is

to bring a half a bushel of grain with it, but with the lambs he may offer any amount of grain he wishes. Each half-bushel of grain should have with it four quarts of olive oil. ¹²When the prince brings a freewill offering, whether it's for a burnt offering or a peace offering, the east gate of the Sanctuary is to be opened for him, no matter what day it is. He is to stand by the doorposts of the east gate as he does on Sabbath and the New Moon Festival, and watch the priest offer his sacrifices for him. Then he is to leave the same way he came in, and the gate is to be closed.

¹³“Every morning the priests are to offer a one-year-old lamb without defect as a burnt offering to the Lord. ¹⁴With the lamb you are to offer five pounds of flour and a quart of olive oil to be mixed with the flour. This is the rule for the morning offerings for all time. ¹⁵This is to be done every morning without fail. The offering is to consist of a lamb, flour and oil.”

Laws of Inheritance

¹⁶The Lord continued, “If the king gives a piece of land that he owns to one of his sons as an inheritance, it will belong to that son and will always stay in that family. ¹⁷If the king gives a piece of land he owns to someone who works for him, it will belong to that individual until the Year of Jubilee. Then it will go back to the king. Only he and his sons can permanently own it. ¹⁸The prince must not take any land from the people and then give it to his sons. He is to give them his own land. None of my people are to have their property taken away from them.”

How Offerings Are to Be Prepared

¹⁹Then the man with the measuring tape took me through the gate to the priests' apartments facing the Sanctuary to the north and overlooking the inner court. He pointed to a kitchen at the west end of the apartments and said to me, ²⁰“That is where the priests boil the meat of the sin offerings and bake the bread of the grain offerings. This way

nothing holy has to leave the area next to the Sanctuary. If these offerings were cooked in the outer court, it would transmit holiness to all the people present.”

²¹Then the man brought me back into the outer court and took me to the four corners inside the Temple walls. In each corner I saw a small courtyard. ²²Each courtyard was eighty feet long and sixty feet wide and had a small wall around it. All four were the same size. ²³Against the inside of the small wall were fireplaces built of stone. ²⁴The man said to me, “These are places where the Levites will cook the sacrifices the people bring.”

The Healing Waters and Trees

47 Then the man with the measuring tape brought me back to the east gate of the Sanctuary and in vision I saw water bubbling up from the southern edge of the sacrificial altar. The water flowed east because that's the way the Temple faced. ²He took me out through the north gate of the Temple and led me around on the outside to the east gate. There I saw that the water had become a small stream and was flowing out from underneath the Temple at the southern end of the east gate.

³The man took his tape and measured two thousand feet downstream. Then he led me across the little stream, and the water came up to my ankles. ⁴He measured off another two thousand feet downstream and led me across and the water came up to my knees. He measured off another two thousand feet and led me across and the water came up to my waist. ⁵He measured off another two thousand feet and led me into the water but it was too deep for me to cross. It had become a deep river, deep enough to swim in.

⁶He said to me, “Notice carefully everything I'm showing you.” Then he led me back out of the water to the bank of the river. ⁷When we got there I noticed many trees on both sides of the river.

⁸The man said to me, “The river flows

east from here toward the Jordan valley. From the Jordan valley, it flows into the Dead Sea, and it will make the salty waters there fresh. ⁹Wherever the river goes, there will be all kinds of animal life. The river will be full of fish and so will the Dead Sea because the river will make the stagnant water there fresh. Wherever the river goes, it will bring life to everything. ¹⁰All along the Dead Sea from En Gedi to En Eglaim fishermen will spread their nets. There will be as many kinds of fish as there are in the Mediterranean Sea. ¹¹However, the marshes around the Dead Sea will not become fresh but will remain as a source of salt for the people.

¹²“Fruit trees will grow on both sides of the river wherever it goes. Their leaves will not wither and they will never stop bearing fruit. There will be fresh fruit every month because the water that feeds them comes from the Sanctuary. They will provide food for the people and their leaves will be for healing.”

Boundaries of the Land

¹³Then the Lord spoke to me again, saying, “Son of man, let me tell you how to divide the land among the twelve tribes with two sections going to the two sons of Joseph. The tribe of Levi will get no land. ¹⁴You are to divide it equally because I promised to give it to your ancestors as an inheritance for their offspring and confirmed my promise with an oath.

¹⁵“The northwestern border will start at the Mediterranean and run east to the city of Hethlon and from there on to the Hamath Pass and the city of Zedad. ¹⁶From there it will continue to the cities of Berothah and Sibraim, which are on the border between Syria and Hamath, and then on to the cities of Hazer Hatticon and Hazer Enan on the border of Hauran. ¹⁷So the northern border will run from the Mediterranean eastward to the city of Hazer Enan, with Hamath and the country of Syria to the north.

¹⁸“The eastern border will run south from Syria and Hauran along the Jordan,

which separates the land of Israel on the west bank from the land of Gilead on the east bank, on to Tamar by the Dead Sea.

¹⁹“The southern border will run west from the city of Tamar to Kadesh Meribah and then along the river of Egypt to the Mediterranean.

²⁰“The western border will be the Mediterranean all the way from Egypt in the south to Israel’s border in the north, which runs eastward in line with the Hamath Pass.

²¹“The country is to be divided equally among the twelve tribes. ²²This land will be your permanent possession. The aliens who have come to live among you are also to be given a share of the land. You are to accept them and their descendants as Israelite citizens, and they are to draw lots for land among the twelve tribes. ²³In whatever tribal area they live, that’s where they are to be given land. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

The Land Divided Among the Tribes

48 The Lord continued, “As I said, the northern border will run from the Mediterranean eastward to the city of Hethlon, the Hamath Pass, and on to Hazer Hatticon and Hazer Enan on the border with Hamath and Syria. Each tribe is to have a slice of land across the entire country from east to west, beginning in the north by Syria and going south toward Egypt. ²Dan will be the tribe in the north, followed by Asher. ³Then will come Naphtali, ⁴Manasseh, ⁵Ephraim, ⁶Reuben, ⁷and Judah.

⁸“After Judah will be the ten-mile square sacred district set aside for the Lord for His Temple and for the city. The land on both sides belongs to the king and will stretch clear across the country. ⁹The four-mile wide area along the middle of the district is set aside for the Temple and the priests. ¹⁰The land on both sides of the Temple will be for the priests to build their houses and to raise their families. It is part of the land ten miles long and four miles wide with

the Temple in the middle. ¹¹It is for the descendants of Zadok, who were loyal to me and who faithfully served me as priests when the rest of the Levites and Israel went astray. ¹²They will settle on both sides of my Temple. The rest of the Levites will have the land to the north of them.

¹³"The land to the south where the Temple and the priests are is most holy. ¹⁴To the north where the Levites will live, the land will be holy. This section also will be ten miles long and four miles wide. ¹⁵They are not to sell it, exchange it, or give it to anyone else, for the land is holy.

¹⁶"The southern part of this ten-mile square will be ten miles long and two miles wide. It is to be set aside for general use. Jerusalem will be in the center, with land for the people extending out on both sides. ¹⁷The city is to be square, two miles long and two miles wide. ¹⁸An open area five hundred feet wide should be set aside all around the city.

¹⁹"The rest of the land, extending out four miles on both sides of the city, is set aside as farm and garden land for the people who live in Jerusalem. ²⁰The city workers, no matter what tribe they belong to, may use this land to help feed their families. ²¹So the total portion of land that is set aside is ten miles square. You will give this sacred district with its city as a special gift to me.

²²"The land east and west of this ten-mile square belongs to the king. It also is ten miles wide and stretches clear across the country, extending out from

both sides of the land set aside for the Lord with the Temple in the middle. ²³This sacred district includes the part set aside for the Levites, the priests and the city of Jerusalem. The tribe of Judah will be to the north and the tribe of Benjamin to the south of the land marked off for the Lord and the city.

²⁴"The land for each tribe will extend across the entire country from east to west. ²⁵The first tribe to the south will be Benjamin, followed by Simeon. ²⁶Then will come Issachar, ²⁷Zebulun, and Gad. There will be seven tribes to the north and five to the south. ²⁸The southern border of Gad and Israel in the east will go from the city of Tamar by the Dead Sea to Kadesh Meribah, along the river of Egypt and on to the Mediterranean in the west. ²⁹This is the land to be divided among the twelve tribes of Israel and is to be their inheritance. I, the Lord, have spoken.

The Gates and the City's Name

³⁰"The city of Jerusalem is to have twelve gates, three on each side. ³¹They are to be named after the twelve tribes of Israel. The three gates to the north will be Reuben, Judah and Levi. ³²The gates to the east will be Joseph, Benjamin and Dan. ³³The gates to the south will be Simeon, Issachar and Zebulun. ³⁴The gates to the west will be Gad, Asher and Naphtali.

³⁵"The city will be two miles on all sides, a perfect square. From then on, Jerusalem will be called by the Hebrew name, THE LORD IS HERE."

DANIEL

Daniel and His Friends

1 It was in the third year of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, surrounded Jerusalem with his army. ²The Lord allowed him to capture Jehoiakim and plunder the Temple. Then Nebuchadnezzar left for Babylon and told his generals to bring the captives back with them and also the Temple treasures which were to be placed in the temple of his own god.

³Once back home, the king ordered Ashpenaz, his master of eunuchs, to select from the Jewish captives young men in their teens who were of royal descent to come to his palace for training. ⁴They were to be healthy, handsome, intelligent, self-disciplined and well-mannered in order to serve in the royal court. Ashpenaz also was to see that they were taught the language and literature of Babylon. ⁵They were to be treated as royalty, fed from the same menu of meat and wine as those who ate with the king. Their training was to last for three years and then the king himself would examine them.

⁶Among those chosen from the captives were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, all from the tribe of Judah. ⁷After arriving in Babylon, they were castrated. Then Ashpenaz, who was in charge of all eunuchs at the palace, changed their names. He called Daniel, Belteshazzar, which means Bel Protect the King's Life. Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego. These names identified them as servants of the gods of Babylon.

⁸But Daniel made up his mind to be identified with the God of Israel, not Bel, the god of Babylonians. Daniel resolved not to eat the king's rich food which had been offered to idols or to drink his wine. He asked Ashpenaz, who was in charge of his training, for permission to follow his Hebrew diet. ⁹Because Daniel stood firm for God, God worked on his behalf and Ashpenaz was especially kind to Daniel.

¹⁰But when he heard what Daniel wanted to do, he said, "I'm not sure the king would appreciate this because he personally selected the food and drink you are to have. If he sees that you're not as healthy as the others and that I have taken you off his diet, he'll have me executed."

¹¹Then Daniel went to Melzar, the guardian whom Ashpenaz had put in charge of the four Hebrews, and said, ¹²"Test us for ten days by letting us eat our simple Hebrew diet of vegetables and water. ¹³Then compare us with the others and see if we don't do better than those on the king's diet. After that, whichever diet you decide, we'll stay with it." ¹⁴Melzar agreed and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵At the end of ten days they looked healthier and were stronger than all those who were on the king's diet. ¹⁶So Melzar decided not to require them to eat the king's meat and wine, and allowed them to continue their Hebrew diet.

¹⁷As these four young men went through their studies, God gave them insight and skill in whatever they learned. In addition, He gave Daniel the gift of interpreting visions and dreams. ¹⁸When the three years of training were over, Ashpenaz took all the young men to Nebuchadnezzar for their oral examinations. ¹⁹The king examined each of them and found that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were ahead of all the others. This so impressed him that he made them permanent members of his court. ²⁰As they served the king, no matter what questions the king asked or what problems he raised, he found them ten times better than any of the fortune tellers and astrologers who served as his advisers. ²¹Daniel served in Babylon as a member of the royal court until Cyrus, the Persian, conquered Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

2 At the end of Nebuchadnezzar's second year as king following his inaugural

year, he had a dream that really troubled him, so much so that he couldn't sleep. ²The next day he called in his fortune-tellers, astrologers who studied the stars and priests who claimed they could communicate with the dead, and asked them to explain the dream. He said to them, ³"I'm really bothered about the dream I had last night. It worried me so much that I couldn't go back to sleep. I need to know what it means."

⁴The men answered him in Aramaic, which was the language of the court, "May Your Majesty live forever. Tell us the dream, and we will tell you what it means." ⁵The king said, "I can't recall the details. That's why I called you, to tell me the dream and interpret it for me. If you can't, I'll have you torn limb from limb and will turn your houses into garbage heaps. ⁶On the other hand, if you tell me the dream and interpret it, I'll give you gifts and rewards and will greatly honor you. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me."

⁷Once again they said to the king, "Your Majesty, tell us the dream and we'll be happy to interpret it for you." ⁸The king said, "Are you stalling for time to cover up the fact that you can't tell me the dream, hoping I'll forget about it? ⁹If you won't tell me the dream, there's only one reason for it. You've agreed among yourselves to come up with an answer that pleases me, because I would have no way of knowing whether it's true or not. So you had better tell me the dream I had and interpret it for me now." ¹⁰The men were afraid and said, "Your Majesty, there's no one on earth who can do what the king is asking. No ruler, no matter how great and mighty, has ever demanded such a thing from his priests, fortune-tellers and astrologers. ¹¹What the king wants is impossible. No one can tell someone else what he dreamed except the gods, but they don't live among people."

¹²This made the king very angry, and he ordered all the wise men in Babylon executed. ¹³As the death decree was being drawn up, the king's guards were sent out to find those who, for whatever reason,

weren't able to come at the king's earlier command, including Daniel and his friends. The guards were to take them to the place for execution along with the rest.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream Given to Daniel

¹⁴When Arioch, commander of the king's guard, found Daniel and confronted him with the king's order, Daniel answered wisely and tactfully. ¹⁵He said to Arioch, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree so hastily? That's not like the king. There must be something wrong." So Arioch explained to Daniel what had happened. ¹⁶Then Daniel asked to see the king. When he was brought into the king's presence, he promised Nebuchadnezzar that by the next day he would tell him the dream and interpret it for him.

¹⁷The king listened to Daniel's proposal and agreed. Then Daniel went home and shared what had happened with his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ¹⁸He told them that they urgently needed to pray to the God of heaven and ask Him to be merciful to them. They must join him in asking God to show them the dream and give them the interpretation or they would be executed along with the king's other advisers in Babylon. ¹⁹Then God gave that same dream to Daniel in a night vision and told him what it meant. Daniel thanked the Lord and praised the God of heaven.

He said, ²⁰"Praise God forever and ever. All wisdom and power are His. ²¹He controls times and seasons. He removes kings and sets up kings. He gives wisdom to those who are wise and insight and understanding to those who know Him. ²²He reveals mysteries that no one else can know and He sees what to man is hidden in darkness. He's the source of all knowledge, and He floods the world with the light of understanding. ²³O Lord, God of my fathers, I thank you and praise you for giving me insight and wisdom and courage to

go in and see the king. You've answered our prayers and given me the dream and told me what it means. Now I can go in and tell the king what he wants to know."

Daniel Explains the Dream

²⁴The first thing in the morning, Daniel went to see Arioch, the one in charge of making the arrests and carrying out the executions. Daniel said to him, "You don't have to carry out the king's order. I'm ready to tell the king his dream and to interpret it for him."

²⁵So Arioch hurried Daniel to the king and said, "Your Majesty, I have found someone among the Jewish slaves serving the court who claims he can tell the king his dream and interpret it for him."

²⁶The king knew Daniel. He called him by his Babylonian name and said, "Do you think you can tell me what I dreamed and interpret it for me?" ²⁷Daniel answered, "Your Majesty, no philosopher, astrologer, fortune-teller, or priest who claims to communicate with the dead can do what the king is asking. ²⁸But there is a God in heaven who can reveal anything and explain any mysteries which trouble the king. It was this God, Your Majesty, who showed you the future. First let me tell you your dream and the vision you had while you were asleep so you can be confident of the interpretation. ²⁹Before you went to sleep that night, you were concerned about your kingdom. So during the night the God who knows the future showed you what will happen right up to the end of the world. But He purposely made you forget the details. ³⁰I know all this, not because I'm wiser than anyone else, but because God gave me the same dream last night and told me what it means. He did this to answer your concerns about the future of your kingdom.

³¹"In the vision you saw an enormous statue of a man. The statue glowed with a brilliant light and as it stood before you, it was frightening to look at. ³²The head

of this statue was made of fine gold, its chest and arms were made of silver, its waist and hips of bronze, ³³its legs of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. ³⁴While you were looking at it, you saw a huge rock break loose from a mountain without anyone touching it, and strike the statue on its feet of iron and clay, smashing them to pieces. ³⁵Then the whole statue collapsed and the stone rolled over the iron, the bronze, the silver and the gold, turning them into fine dust like the dust of harvest on a hot summer day. Then a strong wind came along and blew the dust away, and not a trace of the metals were left. Next, you saw the rock grow bigger and bigger until it became a mountain that filled the whole earth.

³⁶"This was what you dreamed, Your Majesty. Now let me interpret it for you. ³⁷You are seen as a king of kings. The God of heaven has given you the kingdom of Babylon, the power to rule, a mighty army and great honor and respect among the nations. ³⁸He has given you control over different people and also over animals and birds. You and your kingdom are represented by this head of gold. ³⁹But after a time, another kingdom will arise and replace yours. It will be morally inferior to yours, just as silver is inferior to gold. This kingdom will eventually be replaced by a third kingdom represented by bronze, and it will also be morally inferior, even though its kingdom will be larger. ⁴⁰The fourth kingdom will be as strong as iron. Just as iron can crush all other metals, so it will crush everything that stands in its way. But it will be still more base and corrupt. ⁴¹This kingdom will split into ten parts represented by the ten toes. Some of these little kingdoms will be strong and others will be weak, just as the feet and toes were made partly of iron and partly of clay. ⁴²And as the feet and toes were partly iron and partly clay, so their relationship to each other will sometimes be strong and sometimes weak. ⁴³The rulers of these little kingdoms will

try to unite their interests by intermarrying, but these unions won't last, just as iron doesn't stick to clay. ⁴⁴The time will come when all kingdoms of the world will try to work together. That's when the God of heaven will decide to set up His kingdom which will destroy all kingdoms of the world. God's kingdom will never be conquered or destroyed and will stand forever. ⁴⁵In your dream, Your Majesty, you saw how a huge rock broke loose from a mountain without anyone touching it and struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay. You saw the statue fall down and the rock roll over the iron, bronze, silver and gold, turning them into dust. God is telling you ahead of time what will happen to these kingdoms. This the dream and the interpretation that you asked for."

Daniel and His Friends Rewarded

⁴⁶Then Nebuchadnezzar got up from his throne and bowed low before Daniel in amazement and respect. He ordered incense and sacrifices to be offered to the God of heaven out of thankfulness for Daniel. ⁴⁷The king said to Daniel, "It's true that your God is above all gods, Lord over kings, and the only One who can reveal the future. You were the only one who could tell me what I had dreamed and then interpret it for me." ⁴⁸Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many gifts in recognition of what he had done. He put him in charge of the affairs of the city and of the greater Babylonian province and also in charge of all the king's advisers. ⁴⁹At Daniel's request, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego as Daniel's assistants. They helped him with the affairs of the province, while Daniel took care of the affairs of the city itself, staying close to the king and working with his advisers.

The Golden Image

3 During the next twenty years, Nebuchadnezzar gradually changed. He had a statue built to look like the one

he had seen in his dream. But he covered the whole statue with pure gold to show that the prophecy was wrong and that his kingdom would last. It was about a hundred feet high and ten feet wide. He had it set up in the plain of Dura near Babylon. ²After the statue was set up, the king ordered all his officials to come and participate in the dedication. This included the local princes, governors, commissioners, judges, treasurers, royal advisers, heads of the police and all other government officials. Everyone not away on duty was ordered to attend the dedication of the statue that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ³After all the princes, governors, commissioners, judges, treasurers, royal advisers, heads of the police and all other government officials had arrived for the statue's dedication, they were asked to stand facing it. ⁴Then a royal herald announced with a loud voice for everyone to hear, "People of all nations, let me tell you what you will be expected to do. ⁵When you hear the first sound of the trumpets followed by the playing of the flutes, lyres, zithers, harps and other instruments, you shall fall on your knees, bow to the ground and worship the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶Anyone who does not kneel and worship will be executed immediately by being thrown into this nearby brick-making furnace." ⁷So as soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, which was followed by the playing of flutes, lyres, zithers, harps and other instruments, they fell to their knees and bowed in worship toward the golden statue.

Daniel's Friends Refuse to Worship the Image

⁸This was the opportunity that some Babylonians had been waiting for to accuse the Hebrews of not being loyal citizens. ⁹When they saw that the three Hebrews didn't kneel and worship the statue, they went to King Nebuchadnezzar and said, "May Your Majesty live

forever!¹⁰You issued a decree that at the sound of the trumpets, flutes, lyres, zithers, harps and other musical instruments, everyone present should fall on their knees and bow in worship before your golden statue.¹¹Anyone who didn't would be thrown into this blazing furnace.¹²Three Jews, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, whom you put in government positions of honor did not worship your statue. They have consistently refused to worship our gods and now they've refused to worship the golden statue that you have set up."

¹³Nebuchadnezzar became extremely enraged. He ordered the guards to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to him at once.¹⁴When they came, he said, "Is it true that you three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, have not bowed in worship before the golden statue that I set up?" They answered, "That is true, Your Majesty."¹⁵Nebuchadnezzar said, "I'll give you one more chance to demonstrate your loyalty to Babylon. When you hear the sound of the trumpets, flutes, lyres, zithers, harps and other instruments, you had better fall to your knees and bow in worship to my golden statue. If you don't, I'll have all three of you thrown into this blazing fiery furnace. No one, not even your God, can stop me!"

¹⁶Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego answered the king, "Your Majesty, we don't need to think about our decision.¹⁷It's true that we didn't worship before the golden statue, but if that's considered being disloyal to Babylon, what can we say? Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace should He choose to do so.¹⁸But if not, Your Majesty can be sure that we will not worship your Babylonian gods nor bow in worship before the golden statue which you set up."

Safe in the Blazing Furnace

¹⁹Then the king became raging mad. His face turned red with anger as he glared at Shadrach, Meshach and

Abednego. Immediately, he ordered his men to make the blazing furnace seven times hotter.²⁰Then he ordered the strongest guards to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego hand and foot and throw them into the fiery furnace.²¹So the guards tied up the Hebrews and threw them fully dressed with their official robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes into the blazing fire.²²Because the king in his rage had ordered the furnace to be made seven times hotter, the clothes of the guards who threw the three Hebrews into the furnace caught fire, and they burned to death.²³Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego fell down into the blazing furnace, tied hand and foot.

²⁴The king who was watching from a safe distance, suddenly jumped to his feet and, staring toward the blazing furnace, said to his advisers, "Didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the fire?" They said, "Yes, we did, Your Majesty."²⁵Then he said, "Look! I see four men in there! All of them are untied and walking around in the fire! And the fourth one looks like the Son of God they told me about!"

Nebuchadnezzar Praises God

²⁶Nebuchadnezzar came as close to the furnace as he could and called to the three Hebrews, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out of there!" The three men stepped out of the furnace and the Son of God disappeared.²⁷Then the king's counselors, the local princes, governors, commissioners and all the other officials crowded around them to see and feel the three Hebrews who had been in the blazing furnace and had walked out unharmed. Their bodies weren't burned, their hair wasn't singed, nor was there even an odor of smoke on their clothes.

²⁸Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who sent Someone to rescue His servants because they put their trust in Him. They were so loyal to Him that they disobeyed my orders and risked

their lives rather than bowing in worship before any god except their own. ²⁹Therefore, I make this decree: Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, no matter what people, nation or language group they come from, will be torn to pieces, limb from limb and his house will be made into a garbage heap. There is no other god who can save his people like the God of the Hebrews.” ³⁰Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and gave them even greater authority throughout Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream

4 Sometime during the last years of his reign Nebuchadnezzar had an experience that truly convinced him that the God of the Hebrews was the true God. He sent a message to all nations and language groups in his kingdom and to all the countries he had conquered. This was his message: “Peace to all of you. ²I thought it would be good for you to know about the miracles and other wonderful things that the God of heaven has recently done for me. ³How great and wonderful God is! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and He reigns over every generation.

⁴“A little over seven years ago while I, Nebuchadnezzar, was resting in the palace, I thought about everything I had done for Babylon and was feeling quite proud of myself. ⁵Then I fell asleep and had a dream which frightened me. The more I thought about it, the more I felt that it had some evil message for me. ⁶So I called all the royal advisers in the province of Babylon to come to the palace to help me understand the dream. ⁷They all came—astrologers who study the stars, fortune-tellers and priests who claim to communicate with the dead—and I told them my dream. But not one of them could tell me what it meant.

⁸“Finally, Daniel, whom I called Belteshazzar to honor my god, also came to the palace. The Spirit of the Holy God

lives in him. So I told him the dream. ⁹“O Belteshazzar,” I said, ‘chief of all who interpret dreams, I know that the Spirit of the Holy God is in you and that no secret is hidden from you. So let me tell you the dream I had and you tell me what it means. ¹⁰I fell asleep in my palace and dreamed I saw a huge tree standing in the middle of the earth. It was the tallest tree I had ever seen. ¹¹It grew bigger and stronger until its top seemed to touch heaven itself. Everyone in the world could see it. ¹²Its leaves were beautiful and it was loaded with fruit, enough to feed everyone. The animals of the field came to rest in its shade and the birds happily built their nests in its branches. It provided rest and protection for all living things.

¹³“Then in my dream, as I lay in my bed, I saw a Watcher, a Holy One, come down from heaven and say loudly to those with Him, ¹⁴“Cut this tree down. Strip it of its leaves, cut off its branches and scatter its fruit. Drive away the animals that were under it and also the birds that built their nests there. ¹⁵But leave the stump and roots in the ground. Put a band of iron and bronze around it and leave it alone. Leave it in the middle of the field and let it get wet with the morning dew. Let the man whom this tree represents live with the animals and eat the grass of the field. ¹⁶Take away his reason and give him the mind of an animal. Let seven times, that is, seven years, pass by. ¹⁷This was decided by the Holy One and those with Him so that all people will know that the Most High God who rules the universe also keeps a watchful eye on human affairs. He gives the various kingdoms to whomever He wills and sets over them the lowliest of men.” ¹⁸This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar had. Now, Belteshazzar, you tell me what it all means. None of my other advisors and counselors to whom I told the dream could interpret it for me. But I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that you can help me.’”

Daniel Explains the Second Dream

¹⁹“Then Belteshazzar (Daniel) was stunned and remained quiet for a long time. Finally, I said, ‘Belteshazzar, if you don’t want to tell me the meaning because it’s bad news, don’t let that worry you. Just tell me what it means.’ Then Belteshazzar said, ‘Your Majesty, the interpretation of the dream is something your enemies would love to hear. ²⁰The tree you saw in your dream which grew bigger and stronger until it seemed to touch the sky and people everywhere could see it— ²¹that same tree which was covered with beautiful leaves and loaded with fruit for everyone, under which the animals of the field came to rest and where the birds built their nests— ²²that tree, Your Majesty, is you. You have grown to be a great and strong king. There seems to be no end to the height of your power, and your influence extends throughout the world.

²³“The Holy Watcher you saw looking at the tree never slumbers or sleeps. He came down from heaven and said, “Cut down the tree and destroy it. Leave the stump and roots in the ground. Put a band of iron and bronze around it and let it get wet with the morning dew like the grass of the field. Let the man this tree represents live with the animals for seven years.” ²⁴This decision, Your Majesty, was made by the Most High God. ²⁵Your intelligence will be taken away, and you will be driven from human society to live with animals. You will eat grass like an ox and sleep in the field. The morning dew will fall on you for seven years until you have learned that God is in control of all human affairs and that He can give your kingdom to whomever He wants. ²⁶But since the Holy Watcher said to the angels to leave the stump and its roots in the ground, your kingdom will be restored to you. However, this is only after you have acknowledged the sovereignty of the God of heaven.

²⁷“This is the dream’s meaning. And now, Your Majesty, may my personal ad-

vice be acceptable to you. Atone for your sins by doing what is right and for your iniquities by showing mercy to those who are weak and taking care of those who are poor. This change on your part will defer the sentence and may even cancel it altogether.’

Nebuchadnezzar Is Humbled

²⁸“This is what happened to your king, Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹About a year later, as I was strolling in the roof garden of my palace, ³⁰I looked out over greater Babylon and said to myself, ‘What a beautiful sight! I’m the one who built this magnificent city! I put this nation on its feet and made it into a great empire! It was my intelligence and power that did all this. This great city of Babylon will stand as a monument to me forever.’ ³¹I had scarcely gotten the words out of my mouth when a voice from heaven said, ‘King Nebuchadnezzar, your kingdom has been taken away! ³²Your intelligence will be taken from you, and you will be driven from society to live with the animals in the field. For seven years you will eat grass like an ox until you have learned that the Most High God rules in the affairs of men and can give your kingdom to whomever He wants.’ ³³Immediately the sentence was fulfilled and my intelligence was gone. My advisers could tell that my mind wasn’t working, so they took me away to live with the animals out in the field. I ate grass like an ox and slept in the open air. My body got wet with the morning dew. My hair grew long and became so matted with dirt that it stuck out like eagle feathers, and my fingernails grew until they looked like bird’s claws.

Nebuchadnezzar Praises God for Healing Him

³⁴“This lasted for seven years. Then suddenly my intelligence was returned to me and I could think like a human being again. I stood in the open field and looked up to heaven and praised the Most High God. I praised and honored the One who lives forever and ever. His kingship never

ends. He rules in the affairs of men from generation to generation. ³⁵All the people in the world are but a drop in the bucket to Him. He does what He pleases among the hosts of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can stop Him or question what He does.

³⁶“At the same time that my intelligence came back, my advisers, counselors and leading officials came to see me and gave me back my kingdom. I had more power and glory than I had had before. My commanders welcomed me with open arms and honored me more than ever. ³⁷So now I, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, praise and honor the God of heaven and glorify the King of kings, whose ways are right and just toward everyone, but who also humbles those who are lifted up by pride and power.”

Belshazzar's Feast

5 Some years after Nebuchadnezzar died, his son-in-law Nabonidus became king. Later he made his son Belshazzar co-ruler. While his father was away, Belshazzar held a New Year's banquet to which he invited a thousand nobles and leaders of Babylon. They celebrated and drank all night.

²During the celebration, Belshazzar ordered his guards to bring in the gold and silver cups which his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. He did this so that he, his officials, his wives and mistresses, could drink from them and glory in the power of Babylon. ³When the golden cups from the Temple in Jerusalem were brought in, the king, his officials, his wives and mistresses drank from them. ⁴As they drank they praised the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone.

⁵Suddenly a human hand appeared and with its finger began writing on the plaster of the wall opposite the lampstands. The king and his guests watched in terror as the hand wrote. ⁶His face paled, his knees weakened and knocked together, and he began to tremble.

⁷When the king found his voice, he shouted for someone to get the astrologers, fortune-tellers, and priests and bring them in at once. After they arrived the king said, “Anyone who can read the handwriting on the wall and tell me what it means will be dressed in royal purple, wear the gold chain of authority around his neck and be third in the line of power in the kingdom after my father and me.”

⁸The royal advisers studied the writing on the wall, but not one of them could read it or tell the king what it meant. ⁹Then the king became even more terrified, his face grew pale and he again started to shake all over. His advisers were frightened because they didn't know what to do either.

¹⁰When the queen mother heard the New Year's celebrations suddenly stop, she came to the banquet room to find out what was the matter. She saw the handwriting on the wall and noticed how terrified everyone was. Then she turned to the young king and said, “May Your Majesty live forever. You don't have to be afraid or perplexed over this. ¹¹There's someone in Babylon in whom the spirit of the gods lives who can interpret the handwriting for you. During the days of your grandfather, this man was found to have the insight, understanding and wisdom of the gods and gave Nebuchadnezzar excellent counsel. Your grandfather put him in charge of the astrologers, fortune-tellers, counselors and those who claim to talk to the dead. ¹²He has a keen mind, knowledge and understanding to interpret dreams, solve riddles and explain mysteries. The man's name is Daniel. He's also called Belshazzar. Call him, and he can interpret the writing for you.”

Daniel Explains the Writing on the Wall

¹³So the king called for Daniel, who came and stood before the king. The king said, “Are you the Daniel whom my grandfather Nebuchadnezzar brought to Babylon as a Jewish captive?” Daniel answered, “Yes, I

am.”¹⁴Then the king said, “I’ve heard that the spirit of the gods dwells in you and that you’ve been given insight, understanding and wisdom in all things.¹⁵I have brought my counselors, astrologers and others in to read and interpret the writing that’s on the wall over there, but they can’t do it.¹⁶I’ve heard that you can interpret such mysteries. If you can read that writing and interpret it for me, I will have you dressed in royal purple and give you the gold chain of authority to wear around your neck. I’ll make you third in the line of power after my father and me.”

¹⁷Then Daniel answered the king, “Your Majesty, keep your gifts and save your rewards for someone else. I will read the writing and interpret it for you.¹⁸The Most High God made your grandfather Nebuchadnezzar king and gave him majesty, glory and great honor.¹⁹He was so great that people from all nations and languages trembled at his word. People’s lives rested totally in his hands. He killed those he wanted to kill and let those live he wanted to live. He honored those he chose to honor and degraded those he chose to degrade.²⁰But when he became proud and stubborn, he also became insensitive and was removed from his throne and stripped of his glory.²¹His intelligence was taken away from him and he became like an animal. He lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle. He slept out in the field with nothing to protect his body from the morning dew. This lasted for seven years until he learned his lesson that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and sets over them whomever He wants.²²And you, Belshazzar, are his grandson. You knew all about this and yet you did not put a check on your own pride.²³You let it get the best of you to the point that you showed no respect for the God of heaven. You ordered the cups from God’s holy Temple in Jerusalem to be brought in so that you, your officials, your wives and mistresses could drink from them. Then you praised your gods of gold, silver,

bronze, iron, wood or stone, which can’t see, hear or know anything you’re doing. But the God of heaven who knows everything, who holds your breath in His hands, you insulted and ignored.

²⁴“So God sent this hand to write these words on the wall²⁵ which say: MENE, MENE, TEKEL and PARSIN.²⁶The interpretation is: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought them to an end. This word was given twice to let you know for a certainty that it will happen.²⁷TEKEL, you have been weighed on the scales of heaven and found lacking.²⁸PARSIN, your kingdom will be divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.”

²⁹Then Belshazzar ordered Daniel to be dressed in royal purple and had a gold chain put around his neck. He announced to everyone present that Daniel was now third ruler in Babylon after his father and himself.

Babylon Is Taken

³⁰That same night, after Daniel had left the banquet hall, the Medes and the Persians who had diverted the river Euphrates, and were able to slip into the city, surprise the guards and then kill Belshazzar.³¹Darius the Mede, who was sixty-two years old, temporarily took the throne and became the new ruler of Babylon, and Cyrus the Persian continued his conquest of the rest of the country.

The Plot Against Daniel

6 After Darius took the throne in the city of Babylon, he divided the country into one hundred and twenty provinces and appointed a governor over each.²He also appointed three presidents, including Daniel, and put each one in charge of forty of these governors to make sure that his government would not suffer any loss of revenue.³Soon Daniel distinguished himself above the others, and the king appointed him as head of the presidents and even considered putting him in charge of the

whole kingdom because of his good attitude and sound management. ⁴So the other presidents with their sympathetic governors tried to find some fault with Daniel, some negligence on his part which they could complain to the king about, but they found nothing. Daniel was loyal to the king and faithful and honest in everything he did. ⁵They said, "We have to find a fault of some kind with Daniel or the king will put him in charge of the whole kingdom. Since we can't find fault with his work, we'll have to find it with his religion."

⁶So the two presidents and these governors asked to see Darius the king and said to him, "May Your Majesty live forever! ⁷All your presidents, governors, counselors and other officials feel that a loyalty test should be given to the people to see whether or not they support you. It would be good for Your Majesty to issue a decree that for one month, no one should bring their petitions to any god or man except the king. Anyone who does should be thrown into the den of lions. ⁸We've drawn up the decree and simply request your signature. Only then will it become one of the laws of the Medes and Persians which can never be changed." ⁹Darius was flattered with the idea, so he signed the decree.

Daniel Thrown Into the Lions' Den

¹⁰Daniel recognized the motive of these men. He had always prayed three times a day and everyone knew it. When he heard that the document had been signed, he went home to his upstairs room, opened the windows facing Jerusalem and, as his custom was, knelt to pray and praise his God as he had always done.

¹¹Daniel's enemies were watching him so they could testify that they had personally seen him praying, taking his petitions to his God, which was now against the law. ¹²Then they went to the king and said, "Your Majesty, didn't you sign a decree that for thirty days no one should take their petitions to any god or man except

you? Wasn't the purpose of this decree to test people's loyalty to you and to the empire, and if they broke the law they would be thrown to the lions?" The king said, "Yes, I did, and according to the tradition of the Medes and Persians, once a decree is signed, it cannot be changed." ¹³Then Daniel's enemies said to the king, "Your Majesty, the man Daniel, the first of the three presidents, is a Jewish exile brought here from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. He pays no attention to your decree, but prays to his God three times a day. To make it worse, he does it before an open window in defiance of you, Your Majesty."

¹⁴When the king heard this he was terribly upset about what had happened, for now he saw that the whole thing was a plot to get Daniel out of the way and to keep him from being put in charge of the whole kingdom. The rest of the day the king tried to find a way to get around the law, but he couldn't. ¹⁵At sunset Daniel's enemies came to the king and reminded him, "Your Majesty knows that the law of the Medes and Persians can't be changed and that a decree signed by the king must be carried out."

¹⁶Reluctantly the king ordered his guards to arrest Daniel and bring him to the palace. When he arrived, the king spoke with a heavy heart, saying, "Daniel, I have no choice but to have you put into the den of lions. But, I believe that the God whom you so faithfully serve will watch over you and keep you from harm." ¹⁷So at sunset they lowered Daniel into the lions' den, rolled a stone over the mouth and covered the edges with clay. The king pressed his seal into it and his officials did likewise, so that no one would break the seal, either to rescue Daniel or to kill him by some other means.

The King Praises God for Daniel's Safety

¹⁸Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting and worrying about Daniel. He refused all entertainment even though he could not sleep. ¹⁹Early the next morning, at the first sign of dawn the king got dressed and hurried to the lions' den because he won-

dered if Daniel's God had been able to protect him. ²⁰When he got there, he called out anxiously, "Daniel, servant of the Most High God, was your God able to save you?" ²¹From the den came Daniel's answer, "Your Majesty, live forever! ²²My God has sent His angel to shut the lions' mouths so that they have not hurt me. He knows that I am innocent and that I am also loyal to you." ²³The king was overjoyed and ordered his guards to throw a rope to Daniel and pull him out. When Daniel came to the surface they examined him and didn't find even a scratch on him because he had trusted his God.

The King Orders

Daniel's Enemies Killed

²⁴Then Darius ordered Daniel's enemies who had accused him of disloyalty to be thrown into the den of lions, along with their wives and children. Before they touched the bottom of the den, the lions pounced on them, crushing their bones. ²⁵Next, the king dictated the following announcement to all people in his kingdom: "Peace to every one of you! ²⁶I am making a decree that throughout my kingdom, men and women should show respect for the God of Daniel. His God is a living God and will be so forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed, and His sovereignty will never end. ²⁷He is able to save anyone He wants, and He does miraculous things in heaven and on earth. He shut the mouths of hungry lions to save His servant Daniel."

²⁸Then Daniel was restored to his position and served during the reigns of Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian.

Vision of the Four Beasts

7 In the first year of Belshazzar's reign (the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar), God gave me visions and dreams. He asked me to write them down. This is what I saw: ²The first vision came at night while I was in bed. I saw an ocean being whipped up by mighty winds coming from

all four directions. ³Then four huge animals came up out of the stormy sea, one after another, each one different. ⁴The first looked like a lion, but it had huge wings like an eagle. I kept looking and saw its wings torn off, and it was made to stand up like a man. A human heart was given to it so it stopped acting like a lion.

⁵The second animal that came up out of the angry waves looked like a bear. As it stood, it raised up one of its sides more than the other. I noticed that it had three ribs in its mouth and someone told it to devour as much meat as it wanted.

⁶Next a third animal came up out of the fury of waves which looked like a leopard, but it had four heads. It also had four wings like those of a large bird. It was very strong and nothing could stand in its way.

⁷As I looked I saw a fourth animal come out of the boisterous waves. It was a huge beast, monstrous, powerful and extremely frightening to look at. It had huge iron teeth and crushed and ate everything it killed, and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from the other beasts and had ten horns coming out of its head. ⁸As I looked at its horns, I saw a little horn push its way up through the middle of the other horns. It pushed three of the other horns out of the way, roots and all, and took their place. As I looked more closely, I noticed that this little horn had human eyes, and a mouth speaking arrogantly.

Vision of the Ancient of Days

⁹Before this animal disappeared, the scene changed, and I was given a vision of heaven. I saw thrones being set up for a special occasion, and soon the Ancient of Days came and took His seat. His robe was as white as snow, and the hair of His head was white like wool. His throne was ablaze with fiery flames, and it had wheels of fire. ¹⁰Flames streamed out from His throne in all directions. Thousands upon thousands attended Him and ten thousand times ten thousand stood ready to serve Him. The

court was seated, the records were brought in and the books were opened.

¹¹While the judgment was going on, I could still hear the little horn speaking arrogantly. Then the scene changed, and again I saw that monstrous beast. I kept watching it until it was put to death and its body thrown into the fire. ¹²Now even though the three previous animals had disappeared in the waves, their spirit was prolonged in this fourth animal for a season and a time until it was destroyed.

¹³Then the scene changed again, and I saw someone who looked like the Son of Man riding on the clouds of heaven. He came to the Ancient of Days and presented Himself before Him. ¹⁴The Ancient of Days gave Him authority and glory befitting a king, and made Him Ruler over all nations and every language so that all people everywhere should serve Him. His dominion will be an everlasting dominion, and His sovereignty will never end.

Daniel's Visions Explained

¹⁵I was really bothered by the vision and became depressed because I couldn't make sense out of what I had seen. ¹⁶While still in vision, I asked the angel to tell me what all this meant. He said to me, ¹⁷"The four animals that you saw coming up out of the stormy sea represent four kingdoms which will arise one after another. ¹⁸But the kingdom of the saints, the people who belong to the Most High, will eventually supersede all these other kingdoms, and their kingdom will last forever and ever."

¹⁹Then I asked him to tell me about the fourth animal that looked so terrifying, that was so totally different from all the rest, the animal that had the iron teeth and bronze claws which devoured and crushed everything in its way. ²⁰I asked him about the ten horns and the little horn that came up after the rest, pushing three other horns out of the way, the little horn that had kindly eyes and an arrogant mouth, which was more powerful than all the other horns put together. ²¹I wanted to know more about

this little horn that began making war against God's people and was successful in doing so, ²²until the heavenly court went into session. Then the Ancient of Days decided in favor of God's people and announced that the time had come for them to have their own kingdom.

²³My angel explained this, saying "The monstrous animal that you saw represents the fourth and most powerful kingdom on earth following the others. It is different from the other three because it will crush any country that stands in its way and tear it to pieces. ²⁴The ten horns that you saw on its head represent ten smaller kingdoms which will come up and rule the same territory that the animal ruled over. Afterward another little kingdom will come up that will be different from the other ten, and it will get rid of three of them to make room for itself. ²⁵This little horn will boast about its claim to speak for God. It will try to change God's law and control human history. It will oppress God's people for a time, times, and half a time (or three-and-a-half years, each day representing a literal year).

²⁶"But the heavenly court will convene and rule against the little horn and take away its power and destroy it. ²⁷Then God's people will be given their own kingdom taking in the whole world, every country under heaven. It will be exclusively for God's people and will last forever. It will be governed by the Most High God, and everyone there will obey and serve Him from a loving heart."

²⁸This ended our conversation. I was greatly perplexed at what I had seen and my face turned pale. But I kept it all to myself.

Vision of a Ram and a Goat

8 Two years later, in the third year of Belshazzar, I had another vision which included more details than the first one. ²I had this vision while on business for the king at his other palace in Susa, in the province of Elam. It happened as I was standing by the banks of the Ulai River. ³I saw a ram standing beside the river. It had two large horns, but

one was higher than the other. The higher one was newer and obviously had come up last. ⁴I saw the ram charge west, then north, and then south. No other animal could stand in its way or dared to challenge its power. The ram did as it pleased and grew to be very strong and cruel.

⁵As I was thinking about what I was seeing, suddenly a male goat came charging from the west so fast that his feet didn't even touch the ground. It had a huge horn sticking out between its eyes. ⁶It was heading straight for the ram that I had seen standing by the river and charged it with savage fury. ⁷The closer he got to the ram the more furious he became. He hit it head-on, shattering its two horns. The ram was powerless to stand up against it. The goat knocked the ram down and trampled on it. No one was able to rescue it from the goat. ⁸Then the goat grew stronger and more arrogant. But at the height of his power the huge horn broke off, and in its place four little horns came up, each one pointing in the direction of the four winds.

⁹Then the wind from the west blew stronger, and out of it came a little horn which soon grew bigger and stronger than the other four horns combined. And as it grew it first pointed south, then east and finally toward the Promised Land. ¹⁰It grew so strong that it challenged the power of heaven and trampled on the people of God. ¹¹It got to the place where it even stood up against the Prince of heaven, putting an end to the daily sacrifices and later destroying the Temple. ¹²Because of their sins, the people of God were given over to this power, and the services of the Temple ceased. Then I saw the little horn change its appearance and attack the truth about the daily intercession. The little horn practiced and prospered. ¹³The Holy One said something to my angel who asked Him, "How long will the little horn be allowed to transgress so rebelliously and pervert the truth about God and the heavenly Sanctuary? How long will all these things

go on and the little horn's power last?" ¹⁴He answered, "After two thousand, three hundred prophetic days (which represent actual years), God will restore the truth about the heavenly Sanctuary to its rightful place. Then the process of judgment will begin of which the yearly cleansing of the earthly Sanctuary was a type, and God will vindicate His people."

Gabriel Explains the Vision

¹⁵But I wanted to understand more of what I had seen and to know what it meant. So the One standing on the other side of the Ulai River said to my angel, ¹⁶"Gabriel, explain the vision to Daniel and help him understand it." Then I realized that the Holy One who spoke was the Son of Man. ¹⁷So Gabriel came over to where I was standing, and when he came close, I was so terrified that I fell to my knees, my face on the ground. He said, "Daniel, though you don't understand everything, all you need to know for now is that the vision extends to the time of the end."

¹⁸This conversation took place while I was still in vision in a trance. Then he touched me and stood me on my feet. ¹⁹He continued, "First, I want you to understand what will happen in the future. Behind and above all the fury and passions of nations, God is still in control. But the last part of the vision applies to the time of the end, and you don't have to concern yourself about it. ²⁰As far as the near future is concerned, the ram you saw with the two horns represents the joint kingdom of the Medes and Persians. ²¹The goat represents the kingdom of Greece that is yet to come. The great horn between its eyes represents its first king. ²²After its first king dies, the kingdom will be divided. Following a struggle among his commanders, it will be governed by four lesser kings, but they will not rule the kingdom with the same power. ²³As their kingdom weakens, another kingdom will slowly arise and conquer many kingdoms. After this, a very bold little king will come and take

over, who is full of intrigue, even claiming to understand divine mysteries. ²⁴The power of this bold little king will grow stronger and stronger. He will control mighty nations who will wield the sword for him. Through them he will successfully destroy other kings and attack God's people. ²⁵He will use cunning and deceit to achieve his ends and will succeed in whatever he does. In his own mind he will consider himself great. Without warning he will attack and destroy. He will stand up against the Prince of princes by making claims that belong only to Him. The kingdom of this bold little king will be destroyed, though not by human hands. ²⁶The vision having to do with the three-and-a-half years, each day representing a year, is true. But for now, you don't need to understand more than what I have told you because it applies to the time of the end, far in the future."

²⁷I was so overcome by what I had seen that for days afterward I felt sick. Finally, I went back to work to carry on the king's business. But I continued to be amazed at what I had seen in vision and wanted desperately to know more of what it meant.

Daniel Prays to Understand

9 When Darius the Mede took over the kingdom of Babylon, ²in the first year of his reign, I decided to go to the Scriptures to find an answer to the vision of the two thousand, three hundred days. I studied the book of Jeremiah and concluded that the length of time God had said Jerusalem and the Temple would be in ruins was only seventy years, and they were almost up.

³Then I decided to solve this apparent discrepancy by fasting and praying, wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes. ⁴I prayed to the Lord my God, confessing my sins and the sins of my people, saying, "O Lord, you are so great and powerful and yet so kind and gracious. You faithfully keep the covenant you so mercifully made with those who love you and

keep your commandments. ⁵But we have sinned and committed all kinds of iniquities. We have been wicked and rebellious and have done just the opposite of what you wanted us to do. ⁶We haven't listened to your prophets who at different times have spoken to our kings, our rulers and our people. ⁷O Lord, you always do what is right, but we have disgraced you so many times in the eyes of other nations. The shame is ours, whether we live in Jerusalem, Judah or as captives in countries where we have been scattered because we were not loyal to you. ⁸All of us have sinned. This includes our kings, our rulers and our local leaders. ⁹But you, O Lord, are merciful and gracious, always ready to forgive even though we've rebelled against you. ¹⁰We didn't obey your laws even though we claimed to be your people. We have done just the opposite of what you asked and have gone contrary to what you told us through your prophets.

¹¹Yes, all of us have transgressed and broken your law. We have turned the other way and not listened to your voice. Everything that Moses said would happen to us has now happened because we sinned against you. ¹²But your word is true and what Moses said to us and our rulers was right when he warned about the disastrous consequences of sin. Jerusalem has been ravished more than any other city known to man. ¹³Moses wrote down what would happen. We knew it, yet we didn't repent and stop sinning. We didn't ask you, our gracious God, to help us change our sinful ways and pay attention to your truth.

¹⁴So you watched to see what we would do and then had to discipline us because we disobeyed. O Lord, whatever you do is right and what has happened to us is the result of our own disobedience.

¹⁵You brought us out of Egypt with such a great display of power that people everywhere still speak of it. But we still disobeyed you. ¹⁶O Lord, in view of all your righteous acts for us in the past, don't let

Jerusalem and your people continue to be humiliated because of our sins and the sins of our parents. Jerusalem and your people have become the brunt of jokes everywhere we go. ¹⁷So dear Lord, our gracious and merciful God, please listen to my prayer and my request and look favorably on Jerusalem and your Temple which is desolate, not only for our sake, but for your sake, the sake of your reputation. ¹⁸O Lord, please listen to me and hear what I have to say. Please look and see for yourself how the city that everyone knows belongs to you is in ruins. We are not pleading with you because we've been good, but because you're so merciful and forgiving. ¹⁹O God, forgive us our sins. O Lord, please listen to me and do something. Dear God, don't put off your decision to take us back home. You said it would be seventy years and you would restore the city and the Temple, but now you're talking about extending the time. For your sake, as well as for the sake of Jerusalem and your people, please don't change your mind."

The Seventy-Weeks Prophecy

²⁰While I was praying and confessing my sins and the sins of my people and pleading with the Lord on behalf of Jerusalem and His holy mountain, ²¹Gabriel quickly flew to my side to help me. He was the one who had talked to me before and helped me to better understand parts of the vision. It was about the time of evening worship when he arrived. ²²He said, "Daniel, I'm here to tell you what's happening behind the scenes and to help you understand things more clearly. ²³As soon as you started praying, God asked me to come and help you. So now I'm here to give you more insight into the vision. You are dearly loved by God. So listen carefully to my explanation of how you and your people fit into the vision.

²⁴"Seventy weeks have been allotted to your people and to Jerusalem—each day representing a literal year. (These

seventy weeks or four hundred and ninety years are the first part of the two thousand three hundred-year prophecy.) They have been given to your people to stop their rebelliousness, repent of their sins and accept God's salvation as an atonement for their iniquity and bring in everlasting righteousness. Near the end of the seventy weeks, the Messiah will ratify the vision, anoint the heavenly sanctuary and begin His high priestly ministry. ²⁵When a Persian king gives the command to rebuild Jerusalem the two thousand three hundred-year prophecy will begin. But before the Messiah comes and is anointed, there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks (or four hundred eighty-three years). After the seven weeks (or forty-nine years) Jerusalem will be rebuilt in spite of great opposition.

The Coming of the Messiah

²⁶"Sixty-two weeks (or four hundred and thirty-four years) after the city is rebuilt, the Messiah will come. (Then one week or seven years will be left to your people.) After three-and-a-half years, the Messiah will be cut off, but not for Himself. Three-and-a-half years later, your nation's probation will end. Then Jerusalem and the Temple will be destroyed. War, destruction and desolation will come in on the land like a flood. The end has been decreed and is certain. ²⁷During this last prophetic week, God will fulfill His covenant promise to your people. But just three-and-a-half years into the Messiah's ministry, they will turn Him over to strangers to be crucified. This will bring to an end the ancient sacrifices and offerings. For the next three-and-a-half years God will extend one last call to your people, but the rulers will not listen which will bring about the desolation. However, the nation that destroys the city and the Temple will also come to its end."

Vision of the Son of Man

10 It wasn't until the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that I had another vision. It extended over centuries and was also difficult to understand. But it was explained by the angel so I could better grasp its meaning.

²The vision came after I had fasted and prayed for three full weeks. ³During this time I ate no delicacies, no meat, no choice foods or drink and denied myself any personal luxuries until the three weeks were over. ⁴On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, I was standing and looking at the mighty Tigris River. ⁵Suddenly I was in vision and saw someone standing in the distance dressed in a white linen robe with a belt of gold around his waist. ⁶His whole body seemed to radiate light and his face was as bright as a flash of lightning. His eyes looked like flickering flames of fire and his arms and legs were shiny like highly polished bronze. His voice sounded like a huge choir speaking in unison. I knew it was the Son of Man. ⁷I was the only one who saw this. Those who were with me knew something mysterious was happening. They were so frightened, they ran away and hid. ⁸I was left by myself and continued in vision, but my strength left me, and I slumped to the ground feeling terribly unclean. ⁹I could hear what He was saying, but as he talked, I fell into a deep sleep with my face down and knew nothing that was going on around me.

The Kings of Persia and Greece

¹⁰Then I felt someone touch me and help me get up on my hands and knees. ¹¹It was the angel Gabriel. He said, "Daniel, God loves you very much. Now listen and try to understand what I'm going to tell you. But first stand up." I did, although I was very weak and trembling. ¹²He said, "Don't be afraid, because the first day you humbled yourself and started to fast and pray for an explanation of the vision, your prayer was heard. Now I've come to

help you understand it. ¹³The reason for the three-week delay is that the king of Persia refused to cooperate and help carry out God's plan for His people. Then Michael, the Prince of the Lord's host, came to help me. He stayed there to hold the evil powers in check and counteract their counsel. ¹⁴Now I've come to help you better understand what will happen to your people in the days ahead. What I'm going to tell you will fill in some of the details of the previous visions that you had. They're all part of one prophecy that extends to the end of time."

¹⁵When he said that, I bowed my head and was speechless because I remembered how terrible those visions had been, as well as the explanations he had given me. ¹⁶Then Gabriel veiled his brightness, took on human form and touched my lips. When I opened my mouth, I could speak again. So I said, "Sir, this vision was terrible. It scared me and has left me very weak. ¹⁷I'm your servant, but I have so little strength. It's difficult for me to carry on a conversation. I can hardly breathe. But I know you can read my thoughts."

¹⁸He touched me again, and I felt new strength flow into me. ¹⁹He said, "Don't be afraid. God loves you very much. Peace be to your soul and strength to your body." As soon as he said that, I became even stronger. So I said, "Sir, now I'm strong enough to listen and concentrate on what you have to say." ²⁰Then he said, "I've come for the sole purpose of helping you better understand the visions you've had. As soon as I do this, I must go back to continue my work with the king of Persia and later with the king of Greece. ²¹First, let me tell you what is written in God's Book of Truth about events to come. No one else is strong enough to contend with Satan's forces who are trying to control the kings of the earth, except Michael, the Prince of the Lord's host."

11 Gabriel continued, "In the first year of Darius, the Mede, right after Babylon had fallen, I was sent there to support and strengthen him. ²After Cyrus, three more kings are to rule Persia. The fourth one will be richer and stronger than the three before him. Because of his riches and strength, he will attack the country of Greece. ³But a strong king will arise in Greece and defeat the Persians. He will extend his conquests farther than any previous king and will do whatever he wants. ⁴At the height of his powers, the young king will suddenly die and his kingdom will be divided. Eventually it will emerge into four parts ruled by his powerful commanders. Some parts will be given to others, but not one part of his kingdom will be given to his descendants.

Kings of the North and the South

⁵"One of these commanders and his family will rule Egypt and become very strong. He will be known as the king of the south. Another commander and his family will rule Syria and will become stronger than those who supported him. He will be known as the king of the north and will greatly extend his kingdom. ⁶There will be war between Egypt and Syria. At a later time, the ruler of Egypt will make an alliance with the ruler of Syria by giving him his daughter in marriage. But the alliance will not last and she, her husband, her child and all those who support her will be killed.

⁷"But one from her family will become king of Egypt and will avenge her death by attacking the king of Syria. He will be victorious in his attack and will conquer all of Palestine. ⁸He will take many captives and bring back the sacred idols that had been taken away. He will also bring home much silver and gold. Then he will honor his god for giving him the victory. He will not attack the king of Syria again. ⁹After some years of peace the king of the north will attack the king of the south to retrieve his riches, but he will not defeat the king of the south.

The king of the north will be forced to return to his own land.

¹⁰"Then the anger of his sons will be stirred up and they will assemble a huge army. One son will be murdered and the other will sweep down on Egypt like a powerful flood and capture many fortresses. He will also overrun the land of Palestine. ¹¹Then the king of the south will become angry and declare war on Syria and inflict a terrible defeat on her large army. ¹²He will be proud of his victory and the thousands he has killed, but he will not follow up on his success. In a few years he will die. ¹³The king of Syria will attack the new king of Egypt to avenge himself of his earlier defeat. This time he will have a larger army and be better equipped.

¹⁴"Many others will stand up against the king of Egypt. The violent among your people will try to use this to advance the national interest and fulfill God's promises, but will not succeed. ¹⁵The king of Syria will push south and capture the most fortified cities by building dirt ramps to the tops of their walls. Even the stronger Egyptian army will not be able to stand against him. ¹⁶He will take over Palestine and do whatever he wants. He will try to force your people to give up their religion and adopt the religion and culture of the Greeks. ¹⁷Then the king of Rome will come with the strength of his kingdom and invade the land of Palestine. He will force the king of Syria to withdraw and cast his influence over the land of Egypt. The king of the south will give him his daughter, but she will not be for him nor stand by his side. ¹⁸He will turn his attention to the coastlands in the north and then take his army and return to his homeland. He will have many victories but his arrogance and pride will lead to his downfall. ¹⁹After his return home, he will stumble and fall at the hand of one of his own friends who will assassinate him.

²⁰"His successor will issue a decree for everyone to be taxed to support his kingdom. A few years later he will die

peaceably, not by assassination or in battle. ²¹In his place, someone despised and looked down on will obtain the throne. He will do so, not by force but by intrigue and political maneuvering. ²²Once he becomes king, no one will dare oppose him. He will have a huge army under his command and will lead military campaigns both east and west. It will be during his reign that the Prince of the Covenant will be put to death. ²³The king will make agreements with other nations presumably to protect them and promote each other's mutual interest as allies. But he will turn these agreements to his own advantage. ²⁴He will extend his kingdom and do things his forefathers never thought of doing. He will plunder his allies and distribute their wealth among his nobility, army commanders and troops. He will be successful and overthrow many fortresses, but only for a short time. ²⁵Before this, he will invade the land of Egypt and engage a large and powerful army in battle, but the forces of Egypt will not be able to stand up against him. ²⁶He will find that his worst enemies are back home among those who eat with him at his table. Palace intrigue will be rampant. The armies of those who want the throne will fight each other at the cost of many lives. ²⁷At times two kings will sit at the same table but will lie to each other, for their minds are bent on evil. Their lies will not help them, for they will come to their end at God's appointed time. ²⁸One king will set his heart against the holy covenant and come against the city of Jerusalem and destroy it. He will then return to his own land with great riches.

The Northern King

²⁹"Another king will rule the empire. He will try to restore its glory but the kingdom will not be as it was before. ³⁰Barbarian hordes, like fearless sailors from Cyprus, will attack the empire, but he will succeed in holding it together.

To strengthen his kingdom, he will turn against those who are loyal to God's covenant and support those who are suppressing it. ³¹He will use his army to back up his demands. He will help set up the abomination of desolation that will claim authority over the daily ministries of the heavenly Sanctuary. ³²This will produce a new king of the north who will seduce with smooth and slippery talk those who oppose him. He will tell lies to God's people, but those who know God will resist him. ³³They will teach people the truth, and for doing this, they will be killed by sword or flame or will have their homes taken away or be tortured and put in dungeons. This will continue for some time. ³⁴They will receive a little help. Though many will fall, still many more will be added, but some of these will not be sincere nor will they love God. ³⁵Because of persecution, many will lose their lives, but the faith of all will be purified, refined and cleansed. This will continue right up to the beginning of the time of the end. Then there will be a little interval of peace before the actual end comes.

³⁶"The king of this new Roman power will exalt himself above all other rulers and gods and claim to speak in place of the God of heaven. He will magnify himself and be successful only as long as God allows. ³⁷He will respect neither the God of his fathers nor the One whom women desired to bear. He will exalt himself above all that is worshiped and sit in his temple and speak as if he were God. ³⁸He will align himself with civil powers to accomplish his ends. He will honor the god of gold, silver, precious stones and priceless treasures, a god of riches and power which his fathers did not know. ³⁹He will challenge the strongest nations by the power of a god of his own choosing. Those who honor him, he will reward. He will appoint rulers over cities and nations and extract a price for the right to their own land.

The Northern King's Alliance

⁴⁰“He will make an alliance with a king who has many chariots, horsemen and ships. Those from the south will push at this king and he will respond like a whirlwind and with his armies will sweep through many countries like a flood. ⁴¹Many will stumble and fall and be swept away. Not even the Promised Land will escape, but some from Edom, Moab and Ammon will believe and be saved. ⁴²He will extend his influence and power over many countries, including Egypt. ⁴³He will control the treasures of silver and gold, and his wealth will exceed the ancient riches of Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia. ⁴⁴But messages coming from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will fear for his survival. Then he will lash out with great fury and will destroy as many as he can to protect his kingdom. ⁴⁵He will set up his power between the seas and the glorious holy mountain and put his authority between God and His people. But he will come to his end, and no one will help him.”

The Time of the End

12 Gabriel continued, “At that time, Michael, the Great Prince who protects God’s people, will finish His work in heaven and bring all things to an end. But before He comes, there will be a time of trouble such as there never has been since there first were nations, even up to that time. That’s when God’s people will be delivered, everyone whose name is written in His book. ²Many who sleep in their graves will be resurrected to see His coming, some to everlasting life, but some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³Those who understood and acted wisely will shine as the brightness of the firmament, and those who led many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever.

⁴“You need to stop writing now, Daniel, and roll up the scroll. What is written will be sealed and will not be fully understood until the time of the end when many will

open the scroll, and interest in the prophecies will increase. There will also be great advances in knowledge, and many people will travel back and forth all over the world.”

⁵The scene changed, and as I looked, I saw two beings standing by the Tigris River, one on this side and one on the other side. ⁶Then I saw One dressed in white linen standing above the waters, and the one who helped me understand the prophecies asked Him, “How long will it be before all these things end?” ⁷He raised both His right hand and His left hand toward heaven and took an oath to the One who lives forever and ever that these things would only be allowed to continue for a time, times and half a time. The power of the one who tries to crush God’s holy people will be broken and all things will come to a close.” ⁸I knew this meant three-and-a-half prophetic years, with each day representing a year, but I didn’t understand how everything I had seen would fit together. So I asked, “Sir, what will happen after all these things take place?”

⁹He said, “Daniel, these things are closed up and sealed until the beginning of the time of the end. ¹⁰At that time many people will purify their lives and take their stand on the side of truth. The wicked will continue to be wicked and won’t understand these things, but those who are wise will study and know that the end is near. ¹¹From the time when the abomination of desolation (which suppresses the truth of the daily ministry in heaven) was first set up until the time of the end begins, will be one thousand, two hundred and ninety prophetic days. ¹²Blessed are those who wait for the events beginning with the end of the one thousand, three hundred and thirty-five prophetic days.

¹³“Go about your work. Soon you’ll go to your rest, but what you have written will help God’s people during the time of the end. When the Lord returns, you will be resurrected and will receive your reward.”

HOSEA

1 This is the message that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, during the reigns of the kings of Judah from Uzziah to Hezekiah and during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel.

Hosea's Wife and Children

²When the Lord first spoke to Israel through Hosea, He said to him, "Go ahead and marry the girl you say you're in love with, but she has an adulterous character like her relatives, and she will influence her children to be like her. She will be unfaithful and commit adultery as my people commit spiritual adultery against me." ³So Hosea married Gomer, and she conceived and bore a son.

⁴The Lord said to Hosea, "Call him Jezreel, for soon I will punish the house of Jehu for his massacre at Jezreel. It was there that he killed not only the king of Israel and the royal family, but many innocent people for personal advancement. ⁵I will break the power of Israel's army in the Valley of Jezreel."

⁶Gomer's second child was a girl. The Lord said to Hosea, "Call her Lo-Ruhamah (meaning 'not pitied'), for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel that I should forgive them. ⁷But I will continue to have mercy on the house of Judah. I will save them, but not by bow, by sword, by war or by horsemen."

⁸After Gomer had weaned her daughter, she became pregnant again and gave birth to a son. ⁹The Lord said to Hosea, "Call him Lo-Ammi (meaning 'not my people'), for the children of Israel are no longer my people and I am no longer their God. The Northern Kingdom will be taken and will be no more.

Israel Will Be Restored

¹⁰However, as a people, Israel will not perish but will be as the sand of the sea which no person can measure or count. Though it can be said of them, 'These are no longer God's people,' the day will

come when it will be said, 'These are the people of the living God.' ¹¹The time will come when the descendants of Judah and Israel will be one. They will choose one Leader and will live together in the land that I have given them. I will show my love for them in the Valley of Jezreel."

2 The Lord continued, "The time is coming when you will be able to call your brothers, 'God's people,' and your sisters, 'Loved by God.'"

God's People Unfaithful

²"But now I want you to plead with the nation of Israel as sincerely as if you were pleading a case in court. Tell her that she is no longer my wife, and I am no longer her husband. Tell her to remove the adulterous look from her face and cover her exposed breasts. ³If she does not change, I will strip her naked and make her as bare as the day she was born. I will turn her into a dry and parched land, and she will die with thirst. ⁴I will not show my love to her children, nor will I have mercy on her descendants, because they're the offspring of a shameless wife who has become a prostitute. ⁵Their mother has played the harlot and conceived her children in disgrace. She said, 'I will go after my lovers, no matter what. They will give me food and drink, linen and wool, oil and wine.' ⁶Therefore, I will block her path with thornbushes. I will wall her in so she cannot find her way. ⁷She'll chase after her lovers but not be able to catch them. She'll look for them but not find them. Then she'll say, 'I think I'll go back to my husband for I was better off with him than now.'

⁸"Yet she has never acknowledged that over the years I was the one who gave her food and drink, linen and wool, oil and wine. She has never admitted that I was the one who lavished her with silver and gold, which she used in the worship of Baal. ⁹Therefore, I will take back

my grain when it's ready to harvest and my grapes when they're ready to pick. I will take back my linen and wool that I gave her for clothing. ¹⁰I will strip her naked in front of her lovers and expose her lewdness to everyone. No one will be able to stop me.

¹¹"I will put an end to all her celebrations, her new moon festivities and her false worship on the Sabbath. I will put an end to all her appointed feasts. ¹²I will destroy her vineyards and fig trees, which she said she got from her lovers, from her gods of the sun and the rain. Wild animals will devour her vineyards and her orchards will become a wilderness. ¹³I will punish her for the days she burned incense to Baal, for decking herself with rings and jewelry, for going after her lovers and for acting as if I didn't exist. I, the Lord, have spoken.

God's Mercy

¹⁴"I will strip her of all her luxuries and take her back to the desert so she will sense her need of me. There I will win her back with kindness and words of love. ¹⁵Then I will bring her home and give her back her vineyards. I will turn her disgrace into a door of hope as I did for Joshua in the Valley of Achor. She will respond to my kindness with singing as she did in the days of her youth when she first came out of Egypt. ¹⁶She will again call me her beloved husband and will not call me her taskmaster. ¹⁷I will take the names of Baal from her lips and she will not speak of her gods again.

¹⁸"When that day comes I will make a covenant with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air and the little creatures of the ground. I will abolish the bow and the sword from the land. There will be no more war, and my people will live in peace and safety. ¹⁹I will take Israel back as my wife. I will shower her with mercy and love, and she will be mine forever. ²⁰I will not turn away from her and she will again accept me as her Lord. ²¹In that day I will speak to the heavens, and they will

bring the rain. ²²I will speak to the earth, and it will respond to the God who plants by yielding rich harvests of grain, grapes and oil. ²³I will plant my people in the land and they will prosper. I will love those who were called 'Not Pitied,' and to those who were called 'No Longer My People.' I will say, 'You are my people,' and they will say, 'You are our God.'

Israel Will Come Back to God

3 The Lord spoke to me again, saying, "Go and find your wife and tell her that you still love her, even though she has left you and has had many lovers. Show her that you love her just as I love the people of Israel, even though they have gone after fertility gods and sit in front of them eating the delicate raisin cakes they baked for them." ²So I went and found my wife working as a prostitute. I paid the man she worked for fifteen pieces of silver and ten bushels of barley and bought her back. ³Then I told her that I was willing to wait many days for her to see if she would leave me to play the harlot as she had done before, or if she would want me as her husband again.

⁴In this same way the people of Israel will have to go many days without a king, without the holy vest of the high priest, and without gods and sacred pillars where they like to go for answers. ⁵After many days the people of Israel will return and seek the Lord with all their hearts. In the last days, they will turn to the Descendant of David as their rightful King. They will respect the Lord their God and come to Him in awe, seeking His goodness. And He will bless them.

The Lord's Charge Against Israel

4 Hear the charge of the Lord, you Israelites! The Lord has a charge to bring against the inhabitants of the land. Listen to what He says, "There is no faithfulness and love anymore, and the people no longer know me as their God. ²There is nothing but cursing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery throughout the

land. Crime continues to increase and one murder follows another. There is bloodshed everywhere. ³Because of your sins, I'm letting the land dry up. Everyone will suffer and many will die. Even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea will feel the effects.

⁴You're so stubborn, it's useless to reason with you. You're always accusing and blaming one another, but the priests who are supposed to teach you the truth are also to blame. ⁵I will put an end to this by destroying your mother, the nation of Israel, before your eyes. You and your false prophets have been stumbling along and sinning day and night. ⁶My people are destroying themselves from a lack of knowledge. They don't really know me and reject the truth about me. That's why I have rejected your priests, because they have rejected my commandments and my laws. That's why I have not accepted their children as priests.

⁷The more priests you have, the more you sin against me. I will change the honor and glory of your priests into shame and disgrace. ⁸Listen to me, you priests! You grow rich from the sins of my people. They bring you their offerings and gifts when they sin, so you let them sin more and more. ⁹You have led my people astray and by your example they have become like you. I will punish you and your people and make you pay for your sins. ¹⁰All of you will eat but still be hungry. You will carry on your temple prostitution to have good crops but will have none, because you have forsaken the Lord your God and have gone after other gods.

Israel's Idolatry

¹¹Sexual sins are robbing you of your senses. Wine is taking away your understanding. ¹²My people ask for a revelation from Asherah, an idol of wood! They're caught up in their fertility rites and go after other lovers and turn their backs on me. ¹³On every mountain they sacrifice to their gods. On every high hill they burn incense. They worship their idols under

every spreading oak and poplar because the shade is pleasant. That's why your daughters become prostitutes and your daughters-in-law commit adultery.

¹⁴I will not punish your daughters and daughters-in-law for their actions, because the men themselves go off with prostitutes. They think that by their sexual rituals they will please their gods who will increase their crops. My people are destroying themselves. ¹⁵Even though the people of Israel to the north are unfaithful to me, you people of Judah should not follow their example and become guilty of the same thing. Don't go up north to worship at Gilgal or Bethel and there make promises in the name of the Lord your God. ¹⁶The Israelites are like stubborn cows. How then can I feed them like lambs in a broad pasture?

¹⁷The people up north have joined themselves to idols. The whole tribe of Ephraim is under a spell. Let them alone. There is nothing more we can do for them. ¹⁸After they finish drinking together, they have their sexual rituals and go through their fertility rites, and their priests love it. ¹⁹Soon a whirlwind will come and carry them away. They will find that their gods will bring them nothing but dishonor and shame."

A Prophecy Against Israel and Judah

5 Listen to this, you priests! Pay attention you leaders of Israel! Listen, you who belong to the royal family! The Lord says, "You have perverted justice, now justice will fall on you. You've become a trap to the people at Mizpah and a net to those who live in Mount Tabor. ²You also dug a pit for the people of Acacia. Israel is corrupt and has lost her reason. I will punish all of you.

³I know all about the tribe of Ephraim. Nothing that happens in Israel is hidden from me. The people of Ephraim are caught up in ritual prostitution and the whole nation follows their example. Israel has become totally corrupt. ⁴The sins of Israel are keeping the people from

returning to me. The spirit of fertility rites and temple prostitution in front of Baal has so implanted itself in their hearts that they can't let go. Idolatry has such a hold on them that they no longer acknowledge me as their God.

⁵Their arrogance testifies against them. Israel stumbles in its guilt and Judah is not much different. ⁶They take their sheep and cattle and offer sacrifices to the Lord, but it doesn't do them any good. They will not find the Lord, because He has withdrawn Himself from them. ⁷They're unfaithful to the Lord. The illegitimate children conceived during their fertility rites are not the Lord's children. By their New Moon sacrifices they bring about their own ruin, and their enemies will come and destroy their land.

⁸Blow the ram's horn in Gibeah! Sound the trumpet in Ramah! Raise the battle cry in Bethel! Listen to the sounds of war to the north of you, you people of Benjamin and Judah, and let this be a warning to you. ⁹The tribe of Ephraim will be destroyed, for the day of his reckoning has come. The Northern Kingdom of Israel will be no more, just as I have said. ¹⁰The princes of Judah are like those who remove landmarks to steal their neighbor's land. I will pour out my displeasure on them like a flood. ¹¹Ephraim will be oppressed and crushed in judgment because he's determined to worship idols. ¹²If necessary, I will devour Israel as maggots devour a decomposing body. I will bring rottenness to Judah.

¹³When Israel saw her sickness and Judah her sores, they turned to Assyria for help. But the great king will not be able to cure their nations' ills or heal their wounds. ¹⁴I will be like a lion to Israel and like a young lion to Judah. I will tear their nations to pieces, then walk away. I will carry them off, and no one will rescue them.

¹⁵I will return to my place. I will leave my people until they admit their guilt and confess their sins, until they suffer

enough to come looking for me, pleading for me to help them."

A Call to Sincere Repentance

6 The time will come when people will say, "Let's return to the Lord! He has punished us, but He's also the One who will save us. He has wounded us, but He will bandage our wounds and heal our broken hearts." ²It will seem like two days and He will revive us; like only three days and He will restore us to live in His presence. ³Let us acknowledge the Lord by our obedience, let us press on to know Him better. He will shine on us as surely as the day dawns. He will come to us as surely as the winter rains fall on the earth and the spring rains ripen the harvest."

God Longs for His People

⁴The Lord says, "What am I going to do with you, Israel? What am I going to do with you, Judah? Your love for me is like the morning mist, like dew that disappears when the sun comes out. ⁵I have sent my prophets to you again and again, warning you of judgment to come. My requirements were as clear as lightning flashing across the sky. ⁶You knew that I wanted your love, not more animal sacrifices. I desired a relationship with you, not more burnt offerings.

⁷Like Adam who broke the covenant I made with him and sinned knowingly, you, too, turned against me and broke the covenant I had made with you. ⁸Gilead is a city full of evil men whose hands are stained with the blood of innocent victims. ⁹Priests are like gangs of robbers waiting for someone to come along. They will even order someone killed on the road to Shechem, a city of refuge. ¹⁰I see a horrible thing in Israel. Ephraim has given himself to fertility worship and rites of prostitution. The people have totally defiled themselves. ¹¹I also have set a time for those of you in Judah to be punished if you continue to do wickedly."

7 The Lord says, “Whenever I think about healing my people and restoring their land, I look and see wickedness and all the evil they do. Dishonesty and deceitfulness are everywhere. Thieves steal at will and the innocent are robbed in broad daylight as they walk along the streets. ²It never occurs to the wicked to think that I see everything they do and that I don’t just overlook it. Their wickedness is everywhere. How can I not see it? ³Even the king delights in their cleverness and wicked deeds, and his sons join the people in their sins.

⁴They’re all burning with lust like an oven whose fire the baker has just lit as he waits for the dough to rise. ⁵On the king’s birthday, he and his princes got so drunk that they made fools of themselves and joined the mockers who plan evil against those who are good. ⁶The hearts of the people are like an oven. They eagerly plot evil deeds. Their passion smolders all night, and by morning, it’s a blazing furnace. ⁷All of them are like that. Their hearts burn with wickedness, and in the heat of their passion, they even assassinate their kings. One after another is killed, and no one calls on me to stop it.

⁸Ephraim is like a pancake not turned to avoid burning. They say that I’m their King, then ask their idols to protect them. ⁹Foreigners have robbed Ephraim of his strength, and he doesn’t even know it. He’s like an old man whose hair has turned gray, whose days are numbered. ¹⁰The arrogance of Ephraim and Israel testifies against them. In spite of what has happened to their country, the people still won’t turn to the Lord for help.

Israel Goes to Other Nations for Help

¹¹Israel is like a silly little dove. It flits back and forth. First it flies to Egypt for help, then to Assyria. ¹²Next time Israel’s envoys go by I will throw out my net and pull them down like birds of the air. I will punish Israel for all the evil she has

done. ¹³The nation is doomed because the people have left me. Israel will be destroyed because they have rebelled against their God. I love them and long to save them, but all their talk about me is nothing but a big lie.

¹⁴“They don’t pray and talk to me from their hearts, but throw themselves on the ground and wait in front of me as the heathen do. When they pray for big harvests of grapes and grain, they cut themselves like pagans in front of their gods, yet all the time their hearts are full of rebellion. ¹⁵Even though I brought them up, trained them and made them strong, they’re still against me. ¹⁶They’re not coming to me for help, but go to a god that’s powerless. They’re as trustworthy as a cracked bow that looks good but can’t be used. Because of their arrogance, their rulers will fall by the sword and die at the hands of the Assyrians, and the Egyptians will stand by and laugh.”

The Apostasy of Israel

8 The Lord says, “Sound the trumpet! The enemy is ready to swoop down on the land like an eagle. My people have broken the covenant I made with them and have rebelled against my teaching. ²The people of Israel cry to me for help. They claim me as their God and believe that they are my people, ³but they have rejected everything that’s good, so their enemies will come and invade the land.

⁴The people choose whoever they want as king without asking me. They appoint leaders without my approval. They take their silver and gold and make idols for themselves, then worship them to their own destruction. ⁵I despise these golden idols that the people of Samaria worship. How foolish will this go on before they stop this foolishness? ⁶A craftsman from Israel made a golden calf for them, and they worship it as God, but I will crush it to pieces.

⁷“The people have stirred up a wind, and it will come back on them like a whirlwind. Their wheat is not growing to pro-

duce the flour they need. But even if I didn't withhold rain and their wheat should grow, foreigners would come and snatch it up. ⁸Israel has become like other nations and is as worthless to me as a broken pot. ⁹My people are as stubborn as wild donkeys. They have gone to their lovers. They have paid other nations to come and help them. ¹⁰I will gather them up and punish them for their sins. Soon they'll writhe in pain as the mighty king of Assyria invades their land.

¹¹"The people of Israel build more and more altars, but the more offerings they bring, the more they keep on sinning. ¹²I've had my prophets write down for them what I want them to do, but they have rejected what I said as something strange and foreign. ¹³They offer sacrifices to me and eat some of the meat as they are supposed to, trying to please me. But I will not overlook their evil. I will punish them for their sins and send them back into slavery, back to the kind of lives they had in Egypt. ¹⁴The people of Israel have built fortresses, but have forgotten their Protector. The people of Judah have fortified their cities, but I will send fire on their cities and destroy them."

The Time for Punishment Has Come

9 People of Israel, stop celebrating and rejoicing in your gods as the heathen do. You have turned away from your God and committed adultery with temple prostitutes near every threshing floor, rejoicing over the harvest you think you got from Baal. ²But soon your threshing floors and wine presses will be empty and they will not give you the grain and grapes you need. ³The Lord will remove you from the land and send you to a foreign country to live under the lash as your ancestors did when they lived in Egypt. You will be taken away and forced to eat the unclean foods of the Assyrians. ⁴In the land where you'll be taken, there will be no Temple of the Lord. You'll not be able to bring Him the firstfruits of your grain

and grapes and you'll weep over the food you have to eat to stay alive because it makes you unclean in the presence of the Lord.

⁵So what will you do on the festivals of the Lord and the appointed days to honor Him? ⁶Even if you survive the war and escape destruction, the Egyptians will come and take you away, and you'll live and die in a foreign land. Your treasures of silver will be taken from you, and your houses will be empty. Soon your cities will be full of weeds and thorns.

⁷The time for punishment has come; the days of reckoning are here. When that happens, the people will know it. They looked at the Lord's prophets as fools, at inspired men as being insane. ⁸I sent my prophets to them as watchmen. They warned the people of the wickedness of their ways because I cared about them. But everywhere they went you set traps for them and treated them as enemies in the very land God gave you. ⁹The people have sunk to the same level as the Benjamites did at Gibeah when they raped the wife of a Levite until she died. God punished them for their sin, and He will do the same to Israel.

¹⁰The Lord said, "When I found Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I rejoiced over them because it was like finding juicy grapes in a desert. When I saw their loyalty to me it was like seeing the firstfruits on a lovely fig tree. But when their descendants came to Baal Peor, they began worshiping that shameful idol, and they became as disgusting as the thing they loved. ¹¹Therefore, Israel's glory and greatness will fly away like a bird. She will be like a woman who weeps because she can no longer have children. ¹²But even if she concentrates on raising the children she has, I will take them away from her, and not one of them will be left. I will abandon the Northern Kingdom and it will disappear."

¹³O Lord, to think that Israel was once as prosperous as the coastal city of Tyre, planted in a very pleasant place! Soon

the land will be invaded by the Assyrians who will have no mercy on them or their children. ¹⁴Lord, don't give them the increased fertility they're asking Baal for, but give their women wombs that miscarry and breasts that are dry.

¹⁵But the Lord said, "Because of their wicked worships at Gilgal and their sinful deeds throughout the land, I will no longer protect them. Their leaders have rebelled against me and I will drive them from the land. ¹⁶The people of Israel are like a plant whose roots have dried up. It can no longer bear fruit. Their nation will be taken from them, and their children will be killed in the war."

¹⁷The God whom I serve will reject His people to the north because they no longer listen to Him. They will be taken away and will wander among the nations and eventually disappear. People will refer to them as "The Ten Lost Tribes."

Israel's Captivity

10 The people of Israel once prospered like a spreading grapevine full of grapes. But the more they prospered the more altars they built. The more productive their land was, the more money they spent on their idols and sacred stone pillars. ²People whose hearts are divided must bear their guilt and suffer the consequences. The Lord will destroy their altars and their sacred stone pillars.

³After the Assyrians invade the land, the people of Israel will say, "The Lord took away our king because we didn't fear Him. What could a king do now for us even if we had one?" ⁴Our kings make promises but never keep them. They take oaths and make agreements with no intention of carrying them out. Lawsuits are springing up over the land as quickly as poisonous weeds in a newly plowed field. ⁵The people of Samaria fear the golden calf of Bethel they made for themselves more than they fear the Lord. But soon the people and their idolatrous priests will weep over their idol because its glory

will be gone. ⁶It will be taken to Assyria as a tribute to the victory of the emperor. Israel will be disgraced and she will be ashamed of the idol she loved and the advice she followed.

⁷Israel's king will be carried off and will disappear from sight like a twig floating away on water. ⁸The hilltop shrines and high places of wickedness where Israel worshiped her idols will be destroyed. Thorns and thistles will grow up and cover her altars. People will call to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"

⁹The Lord says, "The people have neither really repented of their sins nor changed their ways. Their hearts are still like the hearts of the people of Gibeah when they raped the wife of the Levite until she died. So war will come and destroy them because of the evil they have done. ¹⁰I will not overlook their sinning. I will punish them by sending their enemies against them who will invade the land and put them in bondage. I will punish my people for their wickedness, for they are doubly guilty.

¹¹"Israel is like a trained heifer that enjoys the bountiful harvests and loves to thresh new grain. Judah is no different. I have never put them under a heavy yoke before. But now I will harness Judah to the plow and Israel to the harrow and let them taste what it's like to work in the hot sun. ¹²It's time for my people to sow righteousness and to reap mercy. It's time for you to break up the unplowed ground of your hearts and seek the Lord until I come and rain my righteousness upon you. ¹³You have sown nothing but wickedness, and you have reaped nothing but evil. You have eaten the fruit of your own deception and lies. You have trusted in your nation's strength, in your many chariots of war and in your large armies.

¹⁴"But war will come to you, and all your fortresses will be destroyed. It will be like the day when Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, invaded the land and mothers with children in their arms were thrown

to the ground and trampled to death. ¹⁵This is what will happen to the people of Bethel and all Israel because of their great wickedness. As the rays of the morning sun quickly usher the stars out of sight, so the last king of Israel will be ushered out and the Northern Kingdom will be no more."

God's Love for His People

11 The Lord said, "When Israel was a child I loved him. Out of Egypt I called my son and brought him home. ²But the more I spoke to them, the more they turned away from me. Soon they were sacrificing animals to Baal and burning incense to idols.

³Yet, I was the One who took Israel by the hand and taught him to walk. I was the One who watched over him. But the people of Israel don't seem to know that I did all this for them and healed them. ⁴I drew them to me with cords of love and kindness. I picked them up and held them to my cheek. I took the yoke from their backs and bent down to them and fed them.

⁵"They've forgotten all that and refuse to return to me. They will soon find themselves in the same situation they were in when they lived in Egypt. Assyria will invade the land and take them away. ⁶War will sweep through their cities, and swords will flash in their streets. The enemy will break down the gates of the city and will spare neither old nor young. Their plans will not succeed because they refuse to listen to my counsel. ⁷They are bent on turning away from me. Even if they cry to me for help, I will not lift them up and free them from the yoke that was placed on them.

⁸O Ephraim, O Israel, how can I give you up? How can I do this to you? How can I abandon you and turn you over to your enemies? Can I destroy you as I did Sodom and Gomorrah, as I did Admah and Zeboiim? No! My heart won't let me! My love for you is still strong. ⁹I will not destroy your cities in anger. I am God and

not man. The Holy One of Israel has not left you. I will continue to show mercy.

¹⁰"Some of my people will yet follow the Lord and accept me as their God. Those who truly love me will hurry back home from the east and the west. ¹¹They will flock to me as birds out of Egypt, as doves out of Assyria. I will settle them in their houses and comfort them with my love. I have spoken. ¹²But the way it is now, Israel has surrounded me with lies. Judah is no longer faithful to me, even though I've been faithful to her."

12 Whichever way the wind blows, that's the way Israel goes. She makes treaties with Assyria to the east and goes into business with Egypt to the south. Yet, every day there's more news of violence and treachery.

²The Lord also has a warning for Judah. He will punish Israel for the sins of her people. He will let them reap what they have sown. So don't follow their example or do what Israel is doing. ³Remember how your father Jacob struggled with his twin brother Esau in the womb when they were ready to be born, and even though he came out last, he became first. When he grew to be a man, he wrestled with God. ⁴He wrestled with the Angel of the Lord and would not let Him go until He blessed him. Years before the Angel of the Lord had spoken to Jacob at Bethel when he was on his way to Mesopotamia and had assured him of His presence. ⁵He is the Lord, the God of hosts, the mighty God of heaven. ⁶So return to the Lord. Be loyal and true to Him. Maintain love and justice and wait patiently for your God. He will surely come and save you.

⁷The Lord said, "The people of Israel can't be trusted. Their merchants love to cheat and take advantage of others any way they can. ⁸Ephraim, the leading tribe in Israel, says, 'We are rich and increased with goods. We are wealthy, and no one can point to us as sinners.' ⁹But I am the

Lord your God, the One who brought you out of Egypt. I will strip you of your wealth and turn you into wanderers. I will make you live in tents again as you did when you lived in the desert, as in the time of the Feast of Shelters. ¹⁰I spoke to you through prophets, giving them visions and dreams to tell you, but you refused to listen.

¹¹“You worshiped idols in Gilead, sacrificed bulls in Gilgal and set up altars in your fields, asking your gods to give you abundant harvests.

¹²“Judah, your father Jacob fled to Mesopotamia and worked there to pay for his wife by tending sheep. Yet, the Lord did not forsake him, but brought him back home. ¹³The Lord used Moses, His servant and prophet, to bring His people out of Egypt to preserve and care for them. ¹⁴But the people of Israel north of you have forced the Lord to discipline them. He will punish them for their sins and for the disgrace they have brought on Him.”

Judgment on Israel

13 In the past, when the tribe of Ephraim spoke, the other tribes trembled as they listened. He was the strongest among them and all others looked up to him. But he became enamored with Baal and worshiped him, and Israel followed his example. Because of this, Ephraim will be carried away. ²Israel is sinning more and more. The people keep on making images of Baal, a god conceived by human minds and made by human hands. They even kiss their calf-idols and sacrifice to them. ³Therefore Israel will be like the morning mist; like the early dew, their nation will disappear. She will be like the chaff which the wind blows away from the threshing floor. Israel will be like smoke that rises from the fire to be no more.

⁴The Lord said, “I am the Lord your God who led you out of Egypt. You should have no other god except me. No one can save you but me. ⁵I cared for

you in the wilderness and protected you from the burning heat. ⁶But when you came to the good land, you became satisfied, then proud, and soon you forgot all about me. ⁷So I will come at you like a lion; like a leopard I will wait for you to come along the path. ⁸I will come at you like a mother bear robbed of her cubs. I will rip you open and expose your heart. I will devour you like a lion. I will tear you to pieces like a wild animal.

⁹“I will let your enemies destroy you because you have turned against me, the only One who could help you. ¹⁰Where is your king? Ask him to save you! Where are the leading men of your cities? You said, ‘Give us a king!’ ¹¹Against my wishes, I gave you a king, but now I will take him away, and your kingdom will disappear.

¹²“The sins of Ephraim and his guilt in influencing the other tribes are recorded for the day of reckoning. ¹³Israel still has a chance to live, but the people refuse to turn to me. They are like an unborn baby who won’t come out of its mother’s womb. ¹⁴Shall I redeem him from death? Shall I rescue him from the grave? Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction? I will show Israel no mercy.

¹⁵“Even though Ephraim flourishes like a weed, I will send a hot east wind, and the springs and wells will dry up. I will send his enemies against him, and they will plunder his land and strip his treasury of everything they find. ¹⁶Israel must bear her guilt. No longer can I protect Samaria in her sinning. The nations will say, ‘What happened to their God? Where is He?’ Therefore, I will let her enemies come, and her people will fall by the sword. Her little ones will be dashed to pieces, and her pregnant women will be ripped open.”

Hosea’s Last Plea

14 Return to your God, O Israel! Your own sins have been your downfall. ²Return to the Lord and let this be your prayer, “O Lord, forgive us of our sins.

Receive us according to your graciousness, and we will praise you with our lips and offer you the fruit of a contrite heart instead of the sacrifices of bulls. ³We admit that Assyria can't save us, and war horses can't protect us. We promise never again to go to our idols for help and worship them as if they were our God. We know we made them with our own hands. Lord, have mercy on us. We're without a father and have no one to turn to."

⁴The Lord said, "If my people confess their sins, I will forgive them and heal their waywardness. I will love them freely and will no longer be displeased with them. ⁵I will be like a refreshing dew to Israel and he will blossom like a lily. Like a cedar of Lebanon he will send down his roots deep into the ground. Like trees in the spring, my people will come alive with new

growth. ⁶His branches will spread and his beauty will be like an olive tree. His fragrance will be like the cedar trees in Lebanon. ⁷Once again he will live under my protection. He will flourish like a well-watered garden and blossom like a huge vine. His fame will be as the fine wine of Lebanon.

⁸Israel will have nothing more to do with idols, and I will answer his prayers and look after him. I will be like an evergreen tree to him, giving him shade season after season. I will be a source of blessing to him, and he will be fruitful because of me."

⁹May those who are wise understand what is written and take it to heart. May they discern God's will and understand His purposes for them. The paths of the Lord are right and the righteous will walk in them, but the rebellious will stumble and fall.

JOEL

1 This is the word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel.

Locusts Destroy Crops

²Pay attention, you leaders, to what I have to say. Everyone living in Judah, listen to me. Has anything like this ever happened in our day or in the days of our ancestors? ³Tell your children why this is happening. Let them tell their children who, in turn, should tell it to the next generation.

⁴Swarm after swarm of locusts have swept down on our crops. What the mature locusts have left, the young locusts have eaten, and what the young locusts have left, the grasshoppers have eaten.

⁵Wake up and weep, you drunkards! Weep and wail, all who drink wine, because the grapes for making it are gone! ⁶I saw swarming into our land a powerful army too numerous to count. Its teeth are as sharp as a lion and its fangs as a lioness. ⁷It destroyed our grape vines and ruined our fig trees. It stripped off the bark, leaving the branches white and bare.

⁸Weep as a virgin weeps when the man she was going to marry is tragically killed. ⁹There is no grain or harvest of grapes. There are no firstfruits to bring to the Lord. The priests who minister before Him are deprived of their livelihood. ¹⁰The fields are bare. The ground is hard and dry. The grain is ruined. The grapes are dried up and there is no olive oil.

¹¹Weep in despair, you who have farms. Cry aloud, you who own vineyards. Grieve for the wheat and the barley because there is no harvest. ¹²The grapevines and fig trees are dying, and so are the pomegranate, palm and apple trees. All the fruit trees have withered and died, and the joy of living is gone from the people.

Mourn for the Land

¹³You priests, put on the sackcloth of sorrow and repentance. Cry aloud and weep at the altar with penitence for the

people and for what they have done. Go into the Temple and mourn all night. Sleep in sackcloth, for there are no more grain or drink offerings at the Sanctuary.

¹⁴Declare a day of fasting and prayer. Call a meeting; bring in the leaders and the people to fill the house of God and cry to Him for help. ¹⁵The day of the Lord's visitation has come! What a dreadful day it is! It comes as destruction and sweeps through the land. ¹⁶I saw our crops destroyed, our food taken away before our eyes. Joy has gone out of our worship and gladness from the house of our God.

¹⁷The seeds lie shriveled in the dry earth. The storehouses for grain are empty. Our granaries are swept clean.

¹⁸The cattle bellow in distress. The herds mill about because there is no pasture for them. Our flocks of sheep are suffering.

¹⁹I cry out to you, O Lord, because the fields and trees are dried up, scorched by the sun as if set on fire. ²⁰Even wild animals cry out to you because the streams have dried up and the sun's fire has consumed the forests.

The Day of the Lord

2 Sound the alarm in Jerusalem! Blow the trumpet in Zion! Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord has begun and its fury is yet to come! What is coming upon Judah is like the destruction that will come on the whole world at the end of time. ²It will be a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. The locusts will come across the mountains like a great and mighty army invading the land. There has never been anything like this, nor will there be anything like it again.

³The locusts are like a forest fire that eats up everything in its path. In front of them the land looks like the Garden of Eden; behind them the land looks like a wilderness. Nothing escapes their jaws. ⁴They look like powerful war-horses galloping into battle. ⁵With sounds like rat-

ting chariots of war, they chew their way across the fields and over the tops of the hills. They sound like crackling flames burning dry stalks. They're lined up like a mighty army for battle.

⁶People look at them and tremble; their faces grow pale. ⁷Like an attacking army, they charge and scale the walls. They march in line, never swerving from their course. ⁸They never get in each other's way. They burst through defenses without breaking ranks; nothing stops them. ⁹They rush against the city; they run along the walls. They climb into houses like thieves, going in through any opening they can find.

¹⁰The earth moves as they advance and the heavens quiver. The sun and moon are darkened, and the stars are not visible.

¹¹Like the plague of locusts, the Lord will also send a mighty army whose forces are numberless. They are fearless and strong for they obey His commands. The day of the Lord is terrible! Who can endure it?

A Call to Repentance

¹²The Lord says, "It is not too late. Return to me with all your hearts. Come to me with fasting and weeping over your sins." ¹³Tear your hearts, not your clothes. Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and full of compassion, patient and abounding in love. He keeps His promise and is waiting to forgive, not to punish. ¹⁴Who knows? He might have pity on us and again bless us with abundant crops. Then we can again bring to Him the firstfruits of our grain and grapes as we did before.

¹⁵Blow the trumpet on Mount Zion! Call a solemn assembly. Announce a day of fasting and prayer. ¹⁶Assemble all the people; sanctify the congregation, including the aged, children and those nursing at the breast. Also invite the bridegroom and his bride; let them leave the bridal chamber and come to the holy fast.

¹⁷Let the priests and those who minister between the Temple porch and the altar weep and pray. Let them say to the Lord, "Spare your people; have pity on

your inheritance. Don't let the nations despise us and make us an object of scorn. Don't let them say, 'Where is this great God of yours?'"

God Restores the Land and Pours Out His Spirit

¹⁸Then the Lord heard and felt sorry for His people and showed His concern for His land. ¹⁹He said to them, "I will give you grain and grapes and olive oil that the locust destroyed, and once again you will have plenty to eat. I will bless you, and other nations will no longer scorn you. ²⁰I will remove the locusts from the land. Those in the front I will send into the Dead Sea and those in the rear into the Mediterranean, and they will die there because of what they have done to you. And I will send the army from the north back home."

²¹Don't be afraid, O land, but be glad and rejoice; the Lord will do wonderful things for you. ²²Don't be afraid, you creatures of the wild, for the open fields are turning green again. The trees are budding and will soon bear fruit. The fig tree and the vine are getting ready to yield their riches.

²³Be glad, O people of Zion; rejoice in the Lord your God. He has given you the early rain to water the seed and the latter rain to ripen the harvest. ²⁴The threshing floor will be filled with wheat and the vats beside the presses will overflow with oil and the rich juice of grapes.

²⁵The Lord says, "I will restore what the locusts have eaten and what the enemy destroyed during the years they were in your land. ²⁶Your land will be filled with plenty. You will eat until you are full. You will praise the Lord for what He has done. You will no longer be put to shame. ²⁷You will see that I am in your midst. You will know that I am the Lord your God and there is none else. You will no longer be mocked and shamed by your enemies.

²⁸"After this I will pour out my Spirit on people, regardless of their position. Your sons and daughters will prophesy; your old men will dream dreams and your

young men will see visions. ²⁹I will pour out my Spirit on my servants, both men and women. ³⁰In the last days there will be signs in the sky and on the earth. There will be blood, fire and billows of smoke. ³¹The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon will be as red as blood before the time of judgment and the awesome day of the coming of the Lord. ³²All who believe and call upon the Lord for help will be saved. My people in Mount Zion and Jerusalem will be delivered. And among the remnant will be others who responded to the Lord's call."

Multitudes in the Valley of Judgment

3 The Lord said, "At that time, I will bring my people back from captivity and restore the prosperity of Judah and Jerusalem. ²I will also gather the surrounding nations and bring them to the Valley of Judgment. I will judge them for all they have done to my people. They scattered them everywhere and divided my land among themselves. ³They cast lots over the captives. They traded boys for prostitutes and sold girls to buy wine.

⁴"What do you have against me, you people of Tyre and Sidon, you who live in Philistia? Are you trying to pay me back for something you think I did to hurt your people? If that's your excuse for attacking my people, I will do to you what you have done to them. ⁵You took my silver and gold and carried off my finest treasures to your temples. ⁶You took my people from Judah and Jerusalem and sold them as slaves to the Greeks so they would be taken as far away from home as possible. ⁷I am going to bring them back from where you sent them and I will do to you what you have done to them. ⁸I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah and they will sell them to the Sebeans, a nation far away in Arabia. I, the Lord, have spoken."

⁹Then the Lord said, "Take this message to the nations: Prepare for war! Call your warriors together! Let all the fighting men draw near and get ready for an

attack. ¹⁰Beat your plows into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weak say, 'I am strong!'

¹¹"Come, all you nations, and assemble in the Valley of Judgment. The Lord will meet you there." O Lord, come and bring the armies of heaven with you. ¹²The Lord said, "Let the nations come to the Valley of Judgment. There I will judge them. ¹³Swing the sickle, for the harvest of the earth is ripe. Come and trample the grapes in the winepress for the vats are full. Their wickedness has reached its limit."

¹⁴Multitudes, multitudes in the Valley of Judgment! The day of the Lord is near when He will decide the fate of nations. ¹⁵In that day, the sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars will not shine. ¹⁶The Lord will roar like a lion from Mount Zion. His voice will thunder from Jerusalem. The earth will quake and the heavens tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for His people, a stronghold of defense for those who make up Israel.

¹⁷The Lord said, "In the day I bring the nations of earth to the Valley of Judgment, my people Israel will know that I am the Lord their God. I will return to my city, Jerusalem. Foreign armies will not invade her nor will hostile strangers ever walk her streets again.

God Will Bless His People

¹⁸"In that day the mountains will be covered with abundant vineyards and the hills will be filled with cattle to produce milk. Pure water will be plentiful for all of Judah, and a stream will flow from the Temple of the Lord to water the Acacia Valley.

¹⁹"But Egypt will not be so blessed. Edom will remain a wasteland because of the violence they have done to my inheritance. They have attacked the land of Judah and killed those who were innocent. ²⁰But Judah and Jerusalem will be inhabited forever. ²¹I will acquit all who come to me and will cleanse them from shedding innocent blood. I will come and live with my people in Jerusalem."

AMOS

1 These are the words of Amos, one of the shepherds from Tekoa. This is what he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam II was king of Israel: ²The Lord thunders from Mount Zion and His voice goes forth from Jerusalem. When He speaks, the valleys dry up and the grass on Mount Carmel turns brown.

Judgment on Israel's Enemies

³The Lord says, "The people of Damascus in Syria have repeatedly attacked my people and savagely so. Because of their transgressions I will not hold back any longer. They have treated my people with utter cruelty, dragging boards with iron teeth over the backs of their prostrate bodies and ripping open the pregnant women.

⁴"I will send fire upon the palace built by King Hazael and burn down the fortresses built by his son, King Benhadad. ⁵I will break down the gates of Damascus and destroy the inhabitants living in The Valley of Baalbek and the one in charge of the House of Delights. Syria will be conquered and her people taken away as prisoners to the land of Kir."

⁶The Lord says, "The people of Gaza in Philistia have repeatedly attacked my people. I will not hold back any longer. They invaded the land and sold whole villages and communities into slavery to the Edomites. ⁷I will send fire upon the walls of Gaza and burn down her fortresses. ⁸I will remove the rulers of Ashdod and the one who holds the scepter in Ashkelon. I will turn against Ekron and will not stop until the last of the Philistines living there are gone."

⁹The Lord says, "The people of Tyre have repeatedly mistreated my people. I will not hold back any longer. They invaded the land and sold whole villages and communities into slavery to the Edomites, completely disregarding the

treaty of brotherhood she made with Israel. ¹⁰I will send fire upon the walls of Tyre and consume her fortresses."

¹¹The Lord says, "The descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother, have also repeatedly attacked my people. I will not hold back any longer. They hunted them down with the sword and didn't have an ounce of compassion for their own relatives. Their rage had no limits, and their tempers flared unchecked. ¹²I will send fire upon the wall of Teman and burn down the fortresses of Bozrah."

¹³The Lord says, "The people of Ammon have also repeatedly attacked my people. I will not hold back any longer. They went to war to gain more territory, and in their cruelty, ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead. ¹⁴I will send fire upon the wall of Rabbah and burn down her fortresses. Fighting will rage like a storm on the day of battle and the war cries of attacking troops will be heard everywhere. ¹⁵Their king and his officials will go into exile together."

2 The Lord says, "The people of Moab also have attacked my people again and again. I will not hold back any longer. They attacked the descendants of Esau because at times they had helped Israel. They attacked the land of Edom and dug up the bones of the king friendly to Jacob and burned them to ashes. ²I will send fire upon Moab and consume the fortresses of Kerioth. Moab will go down in great tumult and her people will die amidst war cries of attacking troops and blasts of trumpets. ³I will destroy the king of Moab and all his officials with him."

Judgment Against Judah

⁴The Lord says, "The people of Judah have gone after idols again and again. I will not hold back any longer. They have rejected my laws, looked down on my teachings, and have not walked in the

way of my commandments. They have believed lies and been led astray by the same gods their ancestors followed. ⁵I will send fire upon Judah and burn down the fortresses of Jerusalem.”

Judgment Against Israel

⁶The Lord says, “The people of Israel have continuously worshiped other gods. I will not hold back any longer. They sell their own people into slavery—a righteous man for silver just because he can’t pay his debts and a poor man for as little as a pair of shoes. ⁷They trample the poor in the dust and deny justice to those who are oppressed. Father and son have sex with the same woman and profane my holy name. ⁸At their places of worship they rest on blankets taken from the poor, and in the house of their gods they drink wine taken as fines from those who have no money.

⁹“O Israel, I have loved and protected you. I destroyed the Amorites for you, whose men were as tall as cedars and as strong as oaks. I destroyed them root and branch. ¹⁰I brought you out of Egypt, protected you for forty years in the wilderness, and gave you the land of the Amorites as your inheritance. ¹¹I raised up prophets from among your sons, and some of your young men chose to be Nazarites, setting themselves apart for me. Isn’t that true?

¹²“But you forgot what I had done for you. You forced your young men to drink wine and break their vows of abstinence. You told my prophets not to prophesy. ¹³I will press you down and break your willful spirit just as a wagon loaded with grain crushes everything beneath it. ¹⁴The swift will not escape; the strong will have no strength. The powerful warrior will not be able to save himself. ¹⁵The skilled archer will not be able to stand his ground. The foot soldier will not get away; the horseman will not go far. ¹⁶On that day even the bravest will drop their weapons and run. The Lord has spoken.”

The Prophet’s Message

3 People of Israel and Judah, listen to the word the Lord has spoken against the house of Jacob, against those He brought out from the land of Egypt. ²The Lord said, “Of all people on earth, you’re the ones I chose to be known as my people. This is what makes your sins so terrible and is why I need to discipline you, because you belong to me.

³“Can two people walk together unless they both agree to do so? ⁴Does a lion roar from the thicket when he sees no prey? Does he growl from his den when he has nothing to protect? ⁵Does a bird get caught in a trap if the trap has not been baited and set? Does a trap spring shut when nothing sets it off? ⁶Does a war trumpet sound in a city without making people afraid? Does judgment come to a city without the Lord having done it? ⁷But the Lord does nothing without revealing His plans to His servants the prophets. ⁸When a lion roars, who isn’t afraid? When the Lord gives a man a message, who dares to change it?”

Samaria Punished

⁹The Lord said to Amos, “Cause my message to be heard in the palaces of Ashdod and Egypt. Tell them to come and look at the crimes committed against me by my own people in Samaria. They should see the oppression that I see and the terrible condition of the poor who have to live there. ¹⁰The rich fill their mansions with loot taken by violence. They don’t know right from wrong or what it means to be honest. ¹¹Then the nations will understand why I will let the enemies of my people invade their land, surround their cities, pull down their defenses and carry away their treasures. ¹²As a shepherd rescues only two leg bones or an ear of a lamb from the lion’s mouth, so a pitifully few Israelites in Samaria who now recline on their couches will be rescued.”

¹³The Lord told me to listen carefully to what He said and to warn the house of

Jacob of what is coming. ¹⁴He said, "I will punish Israel for her sins. I will destroy the apostate altars in Bethel. I will break them to pieces and throw them to the ground. ¹⁵I will destroy both their winter and summer houses, even those paneled with ivory. Their great mansions will come to an end."

4 Listen to me, women of Samaria! You are like the well-fed cows grazing in the rich pastures of Bashan. You oppress the poor and mistreat the weak. You demand that your husbands supply you with whatever luxury you want, including expensive liquors and wines! ²The Sovereign Lord has sworn by His holy name, saying, "The time will come when your enemies will drag you away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks. ³You will be dragged through the nearest breach in the wall and taken away into captivity."

⁴The Lord also said, "Go on; go to Bethel or Gilgal to worship your idols and continue sinning if you must. Go ahead and bring your morning and evening sacrifices to me, and your tithes every third day. ⁵Go ahead and bring me your bread and freewill offerings, then brag about it. This is what you love to do. But you Israelites love your idols more."

Israel Does Not Change

⁶The Lord said, "I disciplined you in every city by bringing leanness to the land and a lack of bread to every town, but you didn't come back to me. ⁷I withheld the rain from you just when your crops needed it most. I even sent rain on one city and not on another to get your attention. Rain fell on one field and not on another, but you never asked me why. ⁸People made their way from city to city looking for water, but there was not enough to go around. In spite of this, you didn't return to me.

⁹"Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards with blight and mildew. I let locusts devour your fig trees and olive

trees, but you still didn't come back to me. ¹⁰I sent a plague among you like the one I sent on Egypt. I let your enemies kill your young men in battle and capture your horses of war. I filled your nostrils with the stench of dead bodies in your camps, but you still didn't return to me. ¹¹I destroyed some of your cities with fire as I destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Those of you who survived were like branches plucked from the flames, but you still didn't return to me. ¹²Therefore, I will discipline you even more. And because I will do this, you had better prepare yourself to meet your God."

¹³The Lord is the One who made the mountains and created the winds. He shares His thoughts and plans with men. He changes day into night and walks along the heights of the earth. This is His name: The Lord God Almighty!

A Funeral Chant for Israel

5 Listen, O house of Israel, to this chorus of mourning I'm singing about you: ²"Israel has fallen, never more to rise. She lies abandoned in her own land, and no one is there to raise her up." ³The Lord says, "If a city sends out a thousand troops, only a hundred will come back. If a town sends out a hundred troops, only ten will come back."

A Final Call to Repent

⁴The Lord also says, "Return to me and I'll protect your cities and towns, and the people will live. ⁵Don't continue going to Bethel, Gilgal or Beersheba to worship your idols. Gilgal will soon go into exile, and Bethel will be reduced to rubble."

⁶Listen to the Lord and return to Him. Change your ways and you will live. If not, the Lord will break out against Israel and Ephraim, as fire in the stubble. The fire will burn and devour Bethel and there will be no one to put it out. ⁷You who twist justice and grind the righteous into the ground are doomed!

⁸The Lord made the stars, the Pleiades and Orion. He turns darkness into light

and daylight into night. He takes water from oceans and pours it over the face of the earth. The Lord Almighty is His name. ⁹He destroys strongholds and brings fortified cities to ruin.

¹⁰You hate those who challenge your courts and despise those who tell the truth. ¹¹You have trampled on the poor and forced them to give up their grain. You have built beautiful mansions of cut stone, but you will not live in them. You have planted lush vineyards, but you will not drink their wine. ¹²I know your wickedness and the terrible crimes you commit. You take bribes to prosecute innocent people and stop the poor from getting justice in court. ¹³In these evil times wise men keep quiet because there's nothing they can do.

¹⁴Listen to the Lord. Do good instead of evil. Change your ways and you will live. Then the Lord will be with you. You say He's with you, but He's not. ¹⁵You need to hate what's evil and love what's good. Bring justice back to your courts. It may be that the Lord will have mercy on our children and on Israel, and the descendants of Joseph will live.

A Day of Darkness Is Coming

¹⁶The Lord Almighty says, "The time is coming when there will be weeping in the streets. The farmer will be called in from the field to weep over the calamity in his home. The mourners will sing their lamentations. ¹⁷You will weep in your vineyards, for I will pass through the land and take them away from you. The Lord has spoken."

¹⁸Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! What good will it do you? It will be a day of darkness, not a day of light. ¹⁹It will be like a man fleeing from a lion, only to meet a bear! Or like a man who escapes disaster and reaches into his cupboard, only to be bitten by a snake! ²⁰The day of the Lord you look for will bring darkness, not light! It will be a day of gloom, not brightness.

²¹The Lord says, "I despise your reli-

gious festivals. I can't stand your worship and religious meetings. ²²Even though you bring me your whole burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them. Even though you bring me your choice animals as peace offerings, I refuse to accept them. ²³Stop your songs of praise—they're just so much noise. I will not listen to the music of your harps. ²⁴Instead, I want to see justice flow through your streets like a river, and righteousness like a never-ending stream.

²⁵"Did I require a lot of sacrifices and offerings from your fathers during the forty years they were in the wilderness in order to protect them? Do you think I need animal sacrifices to be your God? ²⁶The problem is with you! You look to Sakkuth, the star-god of Saturn, as your king. You build shrines for Kaiwan. You worship the star of your god Rephan. You take little images of idols with you wherever you go. ²⁷What am I going to do with you? I will send you into exile and you'll be taken to a land beyond Damascus. The Lord, the Almighty God, has spoken."

God's Last Warning to Israel

6 Woe to you who have an easy life, who are complacent in Zion and feel secure in Samaria! Woe to you, notable men of Israel, to whom people look for help! ²Look at the city of Calneh and see what Assyria has done to it. Then look at the great city of Hamath and the Philistine city of Gath to see what has happened to them. Are you stronger than those kingdoms? What is the size of their land compared to yours? ³You keep putting off the evil day. You refuse to admit that a day of disaster is coming. You only bring the day closer by what you are doing.

⁴You sleep on beds inlaid with ivory, lounge on luxurious couches, and feast on choice lambs and fattened calves. ⁵You compose songs and invent musical instruments and strum away on your harps, thinking you're doing what David did. ⁶You drink wine by the bowlfuls and

use the finest perfumes. But you give no thought to the moral condition in Israel and the coming ruin of the house of Joseph. ⁷You will be the first to go into exile. Your feasting and revelry will come to an end.

⁸The Sovereign Lord, the Lord Almighty, has taken an oath, saying, "I hate the pride I see in the people of Israel and I detest their luxurious mansions. I will turn their capitol and everything in it over to their enemies. ⁹Even if ten men are in one house, they will all die. ¹⁰When the last one dies a relative will come in and as he is ready to carry the last body out, he'll say, 'Is there another dead male in the house?' If someone answers and says, 'No,' then he'll say, 'Hush! Before you know it, you'll mention the Lord's name and He'll hear us, and I might be the next one to die.'"

¹¹The Lord has given the command to Israel's enemies, and they will smash the big house to pieces and break the small house to bits. ¹²Do horses gallop on boulders? Do men plow water with oxen? Have you ever seen such weird things before? Yet, you're doing something even more weird. You're misusing justice to kill innocent people and turning righteousness into something to be avoided. ¹³You brag about capturing Lo Debar and boast of taking Karnaim. You gloat over the strength of your army. ¹⁴But this is what the Lord says, "I will bring a nation and its armies against you. They will defeat you and occupy your land from the Hamath Pass in the north to the brook of the Arabah in the south."

Vision of Locusts

7 In vision I saw the Lord preparing a swarm of locusts. This was just after the king's crop had been harvested and the second crop was coming up. ²I saw the locusts come and eat every green thing in the land. I cried out, "Lord! Forgive your people! Their nation is so small, how can they survive?" ³Then the

Lord told me that He had relented. He said, "What you saw will not happen."

Vision of Fire

⁴Then I had another vision and saw the Lord getting ready to bring a judgment of fire on His people. I saw the fire devour rivers and lakes, then start to burn up the land. ⁵I cried out, "Lord! Stop! This nation is so small, how can the people survive?" ⁶Then the Lord told me that He had relented. He said, "What you saw will not happen."

Vision of a Plumb Line

⁷I had a third vision and saw the Lord standing by a wall, checking to see whether it was straight, and He had a plumb line in His hand. ⁸He turned to me and said, "What do you see in my hand?" I said, "A plumb line." He said, "I am using the plumb line to measure my people and to show them that they are like a wall out of line. This time I will not relent. I will spare them no longer. ⁹The places where the people of Israel go to worship their idols will be destroyed. The sanctuaries at Bethel, Dan and Gilgal will be left in ruins. I will bring the house of Jeroboam to an end with the sword."

Amaziah's Complaint to the King About Amos

¹⁰When I gave the Lord's message to the people, Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, sent word to King Jeroboam, saying, "Amos is plotting against you. He's stirring up the people in the very heart of Israel. He'll end up destroying the country! ¹¹He's saying, 'Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will be taken into exile.'"

¹²Then Amaziah said to Amos, "That's enough! Go back to the land of Judah and do your preaching there. ¹³Don't prophesy here! Bethel is the king's place of worship. It's Israel's national temple to the Lord."

¹⁴Amos replied, "I'm not a prophet by profession. I was not a prophet before this, neither am I a prophet's son carrying

on my father's work. I'm a simple herdsman and fruit-picker. ¹⁵It was the Lord who called me from my work and said, 'Go up north and prophesy against my people Israel.' ¹⁶So you had better listen to what the Lord says. Don't tell me not to prophesy against Israel. ¹⁷This is what the Lord says to you, 'Your wife will soon decide to become a certified prostitute, and all your children will be killed in the war. Your property will be divided up and given to others, and you will die and be buried in a foreign country. Israel will be conquered, and her people will be taken into exile.'

Vision of a Basket of Fruit

8 I had another vision and saw a basket of fruit. ²The Lord said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "A basket of ripe fruit." The Lord said, "The time is ripe for me to discipline my people. I will spare them no longer. ³When I do this, the songs in the palace will turn into cries of mourning. Dead bodies will cover the streets. A deadly silence will hang over the city and grip the hearts of the people."

⁴Listen to the Lord's message, you who trample on the needy and bring ruin to the poor of the land. ⁵Listen to me, you who say to yourselves, "When will the New Moon festival be over so we can sell grain? When will the Sabbath end so we can market our wheat?" You can't wait to open your businesses. You love to mark up your prices, overcharge the poor, use false measures, fix your scales to cheat your customers and then congratulate yourselves on how smart you are. ⁶You love to find a poor man who has lost his job, can't pay his debts, and doesn't even have a pair of sandals for his feet. You help him escape his debts by buying him as a slave for cheap labor. And you sell sweepings with the wheat to increase its weight and make a greater profit."

⁷The Lord God of Israel has sworn, "I will not overlook their covetousness and evil deeds any more. ⁸I will make the land tremble and all who live in it will

mourn. The land will quake, rising and falling like the river Nile in Egypt. ⁹I will make the sun go down at noon and will darken the earth in broad daylight. ¹⁰I will turn your feasts into mourning and your singing into weeping. You will shave your head and put on sackcloth to show your grief and pain. You will mourn as if you had lost your only son, and the day will end in great bitterness.

¹¹"I will send a famine in the land, not only a famine of bread and water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. People will hunger and thirst for a word from the Lord, but there will be none.

¹²They will search everywhere, from sea to sea, from north to south, and from east to west, looking for some word from the Lord, but they will not find it. ¹³On that day the lovely young virgins and the strong young men will collapse for thirst in the streets of your cities. ¹⁴Those who put their confidence in the gods of Samaria and say, 'By the god of Dan' or 'By the god of Beersheba' will fall and never rise again."

The Destruction of Israel

9 I had another vision and saw the Lord standing by the altar in the courtyard of the Temple. He said to someone, "Hit the Temple pillars so hard that the whole Temple shakes. Break off the tops of the columns. Let the Temple collapse. Those who are not killed by the falling structure will be killed by the sword. No one will escape.

²"Even if they dig their way into the graves of the dead, I will find them. Even if they climb up to heaven, I will bring them back. ³Even if they hide themselves on top of Mount Carmel, I will hunt them down and catch them. Even if they hide at the bottom of the sea, I will command the water serpents to bite them. ⁴Even if they are taken into exile by their enemies, I will command the sword to slay them. I have set my eyes on them for harm and not for good, to destroy and not to help."

⁵The Sovereign Lord is the One who touches the earth, and when He does, it will begin to melt and everyone will be gripped by fear and will begin to weep. At His presence, the land rises and falls like the river Nile in Egypt. ⁶He is the One who inhabits eternity, who has His home in the heavens and makes the earth His footstool. He calls for the waters of the sea and pours them on the face of the earth. His name is the Lord!

⁷The Lord says, "People of Israel, listen to me. I think as much of the people of Ethiopia as I do of you. I brought you out of Egypt, but I also brought the Philistines here from Crete and the Syrians from Kir. ⁸I, the Sovereign Lord of the universe, have done this. I am watching all nations, but particularly the sinful nation of Israel. The time has come for me to destroy the Northern Kingdom from the face of the earth. But I will not completely destroy the descendants of Jacob.

⁹"I will shake the people of Israel as grain is shaken in a sieve. I will send them as exiles among the nations. But when I do this, not one true kernel of wheat will fall to the ground and be lost.

¹⁰But the sinners among my people will

die in war, for they said, 'God is so good. He won't let any harm come to us.'

David's Kingdom Will Be Restored

¹¹"The day is coming when I will restore David's kingdom, which is like a tent that has fallen. I will set it up again and make it as it was before. ¹²My people will once more possess the land so that the remnant from Edom and all other nations may come to Israel to seek the Lord. The Lord has spoken."

¹³The Lord also says, "The days are coming when the reapers will meet the plowmen, when the grain will grow faster than it can be harvested. The days are coming when grapes will ripen faster than pickers can harvest them, when the juice of fresh grapes will drip from the mountains and flow from the hills. ¹⁴I will bring back my people from the land of their captivity. They will build cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink of their juice; they will plant orchards and gardens and eat their fruit. ¹⁵I will bring back my people and plant them in their own land. Never again will they be uprooted from the land I have given them. The Lord has spoken."

OBADIAH

A Prophecy Against Edom

¹This is the prophecy of Obadiah telling what he saw in vision.

The Lord said about Edom, "I have sent my messengers to nearby nations, saying, 'Get ready and let's go to war against her.' ²Your country is already so small that everyone looks down on you. But I will reduce you to nothing. ³Your pride has deceived you. Because your capital city is built on a high mountain and its defenses are solid rock, you tell yourselves, 'Who can defeat us? Who can bring us down from here?' ⁴Even though you make your home high in the mountains like eagles, and though you imagine you're living among the stars, I will bring you down from there.

⁵"When thieves and robbers break into your house, they only take what they want and leave the rest. When you hire fruit pickers to harvest your grapes, they always leave a few. But your enemies will attack you and leave you with nothing. They will pick you clean. ⁶Even though you're the descendants of Esau, I will not protect you. Your country will be looted and your hidden treasures will be taken. ⁷Your allies, those who joined you to fight against Israel, will now turn against you. They will cross your borders and drive you from your country. Your friends will deceive you. Their armies will overpower you. The very ones who sat down and ate with you will set a trap for you and you won't even know it until it's too late. ⁸I will destroy the wisdom of the men of Edom. I will take away the understanding of all those who live on the mountains of Esau. ⁹Even the fighting men of Teman, known for their fearlessness, will be terrified and every soldier in the mountains of Esau will be cut down in the slaughter.

Edom Mistreated His Brother Jacob

¹⁰"Because you have robbed and killed the descendants of Jacob, your brothers

through Esau, you will be covered with shame and destroyed forever. ¹¹You stood by unconcerned as enemies broke down their gates and carried off the Temple treasures. This was just as bad as if you had been among those who cast lots over Jerusalem's wealth. ¹²Why did you gloat over the misfortunes of your brothers in Judah? Why were you glad on the day of their destruction? Why did you laugh at them in the day of their distress when they were marched off into captivity? ¹³Why did you go into Jerusalem and loot their cities after their enemies had gone and they were too weak to resist you? Why did you gloat over their suffering and misery as you seized the last of what they had? ¹⁴You stood at the crossroads and killed those who ran for safety. You caught those who escaped from their enemies and handed them over to their captors.

¹⁵"The day of the Lord is near for you. As you have done, so will it be done to you. Your cruelty and mercilessness will return on your own head. You will get back what you have given. ¹⁶The way you have treated my people on my holy mountain, that's the way you will be treated. At the end of time, all nations who turned against my people will drink the same bitter cup. All who died in ignorance will not be punished but will be as if they had not been.

Israel's Deliverance

¹⁷"But from Mount Zion deliverance will come to the house of Jacob. My mountain will become a sacred place and my people will possess the land that is rightfully theirs. ¹⁸The descendants of Jacob and Joseph will be like a wall of fire to their enemies. The house of Esau will be like straw set on fire and there will be no survivors. I, the Lord, have spoken.

¹⁹"People south of Judah will live in the mountains of Esau, and people from the foothills will possess the land of the Philistines. My people will again live in the land of Ephraim, and the people of

Benjamin will live in the land of Gilead. ²⁰Exiles from Israel who were taken by the Assyrians to Mesopotamia will return and live as far north as Zarephath. The exiles from Jerusalem who were taken by the Babylonians to the ancient land of Media will return and move into the cities of Judah. ²¹Those who have been saved will come as conquerors to Mount Zion. From there they will govern the mountains of Esau and the kingdom will be the Lord's forever."

JONAH

Jonah Refuses to Go to Nineveh

1 One day the Lord said to Jonah, the son of Amittai, ²“Go to Nineveh, that great Assyrian city, and speak against it. Tell them that I know all about their wickedness.” ³Jonah didn’t want to take on the responsibilities that the Lord had given him. So he went to Joppa, which was in the opposite direction, to find a cargo ship going to Spain. He paid his fare and went on board to get away from the Lord.

The Storm at Sea

⁴Soon after the ship had left, the Lord sent a strong wind to blow on the sea. It created such a violent storm that the ship was in danger of breaking apart. ⁵The sailors were terrified, and each man cried out to his god. They threw some of the cargo and equipment overboard to lighten the ship. Meanwhile, Jonah, exhausted from his haste, had gone below deck to lie down and fell sound asleep. ⁶The captain found him in his bunk, shook him awake and said, “How can you sleep in such a storm? Get up and pray to your God as we have to ours. Maybe He’s the One who can quiet this storm and save us and our ship.”

⁷But the storm didn’t let up. Finally the sailors said to each other, “Let’s draw lots to see who is to blame for this storm.” So they drew lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸So they questioned him, “Are you the one to blame for all this? What country are you from? What is your nationality? Why are you on this ship?”

⁹Jonah answered, “I’m a Hebrew from the country of Israel, and I worship the God of heaven who made the sea and the land.” ¹⁰Then he told them that he was running away from God and why. When the men heard this, they said, “Do you realize what you’ve done? Why did you try to run away from your God?”

Jonah Thrown Into the Sea

¹¹Meanwhile, the storm grew worse. So

they asked Jonah, “What should we do to make this storm stop?” ¹²Jonah said, “Throw me overboard, and it will stop. It’s my fault that you’re caught in this storm because I ran away from the Lord.” ¹³The sailors didn’t want to do that. They tried as hard as they could to turn the ship around and head back home. But the storm grew even worse, and they were all in danger of losing their lives. ¹⁴They cried out to the God of heaven and earth, saying, “O Lord, please don’t let us die because of this man, and don’t punish us for throwing him overboard! You, O Lord, are the One who brought on this storm, so throwing this man overboard is your decision, not ours.”

¹⁵Then they picked Jonah up and threw him overboard. Immediately, the wind stopped and the sea grew calm. ¹⁶This made the sailors even more afraid of the Lord, and they offered what they had as a sacrifice to Him and promised to serve the God of Jonah.

¹⁷Now the Lord appointed a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of that fish for parts of three days and three nights.

Jonah’s Prayer and Deliverance

2 From inside this great fish Jonah prayed to the Lord, ²“I cried out for you to save me and you heard me. From the tomb of the dead, I called for help and you answered me. ³You had me thrown into the sea and let me sink to its very depths. The mighty waves rolled over me, and the waters were all around me. ⁴I said, ‘My end has come, but I will reach out in faith and hope to look again toward your holy Temple.’ ⁵The waters came over me and I thought death was near. The sea surrounded me, and seaweed wrapped around my head, and ⁶I sank into the sea like a person falling into a pit. I went down past the base of earth’s mountains. There was no escape, but, Lord, you saved me through this great

fish. You heard my prayer and brought me up from the deep. ⁷When I felt my life slipping away, Lord, I prayed to you, and my prayer reached your heavenly Sanctuary. You heard me and saved me from death. ⁸Those who turn from you to other gods are disloyal and forfeit the grace that could be theirs. ⁹With a song of thanksgiving and praise I renew my oath of loyalty and obedience. Salvation can only come from the Lord!"

¹⁰So the Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah up on the beach.

Jonah Obeys and Goes to Nineveh

3 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²"Go to Nineveh, that great city in Assyria, and proclaim the message that I have given you." ³Jonah now did what the Lord said and made his way to Nineveh. The capital of Assyria was such a large city, it would take three days to walk all its streets. ⁴He went up and down the streets, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed!" After only the first day of preaching, the word spread throughout the city.

The People of Nineveh Repent

⁵The people of Nineveh believed what God said. So they declared a fast, and everyone who heard about it, from the least to the greatest, put on sackcloth and repented of their sins. ⁶When Jonah's message reached the king, he got up from his throne, took off his royal robes, put on sackcloth and also repented of his sins. ⁷Then he issued this proclamation to the people of Nineveh: "By order of the king and his officials, no one is to eat or drink, not even the animals. No one is to feed them or give them water for a whole day. ⁸Let everyone fast, man and animal alike. Let all the people call upon God. Let them give up their wicked ways and stop their violence. ⁹Maybe the God of heaven will be merciful to us. Perhaps He will relent and we will not have to die."

¹⁰When God saw what the people had done and how determined they were to turn from their wicked ways. He had compassion on them. He decided not to destroy the city as He had originally planned.

Jonah's Anger and God's Compassion

4 When Jonah saw the people repent, he became very angry, because he knew all along that God would forgive them. ²So he complained to the Lord. "Lord, didn't I say that this would happen even before I left home? I knew you wouldn't destroy them. That's why I tried to run away to Spain. You're a loving God, gracious, kind, compassionate, always ready to forgive and show mercy. ³Lord, let me die, because what I told the people of Nineveh won't happen. I would be better off dead than to live and be remembered as a false prophet." ⁴The Lord answered, "Do you have a right to be angry because I forgive people who repent?" ⁵Jonah, sulking, headed east and left the city. There he built a makeshift shelter to give himself some shade and to protect him from the winds blowing in from the desert. Then he waited to see what would happen, hoping that the Lord would destroy the city as He had said.

⁶But Jonah had no protection from the noonday sun. So the Lord made a vine grow over Jonah's shelter in just one night to shade his head and ease his discomfort. Jonah was grateful and extremely pleased with the plant. ⁷However, the next day at sunrise God appointed a worm to attack the roots of the vine. By noon the plant began to wither, and then it died. ⁸When the sun was at its hottest, God sent a scorching east wind to blow on Jonah's shelter. So with the heat of the sun beating down on his head and a strong east wind blowing in from the desert, Jonah was about to faint, so he said, "Lord, let me die!" ⁹The Lord said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be so angry just because you lost your vine?" Jonah said, "Yes! I have every right to be angry. I'm angry over a lot of things.

including the loss of this vine. I'm so angry, I wish I would die!" ¹⁰The Lord said, "You became attached to this vine because it pleased you, even though you didn't plant it or do anything to make it grow. It sprang up overnight, and by noon the next day it began to wither and then died, as many such plants do. Yet you feel sorry for it and miss it. ¹¹Shouldn't I have mercy on Nineveh and accept their repentance? It has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who simply don't know what's morally right and wrong. And what about all the animals? Why shouldn't I forgive the people and save their city?"

MICAH

1 These are the messages the Lord gave to Micah of Moresheth, who lived during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. In vision God showed him things about Samaria and Jerusalem.

The Coming Judgment

²Hear this, all you people! Listen, all who live on the earth! The Lord God will testify against you. Listen to Him as He speaks to you from His Temple in heaven. ³The Lord is coming out of His Holy Place. He will come down to walk on top of the mountains. ⁴They will melt under His feet like wax in the fire and pour out their lava like water rushing downhill. The valleys will split wide open. ⁵Why? Because the people of Israel have sinned and Jacob has transgressed. Who is to blame for Israel's rebellion? Isn't Samaria? Who is to blame for the sins of Judah? Isn't Jerusalem?

⁶The Lord said, "I will turn Samaria into a mound of ruins, a place for planting vineyards as in open country. I will pour the rubble of the city into the valley and expose her foundations. ⁷Her idols will be crushed, and her gifts to her gods will be burned by fire. The wealth she earned from temple prostitutes will be taken by her enemies and used to pay the wages of prostitutes working in their temples."

Micah Mourns for Samaria and Jerusalem

⁸When I heard all this, I wept. I stripped to the waist and walked barefoot. I howled like a jackal and mourned like an ostrich. ⁹Samaria's wounds are incurable and her disease has been passed on to Judah. Destruction is waiting at her gates and at the gates of Jerusalem.

¹⁰Don't repeat the story of our defeat in Gath. Don't let our enemies see us weeping. Yet our enemies will come and even our small cities will not escape. Those of you in the dusty city of Beth

Ophrah will be rolled in the dust. ¹¹Those of you in the pleasant city of Shaphir will be taken into exile, stripped to the waist and shamed. Those of you in the proud old city of Zaanan will not escape. Like the city of Beth Ezel, you, too, will be removed. You will find no refuge behind your walls. ¹²Those of you in Maroth will sit in bitterness and wait for relief, but none will come. Disaster has swept across the land even to the gates of Jerusalem. ¹³Those of you in Lachish will hitch your horses to chariots and fight, but your defeat is sure. You were the first to imitate the sins of Israel, and Jerusalem followed your example.

¹⁴Those of you in Moresheth Gath, the Lord will hand you over to your enemies who will come and take you captive. The deceitful city of Achzib will prove disloyal to the kings of Israel. They will not be able to depend on her. ¹⁵Those of you in Mareshah who glory in your possessions, the Lord will hand you over to your enemies who will take you captive. Israel's enemies will come, and her leaders will run and hide in the cave of Adullam. ¹⁶People of Judah, cut off your hair and mourn for your children. Make your heads as bald as vultures, for your children will be taken away from you into another land.

A Prophecy Against Evildoers

2 Woe to those who lie awake at night making plans to do evil! As soon as morning comes, they carry it out. ²When they want property, they take it. When they want houses, they take them. They defraud a man of his house and take away the family inheritance. No one is safe from their greed. ³The Lord said, "I will bring disaster on you and you'll not be able to save yourselves. You'll no longer walk proudly, for it will be a time of trouble like you've never seen. ⁴When that time comes, people will make fun of you. They will pretend to be Hebrews and sing

this song of mourning: "We are utterly ruined. The Lord has taken away our land and given it to our enemies. We rebelled against our God, and people know it."⁵ Woe to those who dealt unjustly with their neighbor's land; they will no longer have an inheritance in Israel.

False Prophets

⁶The people say to me, "Don't preach at us. Don't tell us about all that. God is good. He will not let us be disgraced."⁷ Let me ask, "Do you think God is limited to what He can do? Will He endure your wickedness forever? Wouldn't He send kind words to those who do right?"⁸ The Lord says, "You have treated those who really love and worship me as being against the country. You strip the poor who can't pay their debts of everything they have as an army strips its enemies before returning home from war.⁹ You drive women and children out of their own homes. You rob those who love me of the material blessings I've given them.¹⁰ It's time for you to be expelled from the land. Your sins have doomed the nation. Your land is listed for destruction. Don't think you can stay here and be safe.¹¹ If a prophet came along and deceived you by telling you good things in return for wine and beer, he would be just the prophet you would like to hear.

God Will Bring Israel Home

¹²"Yet in spite of your sins and your exile, I will once again gather you back home. I will bring together a remnant. They will be like sheep returning to the fold. The land will once again be full of people as a pasture is full of sheep."¹³ The Lord will open the way before them and lead them out of exile. They will break out of the city gates where they've been held captive and go free. The Lord Himself, their rightful King, will lead them out.

Micah Denounces Israel's Rulers

3 Listen to this message, you heads of Jacob, you rulers of Israel! Shouldn't you be more concerned about justice?² But you, too, hate what's good and love what's evil. You skin my people and take the last ounce of flesh from their bones.³ You eat my people up! You exploit them and strip them of everything they have. You break their backs with needless burdens. You chop them up like meat for the kettle or flesh for the pot.

⁴The time is coming when you will cry to the Lord, but He will not answer you. At that time He will hide His face from you. He will not listen to your prayers because of the evil that you have done.⁵ This is what the Lord says, "My people are being deceived by false prophets who promise peace to those who feed them. They wage war against those who refuse to support them.⁶ Their day is almost over. The sun will soon go down on them and darkness will cover them. Their visions and predictions will be shown to be false, invented by their pride and greed.⁷ They will be shamed and disgraced. They will be humbled, for the Lord will not answer their prayers."⁸ The Lord has put His Spirit upon me and given me the courage to speak. He has shown me what is just and right and told me to show the children of Jacob their transgressions and to point out their sins.

⁹Listen, you rulers in Jacob, you chiefs of Israel! Listen to me, you who despise justice, twist the law and distort what's right.¹⁰ You're building Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem on a foundation of wickedness.¹¹ Your judges take bribes. Your priests interpret the law for pay. Your self-appointed prophets tell you their predictions for money. Yet all of them claim that the Lord is with them. They say to each other, "The Lord is here. He'll never leave us. Nothing bad will happen to us."¹² Therefore, because of you, disaster will come and Zion will be plowed like a field. Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, and the Temple

hill will overgrow with thickets like the top of an empty mountain.

The Lord's Reign of Peace

4 The Lord's plan for Israel is that the day should come when the mountain on which the Temple stands will be the highest one of all, towering above every surrounding hill. From everywhere, people will come and stream into the Lord's Temple. ²Nations will say to each other, "Come, let's go up the mountain of the Lord, to the Temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us what He wants us to know so we can walk in His ways." Yes! The law of the Lord will go out from Mount Zion; from Jerusalem the Lord will speak to the world.

³He will judge between nations and settle disputes among those who are strong. They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations will no longer take up the sword against other nations, nor will there be war anymore. ⁴Everyone will live in peace. Each man will sit under his own fig tree and under his own vine, and no one will make him afraid. The mouth of the Lord has spoken. ⁵Today each nation worships its own god, but we will worship the Lord and will continue to walk in His name forever.

The Remnant

⁶The Lord says, "In that day I will gather together the lame, the exiled and those who have had to suffer. ⁷I will make the lame my remnant. I will make a new beginning with those who remain, and they will become a great nation. I will rule over them from Mount Zion from that day on and forever. ⁸And you, Jerusalem, the stronghold of the people of Zion, will have your former dominion restored and once again be the honored capital of my kingdom.

⁹"Why do you cry out so loudly? Has your king been taken captive? Is there no one to counsel you? Is that why you're in so much pain? ¹⁰You who live secure in Jerusalem will cry out as a woman in

labor. You will be forced to leave the city and live in the open field. You will be taken to Babylon, but I will rescue you. I, the Lord, will redeem you from the land of your enemies.

¹¹"Right now many nations are gathered against you. They say, 'Jerusalem must be destroyed! Let us gloat over her defeat and feast our eyes on her treasures.' ¹²But these nations don't know what the Lord has in mind for them. They don't understand His ways. He will punish them like grain brought in from the field to be threshed. ¹³People of Jerusalem, I will make you as strong as a bull with iron horns and bronze hooves. You will rule over many nations and devote their wealth and ill-gotten gains to the Lord of all the earth."

5 Jerusalem! Call out your troops! We are being attacked! Our enemies are coming to capture Israel's king and strike him on the cheek with a rod.

The Messiah to Be Born in Bethlehem

²But the Lord said, "Bethlehem, even though you are one of the smallest towns in Judah, out of you I will bring forth the One who is to rule Israel, who has existed from the days of eternity. ³For now the Lord will turn His people over to their enemies until the time comes when Israel is to be delivered. Then those who are in exile will come back home and be reunited with their people. ⁴When the One from Bethlehem comes and His people accept Him, He will take charge and shepherd His flock in the strength of His God, in the majesty of His might. His people will live in safety, for His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth, and He will be their peace."

Deliverance of Israel and Judgment on Her Enemies

⁵Hear, O Israel, and turn to the Lord. Then He will be with us. When Assyria invades the land, He will raise up ample

shepherds and leaders against him. ⁶His people will crush the invaders, even though they're as fierce as Nimrod. He will save His people from all those who invade the land and march across her borders.

⁷The people of Israel will be like refreshing dew sent by the Lord to the nations, like showers on sprouting plants that don't come at the request of man or wait for his desire. ⁸The remnant of Israel will live among the nations, in the midst of many peoples. They will be as strong as lions which maul their prey and tear it to pieces. ⁹All those who invade our land and attack you will be defeated, and your strength among the nations will be known by all.

¹⁰The Lord says to the nations, "The time will come when I will take away your horses and chariots of war. ¹¹I will destroy your cities and tear down your walls of defense. ¹²I will put an end to your witchcraft and take away your magic charms. You will no longer cast spells, and fortune-tellers will cease to exist. ¹³I will destroy your carved images and sacred stone pillars. You will no longer bow down to the works of your hands. ¹⁴I will pull down the wooden poles of Asherah and destroy her shrines in all the cities where she was worshiped. ¹⁵I will execute judgment on the nations that have not obeyed me."

God Presents His Case Against Israel

6 Listen to the Lord! Listen as He presents His case against Israel! Let the mountains and hills hear what He has to say! ²Listen to Him, you everlasting hills! The Lord has a case against His people. He is bringing a charge against Israel.

³The Lord says, "My people, what have I done to you? In what way have I been a burden to you? ⁴I brought you out of the land of Egypt and rescued you from slavery. I gave you Moses, Aaron and Miriam as leaders. ⁵Remember when King Balak of Moab asked Balaam to come and curse you, and instead, he blessed you? Remember your journey from Shittim to

Gilgal, how you crossed Jordan on dry ground? Think back on these things so you won't forget what the Lord has done for you and His saving acts."

⁶What should I bring to the Lord to show gratitude for what He has done for us? What should I offer as I bow before the God of heaven and earth? Should I bring Him burnt offerings? Should I bring Him the best calves I have, the ones only a year old? ⁷Will He be happy if I bring Him thousands of sheep or ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Should I offer Him my firstborn as a sacrifice for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sins of my soul? ⁸No! The Lord has told you what is good and acceptable in His sight. What is it that the Lord requires of you? It is to be just, to show mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Israel's Injustice

⁹Hear me, you who live in the city. It is a wise thing to fear the name of the Lord, to respect and honor Him. The Lord says, "Listen and learn from my rod of discipline. ¹⁰I know what treasures are stored in the houses of evil men. I know what wealth they have gotten by evil means and dishonest measures. ¹¹Should I acquit a man charged with having dishonest scales and a bag full of false weights? ¹²Your rich men are violent. They exploit the poor. Their tongues are deceitful, and they lie without hesitation.

¹³Therefore, I will destroy your land because of your sins. I've begun to smite you by letting you become sick. ¹⁴You will eat, but never feel satisfied. You will feast, but your stomach will feel empty. You will store up and save, but will end up having nothing. What you have will be destroyed or taken from you in war. ¹⁵You will plant, but not harvest. You will press olives, but have no oil. You will crush grapes, but have nothing to drink. ¹⁶You have followed the evil practices of Omri your king and of Ahab his son. You have listened to their counsels and copied their behavior. Therefore, I will

bring this land of yours to ruin and people everywhere will despise you. You will be the scorn of nations.”

Israel's Moral Decadence

7 Woe is me! I'm like a man who is starved and who goes to the orchard to look for figs, but there are none! I'm like a man who goes to the vineyard to get grapes, but they're all gone!² It seems that the godly have been swept from the land. There's not an honest person left, not one who is loyal to God. Everyone is waiting for an innocent victim to come along so they can shed more blood. Everyone hunts down his fellow countryman as if he were an enemy.³ They're all skilled in doing evil and committing crimes. Officials and rulers demand gifts, and judges ask for bribes. The powerful dictate what they want and conspire together to get it.⁴ Even the best of them are like weeds, and the most upright are worse than thorn bushes. The day that the prophet warned you about is now at the door. The time of God's visitation is here.⁵ Don't trust your neighbor or put confidence in a friend. Be careful what you say to your wife.⁶ A son dishonors his father and thinks nothing of it. A daughter turns against her mother; a daughter-in-law, against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies are those of his own house.⁷ But as for me, I will watch for the Lord. I will wait in confidence for my God. He is the One who will save me. My God will hear my prayers and answer them.

The Lord Is Israel's Light

⁸ Don't rejoice, O my enemy, over the fall of Israel and her people! For though we have fallen, we will rise again. Though we sit in darkness, the Lord will be our light.⁹ We have sinned against the Lord. So now we must endure His displeasure. But this is only for a little while. He will plead our case in court and right the wrongs we have done. He will bring us out

into the light and we will see His justice.¹⁰ Our enemies will see it and be covered with shame. We will see the downfall of the ones who taunted us, saying, "Where is the Lord your God?" They will be defeated and become as mud in the streets.

¹¹ People of Jerusalem, the day for rebuilding our walls will come, the day our Lord will extend our boundaries.¹² In that day people will come to us from Assyria in the east, from Egypt in the south, from the region of the Euphrates, and some day from sea to sea and mountain to mountain.¹³ But before that day, the earth will become as desolate as a wilderness because of the wickedness of her inhabitants.

God Throws Israel's Sins Into the Sea

¹⁴ Lord, be a shepherd to your people and guide us with your staff. Guide the flock you have chosen to be your own. We feel like sheep, alone in the woods, not knowing where to go to find pasture. Lead us and let us go to the fertile pastures of Bashan and Gilead as our people did long ago.

¹⁵ The Lord answered, "I will work miracles for you as I did when I brought you out of Egypt." ¹⁶ The nations will see the hand of the Lord on His people and will be deprived of their power. They will put their hands over their mouths and cover their ears.¹⁷ They will lick at the dust like snakes and crawl on the ground like worms. They will come out of their dens and from behind the rocks to stand before the Lord our God, fearful and trembling.

¹⁸ Who is a god like our God who pardons our sins and forgives the transgressions of His people? The Lord does not discipline forever. He delights in showing mercy.¹⁹ The Lord will once again have compassion on Israel. He will trample our sins underfoot and throw them into the depths of the sea.²⁰ He will be faithful and true to Jacob. He will show mercy to the descendants of Abraham as He promised our ancestors from the days of old.

NAHUM

1 This is the message from the Lord concerning Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, which Nahum received in vision.

God Turns Against Nineveh

²The Lord does not tolerate evil. He is jealous for that which is good and punishes the wicked. The Lord takes action on His adversaries and rages against His enemies. ³But the Lord is slow to anger, even though He's very powerful. He will not let the guilty go unpunished.

The whirlwind and the storm do His bidding, and the clouds are as dust at his feet. ⁴He orders the sea to dry up and it does; He commands the rivers to stop and they do. The lush fields of Bashan wither; the trees on Mount Carmel turn brown; the flowers of Lebanon fade. ⁵The mountains quake at His presence and the hills melt away. When the Lord appears, the earth shakes and all the people tremble.

⁶Who can stand against Him? Who can survive His displeasure? He is like a burning fire; even the rocks shatter at His presence. ⁷But the Lord is good; He is a refuge in the time of trouble. He knows those who trust Him. ⁸Yet like a rushing flood He will completely destroy Nineveh. He will destroy those who have opposed Him; He will pursue them even in the darkness. ⁹Whatever man does to plot against the Lord, the Lord will bring to an end. Sin with its arrogance and rebellion will not arise a second time. ¹⁰Men are drunk with wine and are caught in the thornbush of sin. But the day will come when all the wicked will burn up, like fire sweeping through the stubble. ¹¹You, O Nineveh, have been led astray. There is one from among you who plots evil against the Lord and gives you wicked counsel.

¹²Listen, my people, this is what the Lord says: "Though the Assyrians are strong and numerous, they will be destroyed and their nation will disappear. I disciplined you and made you suffer

under them, but I will not do it again. ¹³I will end Assyria's power over you and will tear off the shackles that bind you."

¹⁴This is what the Lord says to Nineveh: "You will have no descendants to carry on your name. I will destroy your carved images and idols that you worship in your many temples. I am preparing a grave for you, for you've become a vile and wicked city."

¹⁵Look! There on the mountains are the feet of one bringing good news! He is on the way proclaiming peace! People of Judah, celebrate your festivals and keep the vows you made to your God. The Assyrians will never invade your land again. Their power has been destroyed. They are utterly cut off.

Nineveh Destroyed

2 Nineveh! The enemy advances against you! You're under attack! Man your fortresses! Guard the roads! Marshal all your troops! Prepare for battle! The power that will shatter you has come.

²The Lord is about to restore the freedom and glory of His people as it was before you came and plundered the land.

³Now your enemies are coming! The shields of their warriors are red and their uniforms are scarlet. They're preparing to attack. Their chariots flash in the sun; their horses prance in readiness for battle. ⁴Their chariots race madly through your streets; they rush back and forth in the suburbs of the city. They glisten in the sun as if they were on fire; they dart here and there like lightning. ⁵The enemy calls up his best troops. In their eagerness they stumble as they push forward for the attack. They run to the city wall and set up their massive battering ram against the gates. ⁶The gates by the river break open, and the palace is taken and set on fire. ⁷It is decreed that people in the city be exiled and carried away. Her maidens moan like helpless doves and beat their breasts in sorrow. ⁸Nineveh is

like a pool whose water is rushing out; her people run from the city. The cry rings out, "Stop!" But no one listens. ⁹The enemy shouts, "Get the silver! Get the gold! The city is full of it! Her treasures are endless!"

¹⁰Nineveh is destroyed; she is plundered and stripped. Hearts melt and knees shake; bodies tremble and faces grow pale. ¹¹What happened to the city known as the Lion of Nations because of her fierce warriors? Her inhabitants felt as secure as cubs protected by the lioness. ¹²Soldiers provided for their families by pillaging their enemies as lions tear the flesh of their kill and fill their dens.

¹³"I am against you, O Nineveh," says the Lord. "I will burn up your chariots. Your troops will be killed by spear and sword. I will take away all the prey you took from others. The demands of your envoys will no longer be heard."

Where Was the Strength of Nineveh?

3 Woe to the city of blood, a lying and murderous city, a city of plundered and stolen wealth, never without victims! ²Listen! The cracking of whips, the rattling of wheels, the galloping of horses and the jolting of chariots! ³Charging cavalry, flashing swords and glittering spears! Casualties are everywhere, piles of the dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over corpses! ⁴Nineveh, the harlot, is being punished. Attractive, alluring, she was full of sorceries, seducing and enslaving nations by her witchcraft and deadly charms.

⁵"I am against you," says the Lord. "I will pull your skirts over your face and will let the nations see your nakedness and the kingdoms your shame. ⁶I will pelt you with filth because of your idol worship. I will disgrace you and set you up as a public spectacle. You will be treated with contempt. ⁷All who see you will back off from supporting you. They will say, 'Nineveh, that great and terrible city, lies in ruins! We will not mourn for her, comfort her or show any sympathy for her.'"

⁸Nineveh, are your defenses better than the city of Thebes, that sat by the Nile with water around her? Water was her wall and her rampart the sea. ⁹She ruled over Egypt and Nubia. There was no limit to her power. Lydia and Libya were among her allies.

¹⁰Yet she was conquered and her people taken into exile. At every street corner her infants were dashed to pieces. Her great men were put in chains and her enemies cast lots over her nobles. ¹¹Nineveh, you, too, will drink until you're drunk. You, too, will try to hide from your enemies but without success. ¹²Your fortresses are as desirable to your enemies as fig trees with ripe fruit, which when shaken drop their figs right into the mouth of the eater. ¹³Your strongest troops are as weak as women trying to swing battle swords. Your city is defenseless before the onslaught of your enemies. Your gates will be consumed by fire. ¹⁴Go ahead! Draw water for the siege! Strengthen your defenses! Work the clay to make bricks! Mix the mortar! Build your brickworks!

¹⁵No matter what you do to defend yourself, fire will destroy you and the sword will cut you down. You will be consumed like crops eaten by a swarm of locusts, because that's how you acted when you consumed the nations around you. ¹⁶You multiplied your merchants until they were as difficult to count as the stars of heaven. Like locusts they stripped the nations and then flew away. ¹⁷Your officials, too, acted like locusts. When it was cold they stayed inside the walls, but when the sun came out, they flew away to find something to consume.

¹⁸O king of Assyria, soon your governors will slumber in death, and your noblemen will sleep forever. Your people will be scattered on the mountains like sheep with no shepherd to bring them back. ¹⁹Nothing will heal your wounds; they will be fatal and you will die. All who hear the news about your death will clap their hands for joy because there is hardly one who has not felt the heavy hand of your endless cruelty.

HABAKKUK

1 This is the burden the Lord gave Habakkuk in vision.

Habakkuk's Question

²O Lord, how long do I have to call for help before you listen? How long do I have to cry, "Violence! Injustice!" before you do anything to save us? ³I can't stand such injustice and strife. How much longer will you put up with evil and let things like this go on? ⁴Law is useless. The judicial system is paralyzed. The wicked go to court and get the better of the righteous, and nothing is done about it.

The Lord's Answer

⁵Then the Lord said to me, "Keep your eyes on the nations around you, and you will be surprised at what you see. I am about to do something that you will not believe when I tell you about it. ⁶I will bring the Babylonians to power, those fierce and restless people. They're quick-tempered and ruthless. Their troops will sweep across the land and take cities that don't belong to them. ⁷They will spread fear and terror everywhere. They're a law unto themselves and take pride in promoting their own honor.

⁸"Their horses can outrun leopards, and their riders are fiercer than hungry wolves. Their horsemen are made up of people from distant lands and their horses paw the ground eager for battle. They swoop down from the hills like eagles attacking their prey. ⁹Their armies love to taste violence. When their troops approach a city, everyone is terrified. Their advance is like the desert wind. They gather captives like grains of sand. ¹⁰They laugh at kings and treat rulers with contempt. They scoff at fortified cities, and no fortress can stop them. They build ramps and take cities. ¹¹They sweep through the land and pass on like the wind. They feel no guilt and credit their strength to their god."

Habakkuk's Second Question

¹²O Lord, you are our God, the Holy One of Israel, the Just One. Will you let us die at the hands of these Babylonians? O Rock of Israel, have you raised them up just to come and punish us? ¹³Your eyes are too pure to watch such killing. How can you allow such violence against your people? It's not fair! How can you be silent when foreigners come in and slaughter your chosen ones? Yes, your people have disobeyed you, but they're still more righteous than these evil Babylonians. ¹⁴How can you let them do what they're doing? They act like animals, like beasts without a leader.

¹⁵They catch people with flesh-hooks as men catch fish. They throw their nets over them and drag them through the streets, shouting for joy. ¹⁶They worship their flesh-hooks and nets and offer sacrifices to their weapons of war. They do this because their weapons bring them the best of everything and allow them to live in luxury. ¹⁷How long will they continue using swords, hooks and nets? How long will they destroy nations and people without showing any mercy?

2 I will climb up into one of the city's watchtowers and wait to see what the Lord will do. I wonder what He will say to me and what answer I will give when I'm rebuked for my arrogant complaint.

The Just Will Survive by Faith

²Then the Lord said to me, "Write down what I will show you in vision and make it plain, so whoever reads it can understand, and a messenger can keep it in mind as he runs. ³Put it in writing because the time has not yet come for it to happen. It may seem slow, but wait for it because it will come and will surely take place. It will not be delayed. ⁴This is the message I want you to write: The nation that is proud will not survive. But those

who are righteous will, because they live by faith in their God.

Woe to the Oppressors and to Those Who Sell Strong Drink

⁵“As wine robs a man of his senses, so Babylon is deceived. Her kings are arrogant; her leaders, selfish, proud and restless. They always want more; they’re like Death which keeps taking people but is never satisfied. ⁶But the nations the Babylonians have taken will rise up against her. They will say, ‘Those who have taken what is not theirs, who make themselves wealthy by plunder and extortion are doomed! How long do men think they can go on like this and not reap what they have sown?’

⁷“This message is for Babylon: You oppressed others, and now it’s your turn. Nations will rise up and make you tremble. Those you stole from will force you to pay and will take everything you have. ⁸You plundered the people of many nations, and now they will rise up and plunder you. You have shed the blood of many people and destroyed their lands and cities, and they will do the same to you.

⁹“Woe to you who have made yourselves rich by violence and unjust gain. You have set your nest on high to escape the clutches of ruin. ¹⁰In the process you have plotted the ruin of many, disgracing your own name and losing your life and soul. ¹¹Even the stones of the walls cry out against you and the beams of the woodwork echo it. ¹²You have built a city with bloodshed and established it on crime! You have conquered others, but now you are doomed. ¹³The people have worn themselves out in labor, and all that they have built for you will be fuel for the fire. The Lord has spoken. ¹⁴But the day is coming when the earth will be as full of knowledge of the greatness of the Lord as the sea is filled with water.

¹⁵“Woe to you who have sold strong drink to your neighbor, putting the bottle to his lips and making him drunk so that he staggers home naked. ¹⁶You also will

be filled with shame rather than glory. You will be naked and exposed as unfaithful to God. You will stagger like a drunkard. The Lord will make you drink your cup of judgment, and your glory will be turned to shame. ¹⁷Woe to you who have cut down the forests, slaughtered the animals and destroyed lands and cities. Now you will be cut down, animals will eat your bodies and the land will drink your blood. This will happen to you because you have shed innocent blood and because of the violence you have brought against the people and their cities.

¹⁸“You have idolized what you have made, but what has it done for you? What good are your idols? They have led you astray. You trusted in your own creation and have looked for help to things that can’t hear or speak to you. ¹⁹Woe to you who say to a piece of wood, ‘Come to life!’ and to a stone, ‘Wake up!’ You create gods in your imagination, but they can’t reveal the future. You cover your idols with silver and gold, but they can’t even breathe, much less give you the guidance you need. ²⁰The Lord is in His holy Temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him!”

Habakkuk’s Prayer

3 This is the prayer Habakkuk prayed after the Lord had spoken to him:

²“Lord, I have heard of your fame and what you have done, and I am filled with awe. Do the great deeds you have done before. Renew your work in our midst. Though you are displeased with us, remember us in mercy.” ³In vision I saw that the Lord will come and work in behalf of His people. The Holy One will come from Teman in the south from the direction of Sinai. He will come and rescue His people. In that day His glory will cover the heavens, and His praise will echo from the earth. ⁴He will come with the brightness of the sun, and His splendor will fill the land. Rays of light will flash from His wounded hands, for there He hides His power. ⁵He will send the plagues before Him, and pestilence and destruction will

do His work for Him. ⁶When He walks, the earth shakes. When He looks, the nations tremble. Mountains crumble at His presence and ancient hills collapse under His feet. This is our God, the everlasting One, the Holy One of Israel.

⁷In vision I saw the people of Cush tremble and the tents of Midian shake. ⁸What displeased you, Lord? Did the rivers make you angry? Did the seas disobey you? Was it against them that I saw you ride the clouds as a horse and the storm clouds as your chariot? ⁹You uncovered your bow and got ready to shoot your arrows. You split the sky with lightning and tore open the earth with streams. ¹⁰The mountains saw you and trembled. Rivers of water poured down from the sky. Torrents of water swept everything in their path. The deep roared and the waves rose high. ¹¹At the sight of your speeding arrows and the lightning of your flashing spear, the sun and moon stood still.

¹²"You strode across the earth in anger, and in your displeasure you trampled the nations. ¹³You went out to deliver your people, to keep your covenant, to save your anointed ones. You crushed the leader of the wicked land, and laid bare his house. ¹⁴You pierced him through with his own spear as he and his

warriors stormed out to kill your people, gloating and rejoicing over what they were about to do to those who were in hiding. ¹⁵You marched across oceans with your riders and horses, and the mighty waves foamed at your presence.

¹⁶I saw and heard all this in vision, and I trembled. My heart pounded and my lips quivered; my knees knocked together, and my body went limp. Now that I have seen what will happen to the nations invading our land, I will be patient and wait. The time will come when the Lord will punish those who have abused His people.

A Song of Faith

¹⁷"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines; though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no wheat; though all the sheep die and there are no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸I will still be joyful and sing. I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be glad that God is my Savior. ¹⁹The Lord is my strength—whom shall I fear? The Lord is my light—of whom shall I be afraid? He helps me run as lightly as a deer and helps me climb to the heights of the mountains."

(I wrote these verses as a song for the director of music, to be accompanied by stringed instruments.)

ZEPHANIAH

1 This is the message the Lord gave to Zephaniah whose ancestry goes back to King Hezekiah. The message was given in the days of Josiah, king of Judah.

The Day of Judgment

²The Lord said, “The day is coming when I will sweep away everything in the land. ³I will sweep away men, animals, birds and fish. I will bring the downfall of the wicked and there will only be heaps of rubble. I will cut off man from the face of the earth. ⁴Now I will punish the people of Judah and all who live in Jerusalem. I will destroy the last trace of Baal worship, including those idolatrous priests who serve him. ⁵I will destroy everyone who goes up on their rooftops to worship the sun, moon and stars. I will destroy those who swear loyalty to me and also to Molech, the cruel god of the Ammonites. ⁶I will destroy those who have turned away from me, who no longer seek my guidance.”

⁷Listen to the Lord, you people. Hold your peace and be silent. The day of judgment for Judah will soon come, and no one can stop it. The Lord has prepared His people as a sacrifice. He has turned them over to the Babylonians who will come and take them captive. ⁸The Lord said, “On that day of sacrifice I will punish the princes and officials and all those who wear a style of dress to show which foreign god they worship. ⁹I will punish those who practice the cultic ritual of jumping over the threshold to gain protection from their gods. Yet they fill their master’s house with riches gained by violence and deceit.

¹⁰“On that day a cry of despair will go up from the Fish Gate in Jerusalem. There will be wailing in the city, and the noise of an approaching army will be heard coming from the hills. ¹¹Wail and cry, those of you who live in the market district, because all those who sell there will be cut down, and those who trade

there will be dead. ¹²At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps. I will search for those who are self-satisfied and complacent, who say to themselves, ‘The Lord doesn’t do anything one way or another, either good or bad. So don’t worry. Everything will be fine.’ ¹³Their wealth will be looted and their houses destroyed. They will build houses but not live in them. They will plant vineyards but not taste the fruit of them.

¹⁴“The day of the Lord will come quickly. It will be a day of bitterness. Even the bravest warriors will cry out in anguish and despair. ¹⁵That day will be a day of fury, a day of trouble and distress, a day of anguish and despair, a day of destruction and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep blackness, ¹⁶a day of the trumpet and the sound of war, and a day of the battle cry of troops attacking fortified cities and towers of defense.

¹⁷“I will bring such disasters on my people that they will walk around in shock, looking straight ahead as if they were blind, all because of their sins. Their blood will flow out like water into the streets, and their dead bodies will be left rotting on the ground. ¹⁸On that day their silver and gold will not save them. They will not be able to buy their way out of their troubles because it is the day of the Lord’s displeasure. What is true of the land of Judah will also be true for the world. The day is coming when the Lord will put an end to all wickedness. The whole world will be consumed. The Lord will make a full and sudden end of all who live on the earth.”

A Call to Repent

2 Come to your senses, you shameless people. ²Come to your senses before the time of trouble comes, before the day comes that will sweep people away like chaff, before the day when the Lord will show His displeasure. ³Seek the Lord, all

you meek of the land, who do what He says is just. Seek righteousness. Seek humility of heart. Perhaps you will be hidden from the Lord's displeasure.

A Prophecy Against Nations

⁴When the day of destruction comes upon the land, the city of Gaza will be emptied and Ashkelon will be left in ruins. Ashdod will be captured in half a day, and by noon the people of Ekron will be uprooted from their city.

⁵The land of the Philistines is doomed, as are the Cherethites who live by the sea. The Lord says, "I will destroy the land of Canaan and none who live there will be left." ⁶The land by the sea will become open fields. Shepherds will build their huts there and sheep pens for their flocks. ⁷The remnant of Judah who survived the exile will come and occupy the land. Their sheep will find pasture there, and shepherds will sleep in the abandoned houses of Ashkelon. The Lord their God will watch over them, and the prosperity of the land will return.

⁸The Lord says, "I have heard the insults and taunts of the Moabites and the Ammonites. I have heard them boasting that they will take away my people's land. ⁹Therefore, as surely as I live, Moab and Ammon will meet the same fate as Sodom and Gomorrah. Their land will become a place of salt pits and weeds, a place of perpetual desolation. My people who survive the exile will come and plunder the houses and take the land."

¹⁰This is what Moab and Ammon will get for their pride and arrogance, for mocking and insulting the people of the Lord. ¹¹The Lord will do terrible things against them. What He will do to them He will do to all nations of the world. He will destroy their gods and reduce them to nothing. Then every nation will bow down and worship Him, even the people of distant lands and islands of the sea.

¹²And the Ethiopians who rule the Upper Nile will die by the sword. ¹³The Lord will use His power against Assyria.

He will reach into the north and destroy Nineveh. She will lie in ruins, utterly desolate and as dry as the desert. ¹⁴Flocks and herds will come and lie down in her streets. Creatures of all kinds will make the city their home. Owls will live among the ruins and sit on her columns and in her windows. Vultures will be seen in her doorways. Rubble will fill the hallways of her houses, and her walls of cedar will be bare. ¹⁵Is this the proud and carefree city that looked at herself and said, "I am the greatest city of the greatest nation on earth"? But what a desolate place it will be, a place where wild animals come to make their home! Everyone who passes by will shake their heads and shrink back in horror from what they see.

Jerusalem's Rebellion

3 Jerusalem is doomed, that wicked and rebellious city which oppresses its own people. ²She doesn't listen. She accepts no instruction. She rebels at discipline, turns her back on her Maker and doesn't trust her own God.

³Her officials are like roaring lions, always ready for the kill. Her judges are like hungry wolves that kill at night and by morning nothing is left. ⁴Her self-appointed prophets are arrogant and treacherous. Her priests defile the Temple and twist God's law to their own advantage. ⁵But the Lord has not left the city, and He always does what is right. Every morning He blesses His people, yet the unrighteous keep doing wickedly and are not ashamed.

⁶The Lord said, "I have cut off nations and destroyed their battlements. I have laid waste their cities. Their streets are empty, their houses without inhabitants. ⁷I said to myself, 'Surely my people will learn to respect me. They will accept my correction. They will not lose sight of all that I have done for them.' But the more I blessed them, the more they corrupted themselves."

A People From Everywhere

⁸The Lord also said, "The day is coming

when I will hold court and assemble all nations and stand up to testify against them. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my presence. ⁹At that time I will gather men and women from everywhere to be a nation of people who will worship me. I will change their speech to a pure speech, and they will stand shoulder to shoulder in my service. ¹⁰From distant lands and from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, my people will come to worship me.

¹¹“On that day those who serve me will no longer be put to shame because of the wicked deeds of their city, because I will remove from their midst all those who are arrogant and proud. Never again will rebellion be on my holy hill. ¹²Only the meek and the humble will be there, those who depend on the Lord and trust Him. ¹³The remnant of Israel will do no wrong. They will not lie or try to deceive. They will eat and lie down, and no one will make them afraid.”

Sing About God's Faithfulness

¹⁴Therefore, sing and shout, you peo-

ple of Israel! Rejoice with all your heart, O Jerusalem! ¹⁵The Lord will remove your sins and destroy your enemies. The Lord, the King of Israel, has not forsaken you. He is still with you. There is no reason to fear. ¹⁶In that day, they will say to Jerusalem, “Don’t be afraid, O City of God! Don’t let your shoulders droop!” ¹⁷The Lord your God is in your midst. He is with you and is strong to save. He delights in you and will quiet you with His love. He will rejoice over you with singing.”

¹⁸The Lord says, “I will gather those who mourn to my Festival of Praise. I will remove the reproach of exile which has been such a burden to you. ¹⁹At that time I will punish all those who oppressed you. I will save those who are hurt and gather those who are scattered. I will turn their shame into honor, and all the nations of earth will bow before me and praise my people. ²⁰At that time I will gather you together and bring you home. I will honor you before all people of earth, and they will bow before me when they see what I have done to rescue you.”

HAGGAI

The Command to Rebuild the Temple

1 On the first day of the sixth month, during the second year of Darius, the new king of Persia, the Lord spoke through Haggai to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the high priest. ²The Lord said, "Why do the people keep saying, 'This is not the right time to rebuild the Temple?'" ³Then the Lord spoke through Haggai, ⁴"What makes it the right time for the people to build luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins?" ⁵Then the Lord said to the people, "Think about what you're doing! Can't you see what's happening to you? ⁶You plant much and harvest little. You have plenty of food, but you never get enough to eat. You drink, but are always thirsty. You have winter clothes, but you're never warm. You work hard and earn wages, but you might as well be putting money in a bag full of holes."

⁷Again the Lord said, "Think about this, and notice what's happening. ⁸I want you to go to the mountains and cut timber for my house and start rebuilding the Temple. This will honor me in the eyes of the nations, and I will take pleasure in what you're doing and bless you for it. ⁹You expected to accomplish much for yourselves, but with all your hard work, it turned out to be very little. You harvested and brought home wages, but I blew most of it away. Why? Because my Temple still lies in ruins while each one of you is busy working on his own house. ¹⁰That's the reason I've sent little rain and nothing much grows. ¹¹I have called for a drought on the land. It will affect the wheat, the grapes, the olive trees. It will affect men and animals alike and everything that the ground produces."

The People Obey

¹²Then Zerubbabel the governor, Joshua the high priest, and the people who had come back from Babylon obeyed the Lord's messenger. They re-

spected the Lord and stood in awe of Him. ¹³The Lord responded by giving this message to Haggai for the people: "I will help you rebuild my Temple. That's a promise." ¹⁴Then the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel and the spirit of Joshua and the spirit of the people who had come out of Babylon and gave them courage, and they all decided to work on the Temple. ¹⁵About three weeks later on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius of Persia, work on the Temple began.

The Greater Glory of the New Temple

2 About a month later on the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the Lord said to Haggai, ²"Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the high priest, and to the people who have come back home from Babylon and say to them, ³'Is there anyone who can remember the glory of the former Temple before it was destroyed? How does it look to you now that the foundations are laid? To some of you it looks like nothing in comparison, I'm sure. ⁴But don't look to the past and become discouraged. Push ahead and look to the future. Be strong and courageous and do the work that still needs to be done. I'm with your governor, your high priest and with all of you. ⁵The promise I made to you when you came out of Egypt is still good. My Spirit will continue to be with you and help you, so don't be afraid.'

⁶Then the Lord said to Haggai, "Once again I will shake the heavens, the land and the sea, just as I did when I brought you out of Egypt and gave you my law from Mount Sinai. ⁷I will continue to overthrow great empires, until He comes who is The Desire of All Nations. He will set foot in this very house and fill it with glory. ⁸All the silver and gold of the earth is mine. Silver and gold is not what makes my Temple glorious. ⁹The glory of this second Temple will be even greater

than the Shekinah glory of the first Temple, because He whom I will send will stand there and declare peace to the world and good will to men."

Haggai Sent to the Priests

¹⁰About two months later, on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, the Lord said to Haggai, ¹¹"Go and ask the priests some questions for me to see if they know the rules of the ceremonial law and what makes things holy and what does not." ¹²So Haggai went to the priests and said, "If a person takes a piece of consecrated meat from the Temple that's considered holy, puts it in the fold of his robe, carries it home and at home his robe accidentally touches bread, drink, oil or any kind of food, does that food become holy?" The priests said, "No." ¹³Then Haggai asked them another question, "If a person becomes ritually unclean by contact with a dead body, and he touches any of these same foods, will these foods become unclean?" The priests said, "Yes."

¹⁴Then Haggai said, "This is what the Lord says: 'This same thing applies to the Temple. Silver and gold can't pass on holiness any more than people can. They can only pass on evil. Even those who stood in the former Temple can't pass on its glory and holiness to the present one. The Temple can be made holy only by the presence of the Lord and by the One whom He will send.'

God Promises to Bless

¹⁵"Stop for a moment and think about how things were before you started to

build this Temple. ¹⁶At harvest time you went to your threshing floor hoping to get twenty bushels of good wheat, but you got only ten. You hoped to find fifty gallons of grape juice in your vat, but you had only twenty. What happened? ¹⁷Let me tell you. I sent scorching winds and hail on your crops and blight and mildew on your vineyards to get your attention so you would turn to me for help, but you would not. ¹⁸However, starting today, the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, the day you completed the foundation of the Temple, I will begin to bless you. Look carefully and notice what will happen to your crops and to your vineyards. ¹⁹Even though there is not enough wheat to sow all your fields, and even though the grapevines, the fig trees, the pomegranate and the olive trees have not produced as expected, I will bless you and you'll be surprised at how much you'll harvest.'"

Zerubbabel Encouraged

²⁰Then the Lord spoke to Haggai a second time that day, saying, ²¹"Go and tell Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, that I will shake heaven and earth to help my people. ²²I will overthrow the powers that oppose you and those who want to stop you from completing my Temple. I will overturn their chariots and drivers. I will make their horses and riders fall, and many will die by the sword of their own brothers. ²³I have made you, Zerubbabel, my servant, and I have given you my royal ring with the authority to rule in my name. You are the one I have chosen to lead my people. The Lord has spoken."

ZECHARIAH

The People Called to Repentance

1 It was in the eighth month of the second year of Darius, king of Persia, that the Lord spoke to the people through Zechariah, grandson of the prophet Iddo, saying, ²“I was very displeased with your forefathers. ³Don’t be like them. Return to me and I will return to you. ⁴Don’t be like your ancestors before the exile. Prophets cried out to them, ‘Stop your evil practices!’ I begged them to turn from their sinful ways, but they didn’t listen or pay attention to what I said.

⁵“Where are your forefathers now? Did those prophets live forever? ⁶But did not my word live on? Did not your ancestors suffer the consequences? They were taken into exile for seventy years. Finally they repented, saying, ‘The Lord dealt with us according to our deeds, just as He said He would.’”

Vision of Horses

⁷On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month in the second year of Darius, the Lord gave me the first of eight messages. ⁸In a night vision I saw a Man mounted on a red horse standing among the myrtle trees. In the valley behind Him were a large number of horses; some were red like the one He was riding, some were speckled, others were white, and they all had riders on them.

⁹I asked my interpreting angel, “What do all these horses and riders mean?” He said, “The Lord will tell you.” ¹⁰Then I knew that the One on the red horse standing among the myrtle trees was the Lord. He said, “These riders and their horses represent angels who were sent to patrol the earth.” ¹¹The riders came back and reported to the One on the horse among the myrtle trees, “Lord, we have patrolled the earth and found the whole world at peace with no intentions of attacking God’s people.”

The Lord Is Jealous for Jerusalem

¹²Then the One on the horse turned His face upward to the God of heaven and said, “O Lord, you sent the people of Jerusalem and Judah into exile for seventy years. Now they are back. How much longer before you reveal your mercy and prosper them again?”

¹³Then the God of heaven gave Him a gracious and comforting message to pass on to me. ¹⁴So the One on the horse spoke to me and said, “Go and tell the people that this is what the God of Israel says: ‘I am jealous for Jerusalem and have a deep and tender love for Judah. ¹⁵I am very displeased with the nations who feel so safe after what they have done to my people. I was displeased with Judah, but their enemies made things worse by adding to their sufferings. ¹⁶I will return to Jerusalem and have mercy on my people and comfort them. The Temple will be measured and rebuilt and so will the city.’” ¹⁷He also told me to tell the people, “This is what the God of Israel says: ‘The cities and towns in Judah are mine. Soon they will prosper again, and I will bless Mount Zion and once more claim the city of Jerusalem as my own.’”

Vision of Four Horns

¹⁸In the second vision, I saw four large animal horns. ¹⁹I turned to my interpreting angel and said, “What do these horns mean?” He said, “They represent the nations that attacked and scattered the people of Israel and then attacked the people of Judah and Jerusalem and took them into exile. But they will no longer harm God’s people, for His Temple will be rebuilt.”

²⁰Then I saw four workmen coming with hammers. ²¹I said, “Where are these men going and what are they going to do?” My angel said, “They are the Lord’s helpers who have come to rebuild Jerusalem and to terrify the nations who

lowered their horns to attack Judah and took my people and scattered them.”

Vision of a Measuring Line

2 In the third vision, I saw a young man standing in front of me with a measuring line in his hand. ²¹I said to him, “Where are you going?” He said, “To measure Jerusalem, to decide how wide and long it should be and to begin rebuilding it.”

³Then the angel who interpreted things for me, together with another angel, went out to meet the young man. ⁴The first angel said to the second one, “Go quickly and tell the young man with the measuring line that the size of Jerusalem must not be limited. She is to be like a city without walls because of the many people and cattle in it. ⁵Also tell him that the Lord promised to protect her and be as a wall of fire around her. His righteousness will be seen through His people, and His plan is to live there and be its glory.”

Exiles Encouraged to Come Back Home

⁶Then the Lord said to me, “I let my people be scattered in all directions. But now it is time for them to flee from the land of the north and return to Jerusalem. ⁷Come, you people of Zion who chose to stay with the daughter of Babylon. Come back to your own land to help rebuild the Temple and restore the city.”

⁸From the midst of His glory, the Lord said to me, “Tell the nations that plundered Jerusalem, ‘Whoever touches my people touches the apple of my eye.’ ⁹I will raise my hand against you and will plunder you. When this happens you will know that I am the Lord.”

¹⁰Then the Lord gave me this message: “Sing for joy, you people of Jerusalem, for I will come to visit you! Sing for joy, for I will come to live among you! ¹¹Many from all nations will join my people. I will live among them and they will know that I am the Lord. ¹²I will make Judah in the Holy Land my portion and Jerusalem, the city I love, my special possession.”

¹³So be silent, everyone, and listen. The God of heaven is the Lord of all mankind and will one day come from His dwelling place in heaven to claim all those who are His own.

Vision of Joshua the High Priest

3 In the fourth vision I saw Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord as the representative of the people. Beside him stood Satan accusing him of sin. ²¹I heard the Lord say to Satan, “The Lord rebuke you, Satan. The God who has chosen Jerusalem will destroy you. This man represents all those who, like a burning stick, have been snatched from the fire.”

³¹I looked and noticed that as Joshua the high priest stood before the Angel, he was dressed in filthy clothes, covered with the sins of God’s people. ⁴The Lord looked at him, turned to the angels standing nearby and said, “Take off the filthy clothes he’s wearing.” And He said to Joshua, “I have accepted your repentance and taken away your sin. I will give you new clothes to wear.”

⁵Then He said to those near Him, “Put a clean turban on his head and dress him in a clean robe.” So they brought in a white turban and a white robe and put them on him as the Angel of the Lord stood by.

God’s Promise to Joshua

⁶Then the Angel of the Lord said this to Joshua:

⁷“The God of heaven says, ‘If you obey me and live by my commandments, then these new priestly garments will continue to be yours, and you will be in charge of my Temple. I will hear your prayers and one day you will stand in my presence as these angels do. ⁸Listen to me! You and your priests need to pay attention to what I have to say. You represent my Servant who is to come. He is the Branch of the house of David that I’ve been telling you about, the One I promised to send.’”

⁹“Take a close look at the stone I have placed in front of you. It has seven eyes and my signature on it. Through that Stone I will cleanse the earth of sin in a single day. ¹⁰In that day my promise to Israel will be fully realized. Each of you will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree. You will invite your friends to sit with you and enjoy the peace and security for which my people have waited so long.”

Vision of the Lampstand and Olive Trees

4 In the fifth vision my interpreting angel came and shook me as if I had been sleeping. ²He said to me, “What do you see?” I said, “I see a tall golden lampstand with a bowl on top of it filled with oil. I see seven tubes coming out of the bowl feeding oil to seven burning lamps. ³Above that, I see two big olive trees, one on each side of the lampstand, and a golden pipe coming down from each tree feeding oil to the bowl.”

⁴After describing what I had seen, I asked the angel, “What does all this mean?” ⁵He said to me, “Don’t you know?” I said, “No, I don’t.” ⁶Then he explained, “These are symbols of the work and power of the Holy Spirit. So this is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit will the work be done.’

⁷“What is this great mountain standing in Zerubbabel’s way? It’s nothing! It will melt at the presence of the Lord and flatten out and become a plain. All the things that Zerubbabel and his people are worried about will disappear as they push ahead with the work. They will rebuild the Temple and at the laying of the last stone they will shout, ‘Praise the Lord! Blessings on His Temple!’”

⁸Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ⁹“Zerubbabel is the one who laid the foundation of the Temple and he’s the one who will finish it. Then you will know that the Lord has been behind it all and that the message to push ahead came from Him. ¹⁰Don’t look down on

small beginnings and become discouraged over the little progress you’re making. People will respond when they see Zerubbabel on the building site with the plumb line in his hand. Remember the seven lamps that receive their oil from the bowl sitting on top of the lampstand? These seven burning lamps represent the eyes of the Lord inspecting everything that is done, not only here, but throughout the whole world.”

¹¹Then I asked the angel, “What do the two big olive trees represent on the right and the left of the lampstand?” ¹²When he didn’t answer, I asked him a second time, “What do the two olive trees represent that I saw feeding oil through golden pipes into the bowl?”

¹³He said to me, “Don’t you know?” I said, “No, I don’t.” ¹⁴He said, “The two olive trees represent the two covering cherubim who stand in the presence of the Lord to carry His light and power throughout the earth.”

Vision of a Flying Scroll

5 In the sixth vision I saw an open scroll flying through the air. ²The angel who talked with me said, “What do you see?” I said, “I see an open scroll about thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide flying through the air.”

³He said, “This scroll flying in the air represents what will come on the whole world. Everyone who steals will be cut off just as it says on one side of the scroll, and everyone who lies will be cut off just as it says on the other side of the scroll.

⁴“The Lord says, ‘I will send the scroll out and its message will enter the house of every thief and every liar. The message will stay with them and will destroy the stones and timbers of their houses and cut off all those who continue in sin.’”

Vision of a Woman in a Basket

⁵In the seventh vision the angel said to me, “What do you see in the distance coming towards you?” ⁶I said, “I’m looking but I can’t tell what it is.” He said,

"It's a measuring basket and inside are all the sins of the world." ⁷I looked again and noticed that the basket had a lid. Soon the lid was raised and I saw a woman sitting in the basket.

⁸The angel said to me, "Her name is Wickedness." I looked, and as she tried to get out of the basket, the angel pushed her back in and closed the lid. ⁹Then I saw two women flying toward me with powerful wings like those on a stork. They flew toward the basket that had the woman in it, took hold of it, lifted it into the air and flew off with it.

¹⁰I said to the angel, "Where are they taking her?" ¹¹He said to me, "They're taking her back to Babylon to build a house for her. When it's ready, they will set her there, for that is where she belongs."

Vision of Four Chariots

6 In the eighth vision I saw four chariots coming out from between two bronze mountains and then stop. ²The first chariot was being pulled by red horses, the second chariot by black horses, ³the third chariot by white horses and the fourth chariot by speckled horses. All of the horses were big and powerful. ⁴I asked the angel, "What does all this mean?"

⁵The angel said to me, "These chariots with their horses represent the angels who as ministering spirits are sent out from the presence of the Lord. ⁶The chariot pulled by the black horses is asked to go north, the one with the white horses to go west, the one with the speckled horses to go south and the one with the red horses to go east."

⁷I saw that the horses were impatient to go, and when the angel said "Go!" they went throughout the whole earth. ⁸Then he said to me, "Look! The horses that went north into Persia have accomplished their mission and persuaded the king to issue a decree to allow your people to continue building the Temple. The Lord's will for the north country has been done."

The Command to Crown Joshua the High Priest

⁹Then the Lord said to me, ¹⁰"Go to see Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah, who brought silver and gold from Babylon, and ask them for some of it. Next go to the house of Josiah who is in charge of the second order of priests and ask to use his tools. ¹¹Then make a crown out of the silver and gold these men gave you and go place it on the head of Joshua the high priest.

¹²"Tell him that this is what the Lord Almighty says, 'The One who is called, The Branch, will spring forth from the house of David and will come and glorify the Temple. ¹³He will come and build a spiritual temple of the Lord and will be enthroned as Israel's rightful King. With majesty He will govern His people and will serve as High Priest, carrying out God's plan to rescue man from sin, as agreed between the Father and Son in heaven's Council of Peace.'

¹⁴"The crown you made and gave to Joshua is to be placed in the Temple in the care of Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Josiah as a reminder of my promise. ¹⁵More gifts will come to Jerusalem from far away to help you rebuild the Temple. When it is rebuilt, you will know that the message I gave you was from me. But all this will happen only if you listen to me and obey the Lord your God."

The Lord Desires Obedience More Than Fasting

7 Two years later in the fourth year of Darius, king of Persia, on the fourth day of the ninth month, the month Chislev, the Lord gave me a message for His people. ²The people living in Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem Melech, together with their elders to the Temple to pray to the Lord and to ask Him for a favor. ³They also went there to ask the priests and prophets this question: "Should we continue to fast and mourn every fifth month over the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians as we

have done for so many years?" ⁴Then I knew that the message the Lord had given me was for the delegation from Bethel.

⁵The Lord had said, "Ask those people this question for me: 'When you fasted and mourned every fifth month and some of you also every seventh month all during the seventy years you were in captivity, were you fasting and mourning because you had sinned against me or over the destruction of the Temple? ⁶When you were eating and drinking or when you were mourning and fasting, who were you thinking about? You were thinking about yourselves, your own honor and the glory the Temple had brought you, so your fasting didn't mean a thing. ⁷When Jerusalem, the cities around it and the south and west plains were still prosperous, didn't I send my prophets to tell you before you went into exile what would happen if you continued to sin?'"

Disobedience Caused the Exile

⁸Then the Lord gave me another message, saying, ⁹"For years I've told my people they must see that justice is done. They must be kind and merciful to one another. ¹⁰I told them over and over again not to take advantage of widows, orphans, the aliens who have come to live among them or those who are poor.

¹¹"But they refused to listen, shrugged their shoulders and paid no attention to what I said. ¹²They had made up their minds, and their hearts became as hard as stone. They refused to take seriously the messages I sent them by the Holy Spirit through the prophets. Finally I decided to discipline them. ¹³It was because they kept on sinning and refused to listen to me that I did not answer their prayers. ¹⁴I had no choice but to withdraw my protection and let the enemy come in like a whirlwind and take them away and scatter them among the nations. The land they left behind became so desolate that no one wanted to pass through it. So they are the ones who laid

the Temple in ruins and made this pleasant land desolate, not the Babylonians."

Jerusalem's Future

8 Again the Lord spoke to me, saying, ²"I don't need to be persuaded to love my people because I have always loved them. My love for Jerusalem is like a burning fire within me. I am not pleased with the way her enemies have looked down on her and mistreated her. ³I will return to Zion and live with my people in Jerusalem. She will be called, The City of Truth; and the mountain on which she sits, The Holy Mountain of God.

⁴"Once again elderly people with canes can walk in Jerusalem in perfect safety. ⁵Her streets will be filled with boys and girls playing, and no one will harm them. ⁶This may seem hard to believe by the few now living there, but nothing is too difficult for the Lord. ⁷I will bring my people home from the countries of the east and the west. ⁸I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem and they will be my people. I will again be to them their faithful and righteous God.

⁹"Take heart and be of good courage. I'm sending you the same message about the completion of the Temple that I sent to you before when you laid the foundation to rebuild it. ¹⁰When the exiles first returned from Babylon, there was no money to hire anyone to work on the Temple, and no one in the city was safe. People didn't even trust their neighbor.

¹¹"I will no longer deal harshly with the remnant of my people as I had to in the past. ¹²Plant your crops in peace. The seed will grow. Your vines will bear fruit. The ground will give you a rich harvest and the heavens will give you rain. I will bless the remnant of my people abundantly and give them all these things as an inheritance. ¹³Nations have cursed you, but don't be afraid of them. Take courage and let your hands be strong to finish rebuilding my Temple. I will protect you and you will be a blessing to all those around you."

¹⁴The Lord also said, "Just as surely as I disciplined your ancestors when they continued to rebel against me and let them be taken to Babylon, ¹⁵just so surely will I now bless you and do good to Judah and Jerusalem. So don't be afraid to build. ¹⁶Here are the things I want you to do: Be honest with each other and administer true justice in your courts, the kind of justice that brings peace. ¹⁷Don't plan to hurt your neighbor by lying or making false promises. These are things I hate."

¹⁸The Lord gave me another message, saying, ¹⁹"The religious festivals scheduled to be held in the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months will again be times of joy and gladness. These will be times of happiness for the people of Judah, so love the truth and be at peace."

²⁰The Lord said, "The day is coming when people from many cities will come to see Jerusalem. ²¹Those from one city will say to those from another city, 'We're going to worship the Lord and ask for His blessings. Why don't you come along?' ²²Many people from every land and leaders from powerful nations will come to worship the Lord and pray for His blessings. ²³In those days, for everyone who lives in Judah, ten foreigners will come, grasp a Jew's arm and say, 'We want to have a part in your destiny because we have heard that God is with you.'"

A Prophecy Against Israel's Enemies

9 Then the Lord gave me this message of warning for the land of Syria and for the city of Damascus: "The eye of the Lord is on all mankind, but especially on the tribes of Israel. ²The land of Syria belongs to Him, as do the cities of Tyre and Sidon, even though they consider themselves wise and think they don't need the Lord.

³Tyre has built strong fortifications for herself and has piled up so much silver and gold that it's as common as dirt on the streets. ⁴But the Lord will take away everything she has. He will de-

stroy her trading power at sea and let her be burned to the ground.

⁵"The city of Ashkelon will see this and be afraid. The city of Gaza will see it and shake with fear. So will Ekron, but her hopes of survival will also be shattered. Gaza will lose her king and the city of Ashkelon will be empty.

⁶Foreigners will occupy Ashdod, and the Lord will cut off the pride of the Philistines. ⁷But He will transform those who turn to Him and take away their diet of meat and blood and other abominable things they eat. He will give them a diet that is in keeping with being His people. They will belong to Him and share in the leadership of Judah. They will become as much a part of His people as the Jebusites did.

⁸"The Lord will protect His possession against marauding forces and bands of armed men. He will not allow His people to be overrun and taken into exile again. He has not been unmindful of their suffering."

The Coming King

⁹"Rejoice, you people of Zion! Shout for joy, people of Jerusalem! Look! Your King is coming! He is triumphant and victorious! He is gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰I will take away the war chariots from Israel, the battle horses from Jerusalem and the killer bows from the hands of those who use them. Your King will bring peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea, from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.

¹¹"Because of the covenant I made with you which was sealed with blood, I will free you from your prison house, from the deep pit in which you find yourselves. ¹²You are prisoners of hope. Listen to me and I will be your fortress and strength. I will bless you twice over for the sufferings you had to go through.

¹³"Judah will be a battle bow in my hands and Ephraim a deadly arrow. The men of Zion will be a sword in the hand of the Lord as they make their way back

from captivity, and no one will dare touch my people. ¹⁴The Lord will be above them using lightning as His arrow. The Sovereign Lord will sound the trumpet and march in the storms that come up from the south.

¹⁵"The day will come when the Lord Almighty will protect all His people and destroy their enemies. In that day His people will shout for joy, as men who are full of wine and have won a great victory. The blood of the enemies of my people will flow like the blood of a sacrifice that's caught in a bowl and poured out on the altar.

¹⁶"When that day comes, the Lord will save His people as a shepherd protects His flock from attack. He will save His people and they will shine like the jewels in His crown. ¹⁷How attractive and beautiful they will be! My people will be young again and will thrive on grain and fruit which the new land will give them."

The Lord Will Call Together His People

10 Ask the Lord for rain at the time of the late rains just before the harvest, and He will send storm clouds filled with showers for every plant in the field. ²People consult idols and go to fortune-tellers, but their answers are fabricated and what they say about dreams and visions is false. The comfort they give is worthless. So the people wander about like lost sheep. They're oppressed because they have no shepherd to protect them.

³The Lord says, "I am displeased with the way the foreigners have treated my people. I will punish their leaders for what they have done. The people of Judah are mine. I, the Lord, will take care of them and make them as spirited as a war horse in battle. ⁴Out of Judah will come the Cornerstone, the Tent Peg, the Mighty Warrior, the Battle Bow and Ruler. ⁵Nothing will stand in the way of my people. They will be like men of war tramping down their enemies in muddy fields of battle. They will be victorious over their enemies because the Lord is with them.

⁶"I will make the people of Judah strong and will save the descendants of Joseph. I will have compassion on them and will see that they come back home, as if they had never been exiled. I am the Lord their God, and I will hear their prayers and answer their cries for help. ⁷My people will become as strong as soldiers. Their hearts will be glad like men who have tasted wine. Their children will catch the spirit, and their hearts will rejoice in the Lord because of what He has done for His people.

⁸"I will call my people together from afar. I will redeem them and they will be as numerous as I promised they would be. ⁹Though I scattered them among the nations, yet even in faraway places they will remember me. They and their children will survive and they will come home together.

¹⁰"I will bring them back from Assyria and Egypt. I will bring them back to Gilead and Lebanon, and the whole land will be filled with my people. ¹¹They will pass through a sea of trouble, but the sea will be subdued, and I will dry up her depths just as I did the Red Sea. The proud nations will be humbled and their mighty armies will be taken away. ¹²I will provide my people with courage, and they will worship me and keep my commandments. The Lord has spoken."

The Fall of the Mighty

11 Open your doors, O Lebanon, and take a look outside! Fire is burning down the mighty cedar trees! Mighty nations are being laid low! ²Let the weaker pine trees weep, for the mighty cedars have fallen. The stately trees are ruined. Let the oaks of Bashan weep because the dense forest has been cut down. The tight-knit ranks of warriors have been broken. ³Rulers cry out in grief. Their glory and riches are gone. They roar like lions whose lush thicket has just been destroyed.

Two Kinds of Shepherds

⁴The Lord said to me, "Go and hire

yourself out as a shepherd over a flock of sheep to be fattened and then sold for slaughter. ⁵You'll see shepherds over them that have no conscience. They kill the owner's sheep for themselves, sell their wool and meat and then say, 'Praise the Lord! Look how rich we are!' This is what false shepherds do to my people. They have no conscience. They lead them astray and say, 'Praise the Lord!'"

⁶The Lord says, "I will no longer pity my people and have mercy on them, for they love their false shepherds. I will let them be taken advantage of by their rulers and will not rescue them from the hands of their leaders."

⁷So I went and on behalf of the owners, took charge of a flock that had been sold to be fattened and butchered. I used two staves to take care of them, one staff I named Grace and the other Unity, and I tended the sheep. This is what the Lord had told me to do. ⁸In one month I got rid of three under-shepherds who hated me for telling them to be careful with the sheep. I noticed that this particular flock of sheep did not respond to me. They spurned my kindness, and soon I grew weary of them. ⁹So I said to myself, "I will no longer be their shepherd. Let those who are sick die, and those who are to be eaten, taken to the butcher. If any escape, let them be caught and killed."

¹⁰So I quit and took the staff I had named Grace and broke it in two as a sign that the Lord would not carry out the covenant He had made to be merciful to His people. ¹¹The merchants who bought the sheep were watching me and knew that the Lord was giving His people a message through what I had done.

¹²Then I said to the owners, "If you think I deserve to be paid for the length of time I took care of the sheep, then pay me my wages, but if not, then don't." They decided to give me thirty small pieces of silver, the price of a slave.

¹³Then the Lord said to me, "Go to the Temple and throw the money into the treasury." So I took the thirty pieces of sil-

ver into the Temple just as the Lord had told me to do. ¹⁴I took the other staff I had, the one I had named Unity and broke it in half as a sign of the end of brotherhood between Judah and Israel. Those who saw me knew that what I had done was a word from the Lord.

¹⁵After this, the Lord said to me, "Go and again hire yourself out as a shepherd. But this time act the part of a worthless shepherd. ¹⁶This will be a sign to my people. Since they like evil shepherds, I will let them have one. He will rule the country with harshness. He will not care for the lost, look out for the young, help the sick, or feed the weak, but will kill the choice sheep for meat, even tearing off their hooves in search of the last morsel. ¹⁷Woe to the worthless shepherd who leaves the flock! The sword will slash his arm and blind his right eye. His power will be useless and his wisdom will be gone."

The Lord Will Defend His People

12 This is a message from the Lord who stretched out the heavens, created the earth and gave life to man. He says, ²"The day is coming when I will make Jerusalem like a cup of poisonous wine to the nations. They will march through the land of Judah and besiege Jerusalem. They will drink from the cup and die. ³The day is coming when the chief rebel will stir up the nations of the world to attack her. But I will make Jerusalem like a heavy rock, and those who try to remove it will get hurt.

⁴"When they attack, I will terrify their horses and their riders will panic. I will watch over my people and smite the nations and their horses with blindness. ⁵Then the leaders will say, 'The people of Jerusalem are strong because the Lord is their God.' ⁶On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a fire in the forest, like a fire in a field of ripened grain. The attacking nations will be consumed while my people will remain safe inside the city.

⁷"I will give victory to my people and

those from the house of David in Jerusalem will not be greater than those in the rest of Judah. ⁸I will protect Jerusalem, and even those who are weak will be as strong as David. The leaders of my people will be like the Angel of the Lord going before them. ⁹On that day I will destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem.

Remorse and Mourning for Sins

¹⁰“Before that day comes, I will pour out the Spirit of grace and supplication on the house of David and Jerusalem. They will be filled with remorse because of their sins. They will see the One whom they crucified and will weep and mourn over what they have done to Him as those who mourn the death of their first-born son. ¹¹They will weep as the people of Meggido wept over the destruction of their city named after the gods, Hadad and Rimmon.

¹²“Each family will weep and mourn by itself. The men will mourn over their sins apart from their wives and their wives apart from them; the men descended from David apart from their wives and their wives apart from the men; spiritual men like Nathan apart from their wives and their wives apart from them; ¹³the men descended from the house of Levi apart from their wives and their wives apart from them; and the men from the family of workers like the Shimeites apart from their wives and their wives apart from them. ¹⁴All the families apart, the men from their wives and their wives apart from them.”

The Lord Will Cleanse His People From Sin

13 The Lord continued, “On that day I will open a fountain that will cleanse my people from their sins. The record of impurity and idolatry will be gone forever from the descendants of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ²I will even remove their memory of idols and they will remember them no more. There will be no more false

prophets in the land, and even the desire to worship idols will be gone. ³Those who claimed to be prophets and were not will be seen for what they were. Even their mothers and fathers to whom they were born will agree that they have no right to live because of the lies they told in the Lord’s name.

⁴“On that day these false prophets will see the fruits of their labor and wish they had never worn hairy garments and claimed to have had visions. ⁵They will say to themselves, ‘I was not a prophet, but a farmer. I should have stayed on the farm.’ ⁶In that day some will come up to their Lord and say, ‘What are these scars in your hands?’ and He will say, ‘These scars are from wounds I received from my friends when I stayed at their house.’”

The Lord’s Appointed Shepherd

⁷The Lord says, “Before that day comes, the sword will arise against my Shepherd, against the Man who is close to me, my equal! They will smite the Shepherd and the sheep will scatter. Then my hand will turn against them, but I will not forget the innocent ones. ⁸Two-thirds of the people living in the land will be cut off and will die, but one-third will be left alive. ⁹I will refine the one-third like silver. I will purify them with fire as men purify gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them. I will say, ‘These are my people,’ and they will say, ‘This is our God.’”

The Lord Will Reward His People

14 A day is coming when the Lord will judge His people and let their enemies plunder their wealth. ²He will send nations against Jerusalem, and the city will be taken, the houses looted and the women raped. Half of the city will be taken into exile and scattered, but the rest of the people will remain. ³Also, the day will come when the Lord will go out and confront the nations. He will fight against them as in a day of battle.

⁴On that day His feet will touch the top

of the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem, and the mountain will split in two from east to west, shift from north to south and leave a very wide valley. ⁵The valley will extend as far as the Azal River. The earth will shake as it did in the days of King Uzziah when the people were frightened and ran from the earthquake. This will happen when the Lord descends from heaven with all His holy angels, bringing His people with Him.

⁶From that day on, there will not be any cold, frost or darkness. ⁷It will always be day, because even at night there will be light. Only the Lord knows when that day will come. ⁸On that day the River of Life will flow from God's throne through the city. It will flow out from Jerusalem continuously, both summer and winter, to the east and to the west and on to the seas.

⁹The Lord will be King over all the earth. On that day everyone will worship Him as God, and there will be one Lord and His name alone will be honored. ¹⁰The whole region, from Geba in the north to Rimmon in the south, will be a great plain, and Jerusalem will tower above the land around it. The city will reach beyond the Benjamin Gate, the First Gate, the Corner Gate and far beyond the Tower of Hananel where the royal wine presses are now. ¹¹God's people will live there safely. Never again will they be threatened by destruction.

¹²The Lord will send plagues on all the nations that fought against His people and the Holy City. Their flesh will rot while they're still standing on their feet. Their eyes will shrink in their sockets,

and their tongues will shrivel in their mouths. ¹³They will be so afraid of the Lord that they will panic, and each one will seize the one next to him. The hand of one will be against the other.

¹⁴The people of Judah will defend Jerusalem, and they will gather the wealth of all nations. There will be great quantities of gold, silver and the finest linen.

¹⁵The same plagues that strike the surrounding nations will strike their animals also, their horses, mules, donkeys and camels.

The Nations Will Worship the King

¹⁶Then the survivors from all nations on whom the plagues did not fall will come to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (also called the Festival of Shelters). ¹⁷Those nations that refuse to join His people in celebration will receive no rain. ¹⁸If the people of Egypt refuse to join God's people in celebration, their crops also will receive no rain. ¹⁹This will be part of the punishment that will fall on Egypt and on all the nations that refuse to join the Lord's people in celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles.

²⁰On that day the bells of horses and all household utensils will have on them the name "Holy to the Lord" and will be dedicated to His praise. ²¹Everything in Jerusalem and throughout the land of Judah will be set apart to serve the Lord and to honor His holy name. People from everywhere will come with sacrifices to worship the Lord. There will no longer be an unclean person in the House of the Lord Almighty.

MALACHI

1 This is the message the Lord gave to Malachi to give to Israel.

The Lord's Love for Israel

²The Lord said, "I have always loved you. But you asked, 'How do we know that you love us?' I, the Lord answered, 'Wasn't Esau the twin of Jacob, and didn't he come out of the womb first? Yet, I chose Jacob and his descendants to be my people. ³I did not choose Esau and his descendants to serve me in the special way I have chosen you. When they sinned and rebelled against me, I disciplined them by turning their mountains into a wasteland and their fertile valleys over to the jackals.'

⁴'Esau's descendants say, 'Though we have been crushed and our country is ruined, we will rebuild!' But the Lord says, 'You may rebuild, but I will destroy what you do. Other nations will call your country The Wicked Land, a people with whom the Lord is always displeased.'

⁵The descendants of Jacob will see what happened to the Edomites and say, 'The power of the Lord is great, even beyond the borders of Israel.'

Polluted Offerings Unacceptable

⁶The Lord says to the priests of Israel, "A son honors his father and a servant respects his master. If I am your Father, why don't you respect me? But you continue to dishonor me. You say, 'How do we dishonor you?' ⁷You dishonor me by sacrificing on my altar animals that are worthless. You say, 'How is that showing disrespect for you?' You show your disrespect for me by despising my altar. ⁸You bring your blind, sick or lame animals to me as a sacrifice. Is that the right thing to do? Try giving an animal like that as a gift to your governor! Do you think he'd be happy with it? Do you think he would accept it and grant you any favors? ⁹Yet, you come to the Lord your God expecting Him to accept it and expecting Him to

bless you for it. He won't do it, and it will be no one's fault but your own.

¹⁰"How I wish that someone would have the courage to shut the Temple doors to keep you from lighting useless fires on my altar. I am not pleased with what you're doing, and I will not accept your worthless offerings. ¹¹The time will come when people from all over the world will honor me, from the rising to the setting of the sun. They will bring wholesome offerings and gifts to me. They will accept me and honor my name. ¹²You are my own people, yet you show contempt for my altar by offering animals on it which you reject. ¹³You say, 'The ministry is nothing but drudgery. We're tired of all this.' So you turn up your noses at my altar and continue to bring injured, crippled and diseased animals to me. Even stolen ones! Do you expect me to be pleased? ¹⁴Cursed be the one who has an excellent animal in his flock and promises to bring it to me, but then brings a defective, sickly animal instead. Am I not your King? Don't I rule over all nations of the world? Am I not the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth?"

Corrupt Priests

2 The following message is for the priests: ²"If you don't listen and if you don't put it in your heart to honor my name, I will send a curse on the blessings I gave you. In fact, I've already sent a curse because you don't take seriously what I tell you. ³Even your children have been affected by your wickedness. I will rebuke you and your descendants and it will be like dung on your faces from the animals you bring to me for sacrifice. I will put you out of my presence.

⁴"I have warned you again and again not to break the covenant I made with Levi, the son of Jacob, and with his descendants. ⁵My covenant with him was a covenant of life and peace. I promised this to him and to his descendants, and that's what I gave them. In return I ex-

pected them to respect me and honor my name. ⁶In those days the priests taught the people what was true. No lies or false teachings passed their lips. They did what was right and helped others do so. ⁷This is what priests are supposed to do. Their duty is to preserve the knowledge of God among the people and teach them the truth about me. Those who go to them should be learning to do my will, for I have chosen them to be my messengers.

⁸“But you priests have turned from doing what is right. Your teachings and example have caused many to stumble. You have broken the very covenant I made with your father Levi. ⁹Because you have despised me, I will make the people despise you. Because you have not obeyed, they will not listen to you either. You have not been fair in your decisions, but partial in matters of the law, so people will no longer respect your judgment.”

Malachi Confronts the Priests

¹⁰Then Malachi said to the priests, “Now listen to me. Don’t we all have the same Father? Didn’t the one God create us? Why do you despise the covenant God made with your father Levi? Why do you lie to the people and make promises that you don’t intend to keep? ¹¹Your actions have influenced the whole nation! Now the people even make promises to God which they don’t intend to keep. They despise His covenant. They disdain His Sanctuary. Our men marry women who have no intention of worshiping the Lord but who keep on worshiping foreign gods. ¹²The Lord will cut off from Israel all these men, no matter who they are, including those who approve such marriages.

¹³“Another evil thing you do is to flood the Lord’s altar with your tears. You weep because the Lord no longer accepts your offerings or answers your prayers. ¹⁴Do you wonder why? You have broken the Lord’s covenant and the promise you made to your wife when you were young. You have been unfaithful to her. You have broken faith with her in

spite of the fact that she’s your partner and you promised God to take her to be your wife. ¹⁵At that time God made you both one and accepted you as such. Why is He so concerned about this? For many reasons, one being so you would have godly children, descendants who are truly God’s people. Guard your spirit and don’t break faith with your wife, the one you married when you were young. ¹⁶The Lord says, ‘I hate divorce. I hate it when a man is unfaithful and divorces his wife for someone else. To make things worse, he covers up his treachery and violence by pretending to be innocent.’ So guard your affections and don’t break the promise you made to your wife when the two of you got married.

¹⁷“You have wearied the Lord with your empty words. Yet you keep asking, ‘How have we wearied Him?’ Let me tell you. You say, ‘Everyone is good in the eyes of the Lord, even those who do evil, for He is blessing them,’ when you know that isn’t true. Or you say, ‘He is not a God of justice, but a God of unending mercy.’”

The Elijah Messenger

3 Listen to what the Lord Almighty says, “I will send my messenger and he will prepare the way of the Lord. Then suddenly the Lord you are looking for will come to His Temple. The Messenger of the covenant whom you desire will come.” ²Who will be considered righteous in the final day? Who will be able to stand when He returns in judgment? His presence will be like a launderer’s soap and like a fire that refines metal.

³He will come to judge the world. He will not offer the covenant to everyone again. He will judge as one who purifies silver. He will purify both priests and people. He will refine them as gold. He will have a people who will offer Him pure hearts and a right spirit. ⁴This is what pleases the Lord. These were the kinds of offerings the people of Judah and Jerusalem brought to Him in years gone by.

⁵The Lord says, “I will come as a judge

and will witness against those who practice magic, commit adultery, lie, cheat laborers out of their wages, take advantage of widows and orphans, deprive aliens of justice and who don't reverence me or appreciate my covenant. ⁶I, the Lord, do not change. That's why the descendants of Jacob have not been destroyed. ⁷Like many of your ancestors, you have turned against me. You have not kept my commandments and my laws. Return to me and I will return to you. But you ask, 'What must we do to return to you?'

Stealing From God

⁸'Is it right for a person to steal from the God he worships? Yet, you are cheating me. You say, 'In what way are we cheating you?' You are cheating your God out of what is His by holding on to His tithes and offerings. ⁹A curse is on all of you because the whole country is stealing from me by taking what is rightfully mine. ¹⁰Bring your full tithe to my Temple so that there will be plenty of food in my house. Try me, and see if I will not open the gates of heaven and pour out so many blessings on you, spiritual and material, that you will not be able to count them all. ¹¹I will not let insects destroy your crops, and your vineyards will not drop their grapes before ripening. ¹²People everywhere will call you blessed and your country will be a delightful place to live.

The People Criticize the Lord

¹³'But you have harshly criticized me. You say, 'What have we ever spoken against you?' ¹⁴You have said, 'It's useless to serve God. It just doesn't pay to keep His law. We don't gain a thing by confessing our sins and showing sorrow for what we have done. ¹⁵We need to look after ourselves—that's the only way to prosper. Wicked people challenge God and get away with it, and He doesn't do a thing about it.'

God's Book of Remembrance

¹⁶But there are those who do reverence the Lord. They often speak to one another about Him. The Lord hears what they say and writes it in heaven's Book of Remembrance. They love the Lord and bring honor to His name.

¹⁷The Lord says, "These people are my treasured possession, and when I come I will show the world that they are my very own. I will have compassion on them as a father's heart goes out to his son who loves to serve him. ¹⁸Then you will see the difference between those who do right and those who do wrong, between those who serve the Lord and those who do not."

The Great and Terrible Day of the Lord

4 The Lord says, "The day is coming when the arrogant, the proud and every evil doer will burn up as quickly as straw in a furnace. The day is coming when the whole world will be on fire. No one who is wicked will survive, including the one who is the root of all sin and his helpers who are his branches. ²But for you who respect and honor my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings. You will leap for joy and be as free and happy as growing calves fed from the stall. ³In that day the wicked will be gone. They will have returned to dust and will be nothing but soil under your feet.

⁴'Don't forget the teachings of my servant Moses and the commandments I gave you from Mount Sinai. They're for all people to obey.

⁵'But before that great and terrible day of the Lord comes, I will send a message such as I gave to Elijah, calling the people to choose whom they will serve. ⁶This message will be taken to the whole world. It will knit my people together, and the hearts of the fathers will turn in love to their children, and the hearts of the children will turn in love to their fathers. And though the earth is set aside for destruction, my people will be saved."

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THE NEW TESTAMENT

MATTHEW

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

1 This book is about Jesus Christ, whose ancestry can be traced back to David, and then back to Abraham.

²Beginning with Abraham, the following ancestors are listed: First, Abraham, then Isaac, and Jacob, followed by Judah with his eleven brothers. ³After that came Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, followed by Hezron and Ram. ⁴Next came Amminadab, Nahshon and Salmon. ⁵Salmon and Rahab were the parents of Boaz, and Boaz and Ruth were the parents of Obed, who was the father of Jesse, ⁶who was the father of David. This makes fourteen generations from Abraham to David.

David and Bathsheba were the parents of Solomon, Bathsheba having been the wife of Uriah, who was killed in battle. ⁷Solomon was followed by Rehoboam, Abijah and Asa. ⁸Next came Jehoshaphat, who was followed by Jehoram and Uzziah. ⁹And Uzziah was followed by Jotham, then Ahaz and Hezekiah. ¹⁰Hezekiah's son was Manasseh, who was followed by Amon and Josiah. ¹¹Josiah was followed by Jehoiachin and his brothers at the time of the exile. So there are fourteen generations from David to the first captives who were taken to Babylon.

¹²After Jehoiachin came Shealtiel, then Zerubbabel. ¹³Zerubbabel was followed by Abiud, Eliakim and Azor. ¹⁴Next came Zadok, Akim and Eliud, ¹⁵who was followed by Eleazar, Matthan and Jacob. ¹⁶Jacob was the father of Joseph. Joseph was the husband of Mary who was the mother of Jesus the Messiah.

¹⁷So the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen, and from David to the Captivity are fourteen, and from the Captivity to the Messiah are fourteen.

Christ Born of a Virgin

¹⁸Jesus' birth occurred this way: When His mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph,

before they were married and had sexual relations, it was discovered that she was pregnant. ¹⁹When Joseph found out, he was greatly distressed. But he still loved Mary, so he made plans to protect her from public scorn as much as possible by breaking off their engagement quietly and sending her away to have her baby somewhere else. ²⁰One night as he was considering how to carry out his plans, an angel appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, don't be concerned about Mary's purity. Go ahead and marry her. She's still a virgin, in spite of what you think. She was made pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit and will give birth to the Messiah. ²¹When the baby is born, I want you to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."

²²All this happened just as it had been predicted centuries ago by the prophet Isaiah: ²³"A young woman who is still a virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son. He will be called Emmanuel, meaning God Is with Us." ²⁴When Joseph woke up, he followed the angel's instruction and married Mary, ²⁵but decided not to have sexual relations with her until after God's Son was born. Joseph named Him Jesus as the angel had instructed him.

Wise Men Come From the East

2 Jesus was born in Bethlehem when Herod the Great was king of Judea. Priestly astronomers led by God came from the East to Jerusalem asking, ²"Where can we find the newborn King? Doesn't anyone here know where He is? For weeks we've been following an unusually bright star in the sky which tells us that the Deliverer of mankind has been born. It has led us to Jerusalem, and we want to worship Him." ³When the news reached Herod, he and many of his officials decided that this must be a plot to overthrow his government. ⁴So the first thing he did was to call together the religious leaders and demand an explanation.

"Who is this baby King?" he asked. "Where was He born?" ⁵The religious leaders told him that they didn't know who He was, but according to Scripture, He was supposed to be born in Bethlehem. ⁶Then they showed him Micah's prophecy which said, "Bethlehem, you are not just another small, unimportant town. You will be the birthplace of the promised Ruler of Israel."

⁷Then Herod dismissed the religious leaders and asked the palace guards to bring the teachers from the East to him. When they came, he spoke to them privately and asked about their trip, their reason for coming and particularly the time the star first appeared. ⁸Then Herod suggested that they go on to Bethlehem to find this newborn King. He assured them that he, too, would welcome such a Deliverer and that he also would go to worship Him. He asked them to stop by the palace on their way home to let him know if they found the little King and where He was. ⁹As these teachers from the East left the palace, they saw that same bright star again and followed it. The star led them to Bethlehem, about five miles south of Jerusalem. There it stopped over the house where Jesus and His parents were living. ¹⁰The men were overjoyed at having found the Child. ¹¹After introducing themselves to Mary and Joseph, they knelt down and worshiped the little King and gave Him presents of gold, costly incense and expensive perfume. ¹²That night God warned them in a dream not to stop at Herod's palace on their return trip, so they went home another way.

The Escape Into Egypt

¹³That same night an angel spoke to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," the angel said. "Take Mary and the Baby, together with the few things you need, and leave for Egypt. Stay there until I tell you to come back. Tomorrow morning Herod will send out troops to find the Baby to kill Him." ¹⁴So Joseph got up, packed his

saddlebags, put them on the donkey, and in the middle of the night, they headed for Egypt. ¹⁵Joseph and his family stayed in Egypt as he had been told to do until Herod the Great died. These things happened just as the Lord, through Hosea the prophet, had predicted: "I will call my Son back home from the land of Egypt."

The Killing of Infants

¹⁶When Herod learned that the teachers from the East had deliberately ignored him, he became violent. In his rage he sent the palace guards to kill all the babies in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, basing his calculations for the child's age on the time the teachers from the East said they had first seen the star. ¹⁷This also was according to Jeremiah's prophecy: ¹⁸"There will come a time when mothers in Israel will cry and mourn over the cruel deaths of their babies. They will refuse to be consoled because the king has murdered their children."

Settling in Nazareth

¹⁹Some time later Herod the Great died. Then God's angel spoke to Joseph in a dream, saying, ²⁰"King Herod is dead, so you can take the Child and His mother and go back to Israel." ²¹Immediately Joseph packed, took Mary and Jesus and started for home. ²²When he heard that the new king was Archelaus, Herod's son, who was even more heartless and cruel than his father, Joseph was afraid to settle in Bethlehem as he thought he should. An angel warned him in a dream to go on to Galilee, which Joseph did. ²³So the family settled in the town of Nazareth as God had told them. This was predicted by several prophets who said, "The Messiah will be called a Nazarene."

John the Baptist

3 When Jesus was a grown man, John the Baptist started his ministry in the wilderness area of Judea not far from

Jerusalem. ²His message was simple: "Repent, because God is about to set up His kingdom." ³The preaching of John was a direct fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "I heard the voice of a man preaching earnestly in the wilderness, saying, 'Prepare the way for the Lord to come; make a smooth road for the King.'" ⁴John was dressed like the old-time prophets with a wrap-around garment made of camel's hair and held together with a leather belt. His diet was simple. He lived on locust beans and wild honey. ⁵Many people from Jerusalem and around the Jordan River came to hear him preach. ⁶They confessed their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan River.

⁷Also, many Pharisees and Sadducees came. When John saw them in the crowd, he looked straight at them and said, "You brood of snakes! What made you slither this way? Are you just curious or are you running from God's displeasure like snakes from the harvesters?" ⁸Sometimes he would say, "If you're here to be baptized, you need to repent and change your ways. That's what repentance is all about!" ⁹Don't say to me, 'We're Abraham's descendants, so nothing can happen to us.' That means absolutely nothing as far as your salvation is concerned, because God could create all the children of Abraham He wants to out of these rocks! ¹⁰Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and used for firewood. In fact, God is already applying His axe to some of you.

¹¹"What I'm telling you is that I merely baptize people with water, but soon One will come in the full power of heaven. I'm not even worthy to unfasten His sandals! He will baptize people with the Holy Spirit and cleanse their hearts with spiritual fire. ¹²He will separate the chaff from the wheat, store the wheat in His barn and burn the chaff with a fire that can't be put out."

Jesus Baptized

¹³About this time Jesus came down

from Galilee to hear John preach, and He asked John to baptize Him. ¹⁴But John sensed the sinlessness of Jesus and understood that He was the Messiah. So he refused to baptize Jesus, saying, "You need to baptize me, and not I, you!" ¹⁵Jesus said, "Baptize me as you baptized all the others. You'll be doing what is right." Then John went ahead and baptized Him. ¹⁶As soon as Jesus was baptized, He came up out of the water and knelt on the river bank to offer a prayer of thanksgiving. As He looked up, heaven itself seemed to open. Then the light of the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and hovered over His head. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son whom I love. I am very pleased with Him."

Jesus Tempted by Satan

4 Immediately after His baptism, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the Judean wilderness to pray and to prepare for His ministry. But the devil would not leave Him alone. ²While in the wilderness, Jesus fasted for forty days, and He became extremely hungry. ³Then the devil confronted Him by disguising himself as an angel from heaven. He told Jesus that His fast was over and that His Father had given Him permission to use divine power to turn some of the desert stones into bread. "If you are the Son of God, that should be no problem," Satan said. ⁴But as famished as Jesus was, He recognized who was tempting Him. So He answered, "The Scripture teaches that man is not to put survival before obedience to God's word."

⁵But the devil didn't give up. Next, he picked Jesus up and carried Him to Jerusalem to the highest point on the Temple wall, overlooking the valley below. ⁶Then he dared Jesus to jump to prove His faith in God. He even flattered Him for relying so firmly on God's word and quoted the Scripture which says, "God will instruct His angels to watch over you and take care of you. When you fall, they will catch you." ⁷But Jesus knew

that the devil had twisted the Scripture. So He answered him by quoting another Scripture, "You shall not test God's love by demanding that He demonstrate His care for you."

⁸Still the devil did not give up. Next he carried Christ to the top of a mountain giving Him a panoramic view of the many luxuries available in the world and all the comforts that go with power and wealth. ⁹Then he turned to Jesus and said, "I'll give you all this, plus all the people in the world, if you will simply acknowledge that I gave it to you." ¹⁰Instantly Jesus responded to this offer of a life of ease by saying, "Get away from me, Satan, because the Scripture says, 'Man shall acknowledge God as owner of this planet and worship and serve Him only.'"

¹¹Then the devil left Jesus in the desert. By this time His strength was totally gone, and He lay there dying. But God sent an angel from heaven to revive Him and assure Him of His Father's approval and love.

Jesus Begins His Ministry

¹²Meanwhile, Herod Antipas visited Jerusalem. He was the other son of Herod the Great who ruled in Galilee. While in Jerusalem, he had John the Baptist arrested and put in prison because John had publicly rebuked his adulterous marriage. Jesus quickly left Judea and returned to Galilee instead of staying in Jerusalem. ¹³One of the first stops Jesus made in Galilee was at His hometown of Nazareth. From there He went over to Capernaum near the Sea of Galilee and made that place His home. ¹⁴This also was according to Isaiah's prophecy: ¹⁵"The land of Zebulun and Naphtali by the sea this side of Jordan, which the Gentiles call Galilee, will be blessed. ¹⁶The people who live in darkness will see great light, and for those who have no hope, the light will shine." ¹⁷From that time on, Jesus preached what John the Baptist had been preach-

ing, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

Jesus Calls Four Fishermen

¹⁸Walking by the sea early one morning, Jesus saw two brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew. They were standing in a boat off shore throwing out their nets to catch some fish. ¹⁹He called to them, "Come! Follow me! I'll teach you how to catch men!" ²⁰They looked at each other, then without hesitation, came to shore, left their fishing gear and followed Him. ²¹Continuing on, Jesus saw two more brothers, James and John. They were sitting in their boat with their father, Zebedee, mending nets. Jesus gave them the same invitation. ²²Leaving their father in the boat with the fishing gear, they also followed Jesus.

Jesus Teaches and Heals

²³Jesus went on foot throughout the country of Galilee, spreading the good news of the presence of God's kingdom by teaching in the synagogues, preaching in the open air and healing people of every kind of sickness. ²⁴He became known almost overnight. From as far away as Syria, people with all kinds of diseases came to be healed, including those suffering from devil possession, seizures and paralysis. He healed them all. ²⁵Large crowds followed Him wherever He went. Not only did people from Galilee follow Him, but also people from Decapolis, Jerusalem, the southernmost parts of Judea and even from the other side of Jordan.

The Beatitudes

5 One day when Jesus saw the crowds following Him, He went out of town to a hillside where He sat down, surrounded by His disciples and the people. ²Then He shared with them all the distinctive joy of His kingdom.

He said, ³"Happiness comes from having a humble attitude. If you feel your need of God and trust Him, you have the kingdom of God within you.

⁴“Happiness comes from grieving when you sin. Confess your sins and you will be forgiven and peace will spring up in your soul.

⁵“Happiness comes from being submissive. When you acknowledge God as the source of life and abilities, you will feel heaven’s joy. One day, people like this will fill the whole earth.

⁶“Happiness comes from longing to do what is right. Those who do right will have an inner satisfaction that nothing else can give.

⁷“Happiness comes from being compassionate and forgiving. People will remember your loving kindness and return the same to you.

⁸“Happiness comes to those with pure hearts and motives. Such people will one day have the privilege of seeing God and talking to Him face to face.

⁹“Happiness comes from being a peacemaker, for such are God’s children.

¹⁰“Happiness even comes from being treated badly for doing what’s right. Just remember that no matter what happens, your place in heaven is secure.

¹¹“Strangely enough, you’ll find yourself blessed even when people insult you, persecute you and lie about you because you have accepted me. ¹²When this happens, be glad, because it shows that your name is written in heaven and that your reward will be waiting for you there. Remember, the prophets were treated no differently.

Salt and Light

¹³“If you hold on to these values, you will be the salt of the world. But if you let go of them, you’ll be like tasteless salt. What good is salt that has lost its saltiness? The only thing it’s good for is to be thrown outside for people to walk on.

¹⁴“With these values in your life, you’ll be like a city built on a hill, visible to everyone who passes by. ¹⁵People don’t light a candle to hide it, but hold it up high or put it on a lampstand so everyone in the house can benefit from the light.

¹⁶In this same way, let your light shine that others will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.

Jesus Upholds the Law

¹⁷“Don’t think that I’m doing away with the law or the prophets. I am the embodiment of the law. I have not come to change it but to carry it out. ¹⁸Not the smallest letter nor the least stroke of a pen will ever change, any more than heaven and earth can disappear before everything is accomplished. ¹⁹Whoever lives contrary to the law and teaches others to do so does not have the approval of heaven. Those who live by the law and teach others to do so are the ones heaven approves. ²⁰I tell you with absolute certainty that you cannot do everything the scribes and Pharisees tell you and live the way they do and expect to get to heaven. Unless your life is guided by higher values than theirs, you can have no part in God’s kingdom.

Hatred

²¹“You’ve heard the scribes and Pharisees tell you not to kill, and that if you do, you’ll be held responsible by the courts for committing murder. They’re right. ²²But I’m telling you that even if you don’t kill, but you hate someone so much that if you had the opportunity you would kill him, you’ll be held responsible by the heavenly court the same as if you had committed murder. To go a step further, if you treat someone with contempt because you think you’re better than he is, you’re in danger of losing eternal life. ²³That’s why you should make things right with others before you go to worship God. And if, while you’re worshipping, you remember that you have something to make right, ²⁴it’s better for you to leave, go and make things right and come back later, than to stay there and worship God with hatred and pride in your heart. ²⁵Let me tell you something else. If you’re faced with a lawsuit, try to settle it before you go to

court; otherwise, you may end up in front of a judge who thinks you should go to jail for what you have done. ²⁶You will not get out until your accusers have gotten the last penny out of you and your family.

Adultery

²⁷You have also been taught not to commit adultery, and that's right. ²⁸But I'm telling you that if you even look at a woman and lust after her body, you're already having sex with her in your mind. ²⁹If there's anything that keeps leading you into sin, you need to get rid of it, even if it's as valuable to you as one of your eyes. It's better to go without an eye than to go on sinning and lose eternal life. ³⁰Even if you had to lose your right hand, it would be better to lose it here than to lose out on heaven later.

Divorce

³¹"The scribes and the Pharisees have told you that anyone who divorces his wife needs to make it legal by giving her a copy of the divorce papers, and that's right. ³²But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife on a triviality, even though it is legal, may force her to commit adultery to support herself. If he then remarries, he is living in adultery.

Oaths

³³"You've been taught that you shouldn't take an oath unless you take an oath before God. Those who teach this are right. ³⁴But I'm telling you, don't keep swearing by heaven to confirm the truth of what you just said, because God controls the heavens. ³⁵Don't swear by anything that's on earth or by Jerusalem because it's the city of the Great King. ³⁶And don't take an oath carelessly, obligating yourself to do something, because you can't even change the natural color of your hair, let alone predict what will happen next. ³⁷So just communicate with people honestly by letting your Yes mean yes and your No mean no. Taking an oath

to confirm everything you say is one of the devil's ways to break down trust.

Go the Extra Mile

³⁸"You've been taught that you should go to court to get even until you get an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. ³⁹But I'm telling you, don't get angry and retaliate. If someone insults you or slaps you on one side of your face, don't take him to court, even if he slaps you on the other side too. The one who is angry has the problem, not you. ⁴⁰If anyone takes you to court and sues you for your shirt, let him have your coat too. ⁴¹Furthermore, if a Roman soldier asks you to carry his pack for the mile allowed under the law of occupation, do more than the law says and carry it two miles for him. That kind of attitude gives freedom to your spirit. ⁴²Be willing to do a favor for people when they ask you. If anyone wants to borrow something from you, lend it to him.

Love Your Enemies

⁴³"You have been taught that you should love your friends and neighbors, but that it's all right to hate your enemies. ⁴⁴But what I'm telling you is to carry out acts of love for your enemies also. Pray for those who hurt you and curse you. ⁴⁵These actions show that you are the children of God. Look at what your heavenly Father does! He makes the sun to shine on everyone, good and bad alike. Also, He waters the crops for those who do right and for those who don't. ⁴⁶Now if you do kind deeds only for those you care about or who care about you, what makes you different from anyone else? Even those who don't believe in God do that. ⁴⁷And if you greet cheerfully only those who cheerfully greet you, what have you done differently from other people? ⁴⁸You need to reflect the maturity of your heavenly Father who is selfless and kind to everyone, even to those who don't deserve it."

Don't Parade Your Goodness

6“On the other hand, don't parade your goodness in front of others; that's of no value as far as heaven is concerned.

²“When you bring an offering for the poor to the Temple, don't have someone blow a trumpet to announce it. That's what hypocrites do. They've already received their reward by getting the attention they wanted, which is the reason they did it in the first place. ³When you give to others, do so quietly; don't follow the practice of the scribes and Pharisees. ⁴Remember that your heavenly Father knows what you give secretly and will tell others about your love and selflessness when the time comes.

The Lord's Prayer

⁵“When you pray, don't pray as the scribes and Pharisees do. They love to pray out loud in public places, whether it's in the synagogue or the marketplace. Because their purpose is to get people's attention, they've already received their reward. ⁶But when you pray, find a solitary place to talk quietly with God. Your heavenly Father will hear your prayers, you'll be blessed in the time you spend with Him and He'll reward you for it.

⁷“Also, when you pray, don't keep repeating the same prayer. People who don't know God pray that way. They think their gods will take care of their needs because they pray so long. ⁸Don't be like them, for your heavenly Father knows your needs before you even ask.

⁹“When you pray, pray something like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, may your name be glorified. ¹⁰May we extend your kingdom. May we also do your will on earth, as it is done in heaven. ¹¹Please take care of us today. ¹²And forgive us as we have forgiven others. ¹³Do not leave us alone when our loyalty to you is tested. Help us overcome every temptation which the evil one brings against us. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours forever. Amen.’

¹⁴“When you pray this way, remember

that the answer to your prayer is conditional. If you forgive others, your Father will forgive you. ¹⁵But as long as you have an unforgiving attitude, it would not be right for your heavenly Father to forgive you.

Fasting

¹⁶“Regarding fasting, don't do everything the scribes and Pharisees do. When they fast, they want everyone to see their sad faces. Their goal is to impress people, and they achieve it. ¹⁷When you're fasting, comb your hair, wash your face and dress as you always do. ¹⁸People don't need to know that you're fasting. Your heavenly Father knows, and that's all that matters. He will bless you.

Treasures in Heaven

¹⁹“And don't struggle to accumulate a lot of money on earth where insects and rust destroy and where thieves can break in and steal it. Its value is always changing, and you'll spend all your time worrying about money and how to protect it. ²⁰Focus instead on valuables that last, those you can store up in heaven where insects and rust can't destroy them and where thieves can't break in and steal. ²¹Remember, whatever project you invest your money in will have your attention.

What You Look for You See

²²“The relationship that exists between your eyes and your body is the same relationship that exists between what you look at and what you feel. When your eye really focuses on something, your whole body responds. So if you focus on what's good, your life will be full of light. ²³If you focus on what's bad, your life will be full of darkness. And if the inside of you is dark, how dark your life really is!

You Can't Serve Two Masters

²⁴“You can't be loyal to two masters at the same time. Eventually you'll have to choose between the two. It's the same

way with your relationship to God and the things of this world. You can't serve God and money at the same time.

Don't Worry

²⁵"Don't be weighed down with things that concern this world: What should we wear? What should we eat? What should we drink? There's much more to life than eating and drinking. ²⁶Look at the birds. They don't worry about tomorrow's harvest, nor are they concerned about the future. Why? Because your heavenly Father takes care of them and feeds them. Aren't you worth much more to Him than a bird? ²⁷Who can, by concentrating, add one extra hour to his life? No one. ²⁸Worrying about whether or not you'll always have enough to wear won't change a thing. So why be anxious? Look at the lilies. They don't worry about how they look or whether they're wearing the latest fashions, ²⁹yet they are more beautiful in their simplicity than Solomon was in all his costly splendor. ³⁰Now if God designs the flowers so magnificently, which bloom for a very short time and then are gone, how much more interested He is in you! Why do you have so little faith in Him? ³¹Don't worry about what to eat or what to drink or what to wear. ³²These are the priorities of the world. Remember, your heavenly Father knows that you need food and clothes. ³³So make God's kingdom and His righteousness first in your life, and all the other things will be given to you as you need them.

³⁴"Don't take on troubles ahead of time because tomorrow will have its own problems. Just do faithfully what you should be doing today and live one day at a time."

Judging Others

7"Don't judge other people or you will be judged. ²Remember that the same rules you use to judge others, God will use to judge you. Also, the same lack of mercy you show to others will in turn be

measured out to you. ³Why do you keep pointing to the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye when you don't pay attention to the log in your own eye? ⁴Why are you so eager to take the speck out of his eye when you still have a piece of wood in your own? ⁵You hypocrite! First, take a look at your own faults and correct them, then you'll be better able to see how you can help others.

⁶"Don't give food from the Temple to a pack of hungry dogs or throw pearls in front of pigs. The dogs will attack you, and the pigs will trample on the pearls. They don't know the difference.

Asking, Seeking, Knocking

⁷"Ask your heavenly Father for wisdom and He will give it to you. Look for spiritual riches and you'll find them. Knock on heaven's door, and it will open for you. ⁸Anyone who asks will receive; anyone who looks will find; and to anyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹Now just think, What parent would give his son a rock when he asks for a piece of bread? ¹⁰Or what caring parent would give his child a dish of poison when he asks for food? ¹¹Parents who love their children don't do that. How much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask Him! ¹²So do the same good things for others that you would want them to do for you. That's what the law and the prophets are all about.

The Narrow Way

¹³"Don't follow the crowd. The road leading to destruction is wide and easy, and many are on it. ¹⁴The gate is small and the road is narrow that leads to life, and only a few look for it and find it.

A Good Tree Produces Good Fruit

¹⁵"Be careful of false prophets. They come to you as gentle as sheep, but they are as dangerous as hungry wolves. ¹⁶You can tell them by their fruits. Grapes or figs don't grow on thorn

bushes or thistles. ¹⁷A good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree does not produce bad fruit, and a bad tree does not produce good fruit. ¹⁹Remember, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is eventually cut down and used for firewood. ²⁰You'll be able to detect those who are genuine from those who are not by observing the fruit they produce.

Not All Enter Heaven

²¹"You see, not everyone who respects me necessarily loves me. They may call me 'Lord,' but only those who do my Father's will will enter heaven. ²²Many will even do great things, like working miracles or casting out devils, using my name, ²³but when the Day of Judgment comes, I will tell them plainly, 'I don't recognize you. Separate yourself from me, for you have done evil and have not kept my commandments.'

Two Builders

²⁴"The ones who respect me and really love me are the ones who do what I ask them to do. They are like the man who built his house on solid rock. ²⁵The rains came, the streams rose, and the winds battered his house, but it stood firm. ²⁶The ones who make a show of respect for me, but don't do what I ask them to do, are like the man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rains came, the streams rose, and the winds battered his house, and it collapsed with a mighty crash."

²⁸When Jesus finished talking, the people sat there stunned, because His teaching was so different from that of the scribes and the Pharisees. ²⁹He had made things plain to them and had given them a sense of certainty and hope, not just a lot of rules to follow.

Jesus Heals a Leper

8 After this, great crowds followed Jesus everywhere He went. ²Even lepers came to see Him. One such leper fell on his knees and said, "Lord, if you

will, I know you can cure me." ³Jesus reached out and touched him and quietly said, "I will; be clean." Instantly the man's leprosy was gone. ⁴Then Jesus said to him, "Don't tell anyone what I did for you until you first go to the priest, give your offerings and let him pronounce you clean as Moses commanded. This will help the people believe."

Jesus Heals the Centurion's Servant

⁵Then Jesus returned to Capernaum, where He was living. While He was there, a Roman officer sent this message to Him: ⁶"Lord, my servant is at home sick and in terrible pain. Please heal him!" ⁷Jesus returned this message: "I will come and heal him." ⁸Then the officer went to meet Jesus. "Sir," he said, "I'm not good enough for you to come to my house. Just say the word and my servant will be healed. ⁹I know you can do this, because nature is under your authority just as my soldiers are under mine. I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." ¹⁰When Jesus heard these words, He was amazed at this Roman's faith in Him. So He turned to those nearby and said, "This Roman has more confidence in me than my own people have. ¹¹He is living proof that people everywhere can be spiritual sons and daughters of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and be in God's kingdom. ¹²But those who think their blood connection with Abraham makes them heirs of the kingdom will be left in darkness and bitterly weep in despair." ¹³Then Jesus turned to the Roman officer and said, "Go home, and it will be just as you believed." When the officer arrived home, he found that his servant had been healed the same hour that Jesus had spoken to him.

Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-law

¹⁴One day Jesus accompanied Peter to his house and found his mother-in-law sick with a high fever. ¹⁵Jesus went over to her bed and gently touched her.

Immediately her temperature returned to normal and her sickness was gone. Then she got up and helped care for the guests.

Jesus Heals After the Sabbath

¹⁶As soon as it was sundown and Sabbath restrictions were lifted, people came from everywhere wanting to be healed, including many who were devil possessed. Jesus cast out the demons simply by speaking to them and healed all the people who were sick. ¹⁷This was a direct fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "He will take upon Himself our infirmities and He will take away our sicknesses."

The Cost of Discipleship

¹⁸Jesus had no quiet time because huge crowds followed Him wherever He went. So He left Capernaum and crossed over to the other side of the lake. ¹⁹Just before He left, a teacher of the law came to Him and said, "Master, I'll follow you wherever you go." ²⁰Jesus said, "Foxes have their own dens and birds have the privacy of their own nests, but I have no place to call my own. Are you sure you want to follow me?" The teacher didn't answer. ²¹Then another believer said, "Lord, my father just died; please wait for me until after the funeral, then I'll be glad to come and join you." ²²Jesus said to him, "There are some things you will have to let other people do so you can make the kingdom first in your life. You need to decide to join me now, or your family will persuade you not to do so."

Jesus Calms the Storm

²³Upon reaching the boats, Jesus boarded one of them with his disciples and began the trip across the lake. ²⁴When they were about halfway across, an unexpected storm came up, and within minutes the waves were pounding against the boat, filling it with water. Jesus, totally exhausted, had fallen sound asleep. ²⁵The storm was so violent, that finally His disciples shook Him awake and said, "Lord, do something to

save us or we'll all be lost!" ²⁶Then Jesus said, "Why do you have so little faith in God? Our heavenly Father is watching us and knows exactly what is happening. He'll protect us to make sure that our work for Him is not cut short." Then standing up, Jesus steadied Himself in the tossing boat and rebuked the winds and the waves. Suddenly everything was peaceful and still. The storm clouds lifted, the stars came out and the lake was quiet. ²⁷The disciples, together with the people in the other boats who saw this, were speechless. Finally, they said to each other, "What kind of man is this who speaks to the winds and the waves, and they obey Him?"

Two Demon-possessed Men Healed

²⁸When they arrived at the other side of the lake in the district of Gadara and got out of the boat, two devil-possessed men living in nearby rock tombs came charging down the hill at Jesus. These men were so violent that no one dared to pass that way. They screamed, ²⁹"Get out! Get out!" One of them shouted, "We don't want you here! You are the Son of God! Did you come here before the appointed time just to torture us?" ³⁰In the distance was a large herd of pigs. ³¹One of the demons inside the man said, "If you must cast us out, let us go into that herd of pigs." ³²Jesus said, "Go!" So the demons left the two men and entered the pigs. Suddenly the pigs went wild, charged down the hill, plunged into the lake and drowned. ³³Terrified, the men who had been herding the pigs raced back to town to tell the owners what had happened, including the miraculous healing. ³⁴Soon the whole countryside was coming out to see what was going on. This was what Jesus had in mind. Even the pig farmers were eager to see the Man who could do this. However, the farmers pleaded with Him to leave the area because He did not endorse their business.

Jesus Heals a Paralytic

9 So Jesus quietly got back into the boat and returned to Capernaum. ²When He arrived, once again the people brought their sick to Him to be healed. One man was totally paralyzed. Jesus, noticing the people's faith in Him, said to the sick man, "Son, don't despair. Your sins are forgiven." ³When the scribes who were standing nearby heard Jesus say this, they thought to themselves, "That's blasphemy!" ⁴Jesus knew what they were thinking and said, "Why are you always so judgmental? ⁵Which is easier, to forgive sins or to heal someone who is totally paralyzed? Both require divine power. ⁶To show you that I didn't blaspheme or falsely assume the power of God to forgive sins, I will heal the man." He turned to him and said, "Stand up, take your mat and go home." ⁷The paralyzed man stood to his feet, picked up his mat and went home! ⁸When the people saw this they were amazed. They praised God for giving such power to Jesus.

Jesus Calls Matthew

⁹As Jesus was making His way through the city, He passed a tax booth and saw a man named Matthew and his assistants collecting taxes for the Romans. Jesus looked at Matthew and said, "Come, follow me." To everyone's surprise, Matthew stood up, left his booth and followed Jesus.

¹⁰Later when Jesus accepted an invitation by Matthew to dinner, He found that Matthew had invited his relatives and friends, including tax collectors and others whom the Pharisees called sinners. They all had come to see Jesus. Some even sat next to Jesus and His disciples and ate with them. ¹¹When the Pharisees learned about this, they called some of the disciples outside and asked, "Why does your Master let such despicable people as publicans, who collect taxes from us for the Romans, and others who live in open sin, sit and eat with Him?" ¹²Jesus overheard the conversation and

interrupted by saying to the Pharisees, "People who are well don't need a physician, only people who are sick. These people feel they need help. That's why they accepted Matthew's invitation and came. ¹³You need to study the Scriptures to see what God meant when through Hosea He said, 'What I desire is mercy in the hearts of my people, not more animal sacrifices.' I have not come to call those who think they are righteous into the kingdom. I have come to call sinners."

Questions About Fasting

¹⁴Then some of John the Baptist's disciples who were present asked Jesus, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast so often but your disciples don't?" ¹⁵Jesus looked at them and asked, "Do wedding guests fast at a wedding reception when they're sitting next to the bridegroom? It won't be long before this wedding feast is over and the Bridegroom is forcibly taken away; that will be the time for the wedding guests to fast. ¹⁶No one would sew a new, unshrunk piece of cloth to an old garment because as soon as the new piece shrinks, the old garment would give way from the strain and the section that needed repairing would be bigger than before. ¹⁷It's the same with leather wine bags. You don't put fresh grape juice into dried-out leather bags, because they're not flexible, and the continual pressure on the inside would split them wide open. That's why you have to put fresh juice into flexible wine bags."

Jesus Heals a Woman and Raises a Girl to Life

¹⁸Jairus, a leader of the local synagogue, came to Matthew's house to find Jesus. He bowed respectfully and said, "My daughter is all but dead. Come quickly and touch her, and I know she'll be well again." ¹⁹Then Jesus got up, thanked his host, said good-bye to the other guests and with His disciples, followed Jairus to his house. ²⁰While they were making their way through the

crowd, a woman who had been menstruating almost continuously for the last twelve years managed to squeeze through the crowd, come up behind Jesus and reach out far enough to touch the edge of His robe. ²¹She felt that if she could only touch His robe, she would be healed. ²²Jesus stopped. He turned to her and said, "Don't be afraid. You didn't do anything wrong by touching me. Your faith has made you well." The woman had been healed the instant she had touched His robe. ²³Upon arriving at Jairus' house, they found it full of professional mourners playing funeral songs, weeping relatives and neighbors who had come to share the family's grief for the little girl who had died. ²⁴When Jesus saw all this, His heart was sad. He said to the people, "Please make room for me to see the girl. She's not really dead; she's only sleeping." But they all laughed at Him and at what He said. ²⁵So He asked the people to leave and wait outside. Then Jesus went into the bedroom where the little girl was, took her hand and asked her to sit up. She opened her eyes and sat up. ²⁶The news of this spread like fire throughout the whole area.

Jesus Heals Two Blind Men

²⁷As Jesus left the house, two blind men followed Him. "Son of David," they cried, "please have mercy on us!" ²⁸When Jesus got to the house where He was going, the two blind men followed Him inside. After Jesus greeted the people and sat down, He asked the two men, "Do you really believe that I can make you see again?" They answered, "Yes, we do!" ²⁹Then Jesus reached out, touched their eyes and said, "As you believe, so be it." ³⁰Instantly they could see! Jesus told them not to make their healing public because it would upset the Pharisees and could shorten His ministry there. ³¹But after the two men left the house, they broadcast their healing everywhere. Soon that whole area heard what had happened.

Jesus Restores a Man's Speech

³²So Jesus decided to move on because He was attracting too much attention, but the people followed Him and continued to ask Him to heal them. One such man was demon-possessed and mute. ³³After Jesus cast out the demon, the man could talk again. The people were amazed and said, "Never did things like this happen in Israel before!" ³⁴The Pharisees in the crowd were quick to dampen this enthusiasm by saying, "His power over demons is not from God, but from other demons. It's the prince of demons who is helping Him do this!"

Sheep Without a Shepherd

³⁵Jesus paid little attention to what the Pharisees said, but continued on His way, stopping at all the cities and villages in the area, teaching in the local synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every sickness and disease the people had. ³⁶Whenever He saw a group of people, His heart was moved with compassion because they seemed so helpless and misled, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷At times like these, Jesus would turn to His disciples and say, "The harvest is great, but the laborers are so few. ³⁸Pray that God will send many more laborers into His field to reap the harvest."

The Twelve Disciples

10 Jesus not only healed the sick and cast out demons, but also shared His power with His disciples. All twelve of them cast out demons and healed the sick. ²The names of the twelve disciples were Simon Peter, his brother Andrew, James the son of Zebedee, his brother John, ³Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew the former tax collector for the Romans, James the son of Alphaeus, Judas Thaddaeus, ⁴Simon the patriot, and Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed Jesus for money.

The Mission of the Twelve

⁵These were the twelve Jesus sent out to preach and to heal, giving them these instructions: “Don’t preach to the Gentiles to the north or to the Samaritans to the south. ⁶I want you first to go to the lost sheep in Israel. ⁷Tell them that the kingdom of God is near! ⁸Then give them a glimpse of that kingdom by healing their sick, cleansing their lepers, raising their dead and casting out demons. Do this graciously and freely as though you’re giving gifts to people, because this power is also a gift to you. ⁹Don’t carry any money in your belts, such as gold or silver coins. ¹⁰Don’t take a bag, extra clothes or sandals or a staff, because the people will give you what you need. ¹¹When you come into a city or a village, look for a hospitable person who’s respected, and stay at his house until you complete your mission. Don’t rush off to the next place. ¹²Wherever you stay, greet the people graciously and be a grateful guest. ¹³If a family who puts you up for the night is genuinely kind, thank them and bless them. But if they try to take advantage of you, thank them but don’t bless them as you leave because you’ll give them the impression that you approve of their self-interest. ¹⁴If you come into a town that’s hostile or not interested in what you have to say, go on to the next one. ¹⁵I’m telling you that Sodom and Gomorrah’s corruption will look better on the Day of Judgment than the towns that reject the offer of God’s grace.

Persecution

¹⁶“Your work won’t be easy for you, because you’ll be like sheep walking in the midst of wolves. You must be as wise as snakes and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷Watch out for evil men. They will have you arrested and taken to court to stand trial, or they might have you whipped. ¹⁸You might even be taken before the Roman governor or one of King Herod’s sons. If this happens, remember that you are my witnesses, so tell them about me.

¹⁹When persecution comes, don’t worry about what you’re going to say to the judge or to the governor. God will tell you what to say and help you say it. ²⁰Then you’ll know that the Father is with you and that you’re not the one who is speaking but that the Holy Spirit is speaking through you. ²¹Don’t be surprised if you see a believer taken to court and testified against by his own brother, or a father willing to have his children put to death because they believe in me, or even children turning against their believing parents and having them arrested and put to death. ²²Don’t be surprised if you’re hated for my sake, but do your work faithfully and stand firm to the end, and you’ll have a place with me in my kingdom. ²³When they persecute you in one place, go to another. But you will not be able to go to every city and town in Israel before the Son of Man finishes the work He came to do.

²⁴“You know that a student shouldn’t expect to be treated better than his teacher, nor a servant better than his master. ²⁵Good students are like loyal servants. They feel that it’s a privilege to be like their teacher and identify with him. So if people call me a devil, what would you expect them to call you? ²⁶Don’t be afraid of them. Everything they try to cover up and hide will be revealed in the Day of Judgment.

God Cares About You

²⁷“Whatever I tell you in our evening get-togethers, feel free to preach during the day. What I tell you privately may be told publicly. There’s nothing secret about my mission. ²⁸Don’t fear that you might be killed. They may kill your body, but they cannot take away your eternal life. God is the only One who has power over eternal life and death. ²⁹Remember that God never loses sight of you. Look at the sparrows and see how little they’re valued, and yet not one of them dies without God noticing it. ³⁰In fact, God even knows the number of hairs you have on your head.

³¹So don't be afraid; you're worth more than a sky full of sparrows.

Don't Be Ashamed of Me

³²"Anyone who's not ashamed to stand up for me, I'll not be ashamed to stand up for him before all of heaven and introduce him to my Father. ³³Anyone who disowns me, I will disown before all the angels of heaven and before my Father.

The Gospel Divides

³⁴"Sometimes the gospel is like a two-edged sword: it brings the good news of salvation on one hand, but accepting it can also bring persecution. ³⁵It can even drive families apart, such as fathers from their sons, or mothers from their daughters, and those who are related by marriage from their in-laws. ³⁶In fact, a disciple's enemies could come from his own family. ³⁷If you think more highly of your parents or of your family than of me, then I can't trust you to be my disciple. ³⁸Anyone who is not willing to carry his cross, just as I willingly carry mine, is not worthy of me. ³⁹If your only concern is to hold on to life, you'll lose it, but if you're willing to lose your life for my sake, you'll find it.

Christ's Representatives

⁴⁰"Anyone who welcomes you is actually welcoming me and anyone who loves me will love you too. ⁴¹If a person receives you as he would an inspired prophet, he'll be rewarded accordingly. If he receives you as if you're just a good man, he'll even be rewarded for that. ⁴²In fact, no one can give a drink of water or be kind to any of my disciples, young or old, without it being recorded in heaven."

John the Baptist

11 After Jesus finished telling these things to His disciples, He, too, went out to preach and to heal. ²Now John the Baptist, though he was in prison, heard about the things that Jesus

was doing. So he sent two of his followers to find out firsthand if what he had heard was true. ³When they found Jesus, they asked Him, "Are you the One who is coming to deliver Israel, or should we look for someone else?" ⁴Jesus said, "Stay here for a while and watch what I'm doing, then go and tell John what you saw. ⁵You'll see the blind receiving their sight, the lame walking, lepers being healed and the deaf having their hearing restored. In fact, a dead girl has already been raised, and others will be raised also. And all the time, the good news is being preached, even to the most destitute. ⁶The man who recognizes the Messiah's work in all of this will be glad for what is happening."

⁷When the disciples of John saw these things, they went back to give John a firsthand report of what Jesus was doing. After they had gone, Jesus turned to the crowd and asked, "When you went out into the desolate area by the River Jordan, what did you expect to see? Did you expect to see a man who bends with every political and religious wind that blows? Of course not. ⁸Then tell me, why did you go into the desert to hear John preach? Did you expect to see a man dressed in the latest fashion? Of course not, because those kinds of men live in cities where all the comforts are. ⁹Then why did you go out to hear John? You went out because you wanted to see and hear a prophet. I want to tell you that John is a prophet and much more than a prophet. ¹⁰He's the one God spoke about through the prophet Malachi when He said, 'Listen, I will send a messenger ahead of my Son who will prepare the hearts of the people for His coming.' ¹¹That's why John the Baptist is more than just a prophet. The purpose of his calling was to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. In this sense those who are with me and see what I do are more privileged than John. ¹²Beginning with John's ministry, the kingdom has been going forward in

strength, and those who are courageous take hold of it with boldness. ¹³Everything written in the books of Moses and in the prophets about the Messiah points to this time. ¹⁴If you've taken John's message to heart, then you know that he's the Elijah everyone's expecting to see just before the Messiah comes. ¹⁵If you have ears, then listen to what I'm telling you.

¹⁶"To what shall I compare the people of this generation? They are like two groups of children playing in the street. ¹⁷The first group says, 'We play happy songs and you don't sing; then we play funeral songs and you don't cry!' The second group just sits there, and the first group can't do anything to please them. ¹⁸That's how it is here. John lived a very strict life and they said he was a fanatic; some even thought he was devil possessed. ¹⁹When they saw me living normally, eating and drinking with all kinds of people, I was accused of being a glutton, a drunkard and a friend of sinners. But wise people will judge us by our actions."

Impenitent Cities

²⁰Then Jesus expressed disappointment in the people who lived in the cities where He had recently performed some of His greatest miracles because they had not repented of their sins. ²¹"I am disappointed in you, Bethsaida and Chorazin, because if I had performed these same miracles in the streets of such non-Jewish cities as Tyre and Sidon, the people there would have responded immediately by changing their ways. ²²That's why the Judgment will be easier on them than on you. ²³Capernaum, you're so full of pride, you think everything is beneath your dignity. But you will be brought to your knees. If Sodom had been privileged to see the miracles I have done in your streets, the people would have responded and their city would have been spared. ²⁴That's why they will receive more consideration in the Judgment than you will."

Jesus Thanks the Father and Offers People True Rest

²⁵Then Jesus looked up and said to His heavenly Father, "Thank you, Father, that my works are understood by people of childlike faith. Most of the rich and educated ones are so filled with pride that they do not listen. ²⁶But I know that even the response of the few is pleasing to you." ²⁷Then Jesus turned to the people and said, "My Father has put me in charge of everything down here because He knows me as no one else does and knows He can trust me. I know the kind of person my Father is, and I've been trying to show you how much He loves you. ²⁸Come to me, you who are tired and worried, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take up my work and learn from me, for I am gentle and kind, and you will discover an abiding peace in your soul. ³⁰My requirements are easy and the load you carry will be light."

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

12 Some time later Jesus and His disciples were passing through a wheat field on their way home from the synagogue. Since they hadn't had breakfast, they picked some of the heads of wheat, rolled them in their hands and were eating the kernels. ²Some Pharisees came by, also on their way home from the synagogue. They stopped and said to Jesus, "Can't you see that your disciples are breaking the Sabbath? They're harvesting on God's holy day!" ³Jesus answered with Scripture, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his followers were hungry? ⁴They ate the consecrated bread from the Holy Place which only the priests are supposed to eat. But the priest gave it to them because he knew that even holy things can at times be used to serve people's needs without incurring guilt. ⁵If you're concerned about work being done on the Sabbath, what about the priests who work harder in the Temple on the Sabbath than on any

other day of the week? ⁶You don't realize it, but you're talking to One greater than your Temple. ⁷If you understood what God meant when He said, 'I would rather you show mercy than to offer endless sacrifices for sins,' then you would not have condemned the innocent. It would have been obvious to you that my disciples were simply trying to satisfy their hunger after attending the synagogue. ⁸It is the Son of Man who is the Lord of the Sabbath."

Jesus Heals a Man on the Sabbath

⁹Jesus and His disciples left the Pharisees standing in the wheat field. The next Sabbath He again attended the local synagogue. ¹⁰A man was there who had a shriveled arm. When the Pharisees came in, they were still upset about the conversation in the wheat field. So they pointed to the man with the shriveled arm and said, "If people's physical necessities are reason enough to break the Sabbath and you are the Lord of the Sabbath, then why shouldn't you heal this man's arm on the Sabbath?" The Pharisees wanted to turn the people against Jesus by forcing Him to heal on the Sabbath. ¹¹Jesus turned to the people and said, "Is there anyone here who doesn't own a sheep or two? What do you do on the Sabbath when one of your sheep falls into a ditch? Don't you go and pull it out? And when you do, aren't you relieving the sheep of its distress and pain? ¹²Of how much more value is this man? That's why it's not wrong to relieve people of their pain on the Sabbath." ¹³Turning to the man, Jesus said, "Stretch out your arm." The man obeyed and in the attempt to stretch it out, his arm was healed. ¹⁴When the Pharisees saw this, they left the synagogue and met together to decide how to have Jesus arrested and executed for healing people on the Sabbath.

God's Servant

¹⁵Jesus, knowing what they were up to,

also left the synagogue. A huge crowd followed Him, and that same evening He healed all who were sick. ¹⁶Then Jesus told the people not to tell everybody who they believed He was because it would make the Pharisees hate Him even more. ¹⁷This, too, was a fulfillment of God's prophecy through Isaiah, ¹⁸"Look at my Servant whom I chose. The One I love is the very One I sent you. I will put my Spirit in Him and He will share the good news of salvation with everyone. ¹⁹He will not argue or shout, and no one will hear Him make loud speeches in the streets. ²⁰He will not crush those whose hearts are bruised and will not snuff out the weakest flame. He will lead justice to victory. ²¹People will trust Him, and nations will put their hope in Him."

A Divided House Cannot Stand

²²The next day, as Jesus continued to heal the people, they brought to Him a person who was blind, mute and devil possessed. Jesus healed him, so that he could see and talk. ²³When the people saw this miracle, they were amazed and said to each other, "This couldn't be the Son of David whom we looked forward to, could it?" ²⁴When the Pharisees heard what the people were saying, they accused Jesus of using demonic power to work such miracles, even when He cast out demons. ²⁵Jesus knew what they were thinking and said, "If a country or a kingdom is divided against itself, it can never be victorious over an outside enemy. This is also true of a city, a town or a family; if one of them is divided, and the people fight among themselves, it will not stand. ²⁶If the devil uses his own power to cast out other devils, how can his kingdom last? ²⁷And if I cast out devils by using the devil's power, then what power do your people use to cast them out? ²⁸But if I cast out demons by the power of God, then you're seeing the kingdom of God at work. ²⁹God does what anyone would do who wants to go about his business unhindered. Even a thief does that. He first ties

up the owner of the house so he can accomplish his mission. ³⁰If you're not with me in my work, you have set yourself against me; if you're not gathering with me, you're scattering.

The Unpardonable Sin

³¹"I warn you, all sins that men commit can be forgiven, even if they curse God. But when you turn against the Holy Spirit's work by calling it demonic, how can you be convicted of your sins and then be forgiven? ³²God is willing to forgive you even if you accuse me of working together with devils, but turning against the Holy Spirit leaves no room for forgiveness.

A Tree Is Known by Its Fruit

³³"You need to make up your mind whether my work is from God or not. A good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree, bad fruit. If my work is from God, then it is good and He who is doing it must be good too. You can't have it both ways. ³⁴You're as slippery as snakes. How can you be planning to have me killed and at the same time be objective in deciding whether my work is of God or of the devil? The mouth speaks what overflows from the heart. ³⁵A good man's heart will overflow with good things and an evil man's heart will overflow with evil things. ³⁶For every decision you make, you'll be held responsible in the Judgment. ³⁷Your own words will judge you to be innocent or guilty."

The Pharisees Ask for a Miracle

³⁸The Pharisees said, "Give us an unquestionable miracle. Then we'll believe that you're exercising the power of God and not the power of the devil." ³⁹Jesus said, "Godless people are always asking for indisputable proof before they believe anything. No greater miracle will be given than what happened to the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰He was in the stomach of a huge fish for parts of three days and came out alive. Similarly, the Son of Man

will be in the grave for parts of three days and will also come out alive. ⁴¹Some of the people of Nineveh to whom Jonah preached will be saved and in the Judgment will marvel at your blindness. They'll remind you of how they repented at the simple preaching of a prophet. But you have the privilege of listening to One much greater than Jonah. ⁴²The Queen of Sheba, who traveled a great distance just to hear Solomon's wisdom, will be saved. She, too, will wonder how you could be so blind to my words which are greater than what she saw and heard at Solomon's court.

A Demonic Spirit Cast Out Can Return

⁴³"You realize, of course, that when a demon is cast out, he's very restless and keeps looking for another victim. ⁴⁴Then he says, 'Let me check out the house I left.' When he does, he finds it clean, but empty. ⁴⁵So he goes to his fellow demons and invites seven others to join him. Together they go back and find that they are able to gain possession of that man again because he didn't let the Holy Spirit fill his heart. He's now worse off than before. You, too, need to be careful so you don't become more evil than you already are. Surely this is a wicked generation."

Jesus' Mother and Brothers

⁴⁶Jesus turned from the Pharisees and while talking with the people, His mother and stepbrothers came to see Him. ⁴⁷They couldn't get into the house where Jesus was because of the crowd, so they passed a message to Jesus that they had come and wanted to talk to Him privately. ⁴⁸When His disciples brought Him the message, He turned to the people and said, "My relatives are outside and want to talk to me privately, but who are my real relatives?" ⁴⁹He waved His hand toward the people and said, "These are my real relatives! They are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰Whoever is willing to do what my Father says is related to me and is my family."

Parable of the Sower

13 Then Jesus went outside to see His mother and stepbrothers. They expressed concern over the constant controversies He was having with the Pharisees. To find peace, He went down and sat by the lake. ²The crowds there became so big that in order to be comfortable, He had to get into a fishing boat and push off from shore. ³It was from the boat that He taught the people by using many stories. “Look,” He said, as He pointed to a man on a nearby hillside, “a sower is sowing seed in his field. ⁴He sows as close to the edge of his field as he can, and some of the seeds fall on the nearby roadway, and the birds are right there to eat all they can. ⁵Often seeds fall on rocky areas in the field where there is little or no soil. Although these seeds come up quickly in the shallow soil, ⁶after they’re exposed to the hot sun for a while, they shrivel and die because they have shallow roots. ⁷Still other seeds fall where thorny weeds are, and the weeds grow faster than the good seeds, choking them out. ⁸But many of the seeds fall on good ground and produce a hundred, sixty or thirty times more than what was sown. ⁹Think carefully about what I’ve said, then you’ll understand.”

The Reason for Parables

¹⁰Some time later the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Why do you use such everyday illustrations in your teaching and then not explain what they mean?” ¹¹He said to them, “You can understand because you really want to know what they mean. It’s those who don’t want to know who can’t understand. ¹²The person who has the Holy Spirit will receive all the insight he needs to understand what I’m saying, but anyone who doesn’t have the Holy Spirit to help him will soon lose the little insight he does have. ¹³The reason I use everyday illustrations is to give the Holy Spirit room to work on people’s hearts. It will separate those who truly want to hear

and understand from those who do not. ¹⁴Some people really don’t want to know. As the prophet Isaiah said, ‘The people will listen, but they won’t understand; with their own eyes they’ll see what’s happening, but they won’t be convinced. ¹⁵Their hearts are not right. They close their ears and shut their eyes, and although they hear what is being said, they don’t understand what it’s all about. Even though they’ll see things happening before their very eyes, it doesn’t mean a thing. And they won’t come to me for spiritual healing because they really don’t want to change.’ ¹⁶But you’re different and are blessed because you can see and hear and understand. ¹⁷Also, you’re more privileged than the prophets were. They desperately wanted to see what you’re seeing and hear what you’re hearing but didn’t have the opportunity.

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Sower

¹⁸“Let me explain the meaning of the sower for you. ¹⁹The field that was being sown represents the whole world. The seed is the good news about salvation. I am the Sower. The people who only half listen to what I’m saying are like the roadway. They don’t really welcome the good news, and whatever impression it does make on them, Satan is right there to take that impression away, so there are no lasting results. ²⁰The people who hear the good news and are thrilled by it ²¹but live it only halfheartedly are like the rocky areas in the field which have little or no soil. When everything goes well in their lives, they’re fine; but as soon as life becomes a little tough, they forget the whole thing. ²²Then there are those people who hear the good news, receive it joyously and are even willing to suffer for it; yet they get so busy with making a living and getting ahead that their priorities get turned around. Their experience is choked, and they never bear fruit. They are like seeds trying to grow underneath the thorns. ²³Finally, there are those who listen attentively and receive the good

news in their hearts and fully commit themselves to it. They live their lives in such a way that the good news always has priority, and they bear fruit accordingly. Through their influence some of these people will win a hundred to the gospel, others sixty and still others thirty. They are represented by the seed sown in the good part of the field.”

Parable of the Weeds

²⁴Then Jesus turned back to the people on the shore and said, “The kingdom of God is like a man who sowed his whole field with good seed. ²⁵But during the night his enemy came, sowed weeds over the field and then went back home. ²⁶When the good seed sprouted, the weeds came up too. ²⁷When the field workers realized what had happened, they came to the owner and said, ‘We know that you gave us good seed to sow in the field, but now the field is full of weeds! Where did they come from?’ ²⁸The owner said, ‘My enemy did this.’ Then the workers said, ‘We’ll just go and pull up the weeds before they get too big!’ ²⁹But he stopped them, saying, ‘If I let you pull up the weeds now, no matter how small they are, you’ll pull up some of the wheat sprouts too. ³⁰It’s already too late for that. We need to let them grow beside each other until harvest time. Then we’ll go out and harvest the wheat and the weeds together. After that we can separate them. This way we won’t hurt the grain, and we can store it safely in the barn. The weeds we’ll put aside and later burn.’”

Parable of the Mustard Seed

³¹Jesus illustrated the kingdom of God still another way. He said to His disciples, “The beginning of God’s kingdom can be compared to a small mustard seed which a man took and planted in his garden. ³²The mustard seed is a very tiny seed, but when the plant grows and reaches its full height which could be twelve feet, it is bigger than anything in the garden. Even the birds come and

build their nests in its thick branches.

Parable of Yeast

³³“The growth of God’s kingdom can also be compared to the quiet action of yeast which women put in their bread dough. Without notice, the yeast begins to permeate the dough, and the dough begins to rise.”

Jesus’ Use of Parables

³⁴These are just some of the insights Jesus shared with the people as He taught them. He always illustrated His teachings with examples from everyday life. ³⁵This, too, was a fulfillment of prophecy when the Psalmist spoke for the Messiah, saying, “I will open my mouth and use parables to explain to my people hidden things from days of old.”

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Weeds

³⁶Then Jesus had his disciples return the fishing boat they were in and He accepted an invitation to dinner. While they were waiting for the meal, His disciples said, “Tell us the meaning of the story about the man who had weeds sown in his field.” ³⁷Jesus explained, “The man who sowed good seed in the field is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world and the good seed are the people who love God. The weeds are the people who do not love Him. ³⁹The enemy who sowed weeds is the devil. The harvest is the close of probation at the end of this world, and the sorters are God’s angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are sorted out from the wheat during harvest time and later burned, so it will be at the end of the world. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send His angels to weed out of His kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴²The angels will cast all evil into the lake of fire, and the wicked will cry and gnash their teeth in remorse and be destroyed. ⁴³But those who love God will radiate a joy that cannot be imagined and will live in their Father’s house forever. May those who hear these parables listen to me.

Parable of Hidden Treasure

⁴⁴“The kingdom of God can also be compared to treasure buried in a field. When a man finds it, he covers it up, goes home and joyfully sells everything he has to buy that field.

Parable of a Precious Pearl

⁴⁵“You can also compare the kingdom of God to a precious pearl. The merchant who finds it sees its worth. ⁴⁶He then sells everything he has to buy this precious pearl. That’s how much God loves you and how much you should love Him.

Parable of the Fishing Net

⁴⁷“The kingdom of God is also like a fishing net that is thrown out into the water. When it is pulled in, it brings in good and bad fish alike. ⁴⁸The fishermen save the good fish, and the bad ones, they throw away. ⁴⁹That’s the way it’ll be for people at the end of the world. The angels will do the sorting, separating the bad from the good. ⁵⁰Then the bad will cry and feel the terrible pain of God’s withdrawal just before they’re destroyed forever.”

⁵¹Jesus asked His disciples, “Do you understand what I’m saying about the kingdom?” And they said, “We do.” ⁵²Jesus responded, “Every disciple who understands what God’s kingdom is all about is like a wise homeowner who blends treasured antiques with new items of great value. In the same way, those who are my disciples know how to give new value to old truths.”

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

⁵³After dinner Jesus thanked His host and left for Nazareth, His hometown. ⁵⁴There He taught in the local synagogue and healed many people of all kinds of diseases. The townspeople were so amazed at His wisdom that they asked each other, “Where did Joseph’s son get all this wisdom and power to heal the sick? ⁵⁵Isn’t this the stepson of Joseph the carpenter, and isn’t Mary His mother? His stepbrothers—James, Joseph, Simon

and Jude, the sons of Joseph—are’n like that. ⁵⁶And his stepsisters are just like us also. Where did this fellow get all His intelligence?” Some thought Jesus must feel superior to them and had come back to show them how intelligent and powerful He was. ⁵⁷This made them jealous, so they turned against Jesus. He sensed their attitude and said to them, “A prophet is treated with respect wherever he goes except in his own hometown.” ⁵⁸So He had to hold back the blessings of ministry in Nazareth because the people there didn’t accept Him.

John the Baptist Beheaded

14 About this time, Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who ruled Galilee heard about Jesus. ²Talking to his servants one day, he said, “This man Jesus must be John the Baptist risen from the dead! There’s no other way to explain how He can do all these miracles.” ³This was the same Herod who had put John the Baptist in prison because his wife Herodias, whom he had taken from his half-brother Philip, asked him to do so. ⁴She resented John because he had publicly stated that her marriage to Herod was an adulterous relationship, which was against the law. ⁵Herod would have killed John right away for saying this, but he was afraid of a public uprising since the people believed John to be a prophet. So Herod just kept him in prison. ⁶Not long after John’s arrest, Herod celebrated his birthday with a large party. During the evening, he asked his stepdaughter to dance for his guests. She did so and delighted everyone with her performance, especially pleasing Herod. ⁷So he offered to give her anything she asked for, even up to half of his kingdom, and he confirmed his promise in front of his guests with an oath. ⁸Still flushed with her successful performance she conferred with her mother who told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. The daughter returned to the banquet hall and asked that the head of

John the Baptist be brought to her on a serving tray. ⁹Herod was stunned, but because of the oath he had taken and because he did not want to lose face among his guests, ¹⁰he gave the order to have John beheaded. ¹¹Then John's head was brought in on a serving tray and given to the girl. She in turn, presented it to her mother. ¹²The next morning, John's disciples were among the first to hear about it. So they went to the prison and asked the guards for John's body so they could give it a decent burial. They buried him, then went to tell Jesus.

Feeding the Five Thousand

¹³Jesus was so saddened by the news that He got into a small boat and asked His disciples to take Him across the lake so He could be alone for awhile. But the people followed Him by crossing the lake in other boats or by going around the lake on foot. ¹⁴When Jesus saw the people coming, He was moved with compassion and began healing their sick. ¹⁵Late in the afternoon His disciples interrupted Jesus by saying, "We're out here in the middle of nowhere, and it's past mealtime. We need to dismiss them so they can get back home or at least to a place where they can buy bread before the marketplaces close." ¹⁶But Jesus said, "They don't need to leave yet. We can feed them right here." ¹⁷Then the disciples said, "How can we feed this huge crowd? All we have is five little loaves of bread and two small fish!" ¹⁸Jesus said, "Let me have those loaves and fish." ¹⁹When they brought the loaves and fish, He asked the crowd to find some grass and sit down. He took the five little loaves and two small fish, looked up to heaven and asked a blessing, giving thanks for what they had. Then He broke each loaf in half and placed the bread and fish in baskets for the disciples to distribute to the people. ²⁰That huge crowd ate bread and fish until everyone had had enough to eat. When they were finished, the disciples

collected twelve baskets full of leftovers. ²¹Five thousand men were in that crowd, not counting women and children.

Jesus Walks on Water

²²When the people realized what had happened, the effect was electrifying. They began whispering about making Jesus king, but He sensed their plans. He told the disciples, "Get into your boat and go back across the lake. I will meet you on the other side." Then He dismissed the people, speaking with such authority that no one dared disobey. ²³It was late, but when everyone had gone, He climbed a nearby hill to spend some time alone in prayer. ²⁴The disciples had hesitated to leave without Jesus, but seeing that He wasn't coming with them, they finally got into the boat and began to row, grumbling and complaining about Christ's refusal to set up His kingdom. Halfway across the lake, a storm arose. Waves washed relentlessly over the sides of the boat, and the wind blew them off course in spite of their best efforts. ²⁵After midnight, they gave up and let the boat toss in the waves, certain that this was their last hour. But Jesus had not forgotten them. Toward morning He walked down the mountain through the storm and out over the surface of the lake to the disciples' boat. ²⁶When the disciples saw Him, they thought He was a spirit and cried out to God for help. ²⁷Jesus responded to their cry and said, "Don't worry; it is I; don't be afraid!"

²⁸Then Peter called back, "Lord! If it's really you, let me walk to you on the water!" ²⁹Over the noise of the storm, Jesus replied, "Come!" So Peter jumped over the side of the boat and into the waves. He found that he, too, could stand on the water! Then with his eyes on the Lord, he started walking toward Jesus. ³⁰Peter began to feel proud and turned to look at his fellow disciples. When he looked back toward Jesus, a huge wave came between them. Suddenly Peter became afraid. He started to sink and cried

out, "Lord, I'm going down! Please save me!" ³¹Jesus reached out, grabbed Peter's outstretched hand and pulled him back up. He said, "Why did you lose faith and begin to doubt? You need to keep your eyes on me." ³²Then Jesus and Peter walked back to the boat. As soon as they took hold of the sides of the boat, the storm stopped and they climbed in. ³³Then the disciples fell on their knees and said, "Now we know that you are the Son of God!" And they worshiped Him.

Many Healed Just by Touching Him

³⁴Just as dawn was breaking, they arrived on the other side of the lake. ³⁵When the people there found out who these fishermen were and that Jesus was with them, they spread the word. Soon people were coming from everywhere bringing their sick. ³⁶They begged Jesus to heal them and believed that they would be healed if they could only touch the edge of His garment. And everyone who did touch Him was healed.

Evildoing Begins Within

15 After this experience, Jesus had another encounter with the scribes and Pharisees who had come from Jerusalem to Galilee. They said to Him, ²"Why don't your disciples keep the customs of our people? We never see them wash their hands the way the Pharisees do before they eat." ³Jesus replied, "Why don't the scribes and Pharisees keep God's law the way they should? Why are they so concerned about keeping man-made customs when some of these customs are contrary to the very thing God had in mind? ⁴For example, God says, 'Respect your father and mother.' Now under the old government, the man who cursed his parents and rejected them was put to death. He was expected to take care of them. ⁵God's commandment hasn't changed. A man is still expected to take care of his parents. However, you get around the commandment by saying that whoever

dedicates his money and property to the Temple can live off of it all his life, but he can't use a penny of it for his parents, even if they're in need. ⁶If his parents ask him for help, all he has to say is, 'My money has been dedicated to the Lord, so you'll have to get help from somewhere else.' These kinds of customs undermine the whole purpose of God's law. ⁷You hypocrites! Isaiah was correct when he prophesied for God, saying, ⁸'The time will come when my people will talk a lot about me and speak well of me, but their hearts will not be in it. They don't really love me. ⁹Their worship is meaningless because their customs undermine everything I say.'

¹⁰Jesus turned to the people and said, "Listen, I want you to understand what I'm saying. ¹¹It's not so much what goes into a person's mouth that makes him unclean, but what comes out of his mouth. That's what makes him unclean, not whether he washed his hands before eating." ¹²Then the disciples quietly asked Jesus, "Did you notice how you offended the Pharisees when you spoke to them the way you did?" ¹³Jesus answered, "In some ways God treats people like plants. The ones who don't take in the nourishment my Father provides, but prefer to absorb evil, will eventually have to be rooted up. ¹⁴Don't worry about the feelings of the Pharisees. No matter what you do or say to them, they're never happy with you. They're like blind guides followed by those who are blind. And when the blind lead the blind, they'll both fall into the ditch." ¹⁵Peter said, "Lord, explain to us what you said about eating and being unclean." ¹⁶Jesus said, "You mean you didn't understand what I was saying? ¹⁷Let me make it plain. Whatever you eat goes into your mouth, down to your stomach, through your intestines, then out as human waste. ¹⁸But what comes out of your mouth comes from what you're thinking. If your thoughts and feelings are bad and you keep expressing them, they will only make you

feel worse because you'll reinforce what you're already thinking.¹⁹ All kinds of evil come out of people's hearts—murder, adultery, lust, robberies, lying and blasphemy.²⁰ These are the things that hurt a man. But to eat without having washed your hands, much less not having washed them a certain way, does not make you spiritually unclean."

A Canaanite Woman's Faith Rewarded

²¹Then Jesus left that region, crossed the border into the province of Phoenicia and headed northwest toward Tyre and Sidon.²² While Jesus was in the coastal area, a Canaanite woman approached Him and with tears in her eyes said, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David. My daughter is possessed by a devil."²³ But Jesus, contrary to His nature, completely ignored her, as any pious Jew would have done. Seeing this, the disciples thought that Jesus was condoning their practice and suggested to Him that He send her away because she was bothering them.²⁴ Jesus looked at the woman and said, "My commitment is to help the Israelites."²⁵ Then she fell on her knees in front of Him and bowed low, pleading with Jesus to help her.²⁶ But again Jesus rebuffed her by saying, "It's not right to take the family dinner and give it to the dogs."²⁷ The woman responded, "That's true, Lord, but family dogs are taken care of by their owners and are given the leftovers."²⁸ Then Jesus responded with His normal kindness and compassion, "Dear woman, you have a very strong faith. I really do care about you and your daughter. Your request is granted and your daughter is now well." The disciples then realized that Jesus was showing them the contrast between their cold cultural bias and the compassion that God wanted them to have.

Jesus Heals Many Sicknesses

²⁹After this, Jesus went back to Galilee to a secluded spot near the lake. There

He climbed a little hill and sat down to rest a while.³⁰ But soon the people came bringing their sick. Some were lame, others were blind, mute, or handicapped in some other way. Jesus healed them all.³¹ The crowd was amazed when they heard the mute speak, saw the lame walk and realized that the blind could now see. They started praising the God of Israel.

Feeding the Four Thousand

³²This continued for three days. Finally Jesus said to His disciples, "These people haven't had much of anything to eat since we first came. We can't send them away hungry, because some of them may faint before they get home."³³ His disciples said, "Where are we going to get food to feed all these people? We're miles from anywhere."³⁴ Jesus asked, "Don't we have something we can share with them?" They said, "All we have are seven little loaves of bread and a few fish."³⁵ Then Jesus turned to the crowd and asked them to sit down.³⁶ He took the loaves and fish the disciples gave Him, thanked God for what they had and asked Him to bless it. Then Jesus gave the bread and fish to the disciples and they gave them to the people.³⁷ After everyone had eaten, the disciples collected seven baskets full of leftovers.³⁸ That day Jesus fed four thousand men, not counting the women and children who were there also.³⁹ Then Jesus dismissed the crowd and sent the people home. He walked down to the Lake of Galilee, got into one of the fishing boats and crossed over to Magadan.

Understanding the Time

16 When the Pharisees and Sadducees learned that Jesus was in the area, they asked Him for irrefutable evidence that He was the Son of God.² Jesus said to them, "When you see a beautiful sunset, don't you usually say that tomorrow will be a beautiful day?³ And when you see an overcast sky in the morning, don't you usually say that today we'll

have bad weather? If you can interpret the sky, why is it so hard for you to interpret the miracles that I've already done and to accept them as evidence? ⁴The reason you ask for such evidence is that you don't want to change your ways. But God will give no sign other than the evidence that's similar to the experience of the prophet Jonah." And when the Pharisees and Sadducees heard Him make reference to Jonah, which they had heard Him make before, they had nothing to say. Then Jesus turned and left.

The Yeast of False Doctrines

⁵By now the disciples were hungry, because they had not eaten for some time. ⁶Jesus said, "You need to be careful not to eat bread that has the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." ⁷They tried to figure out what Jesus meant and concluded that He was telling them never to depend on other people for bread, but to provide their own. ⁸When Jesus overheard what they were discussing, He said, "You're so concerned about eating that you don't understand what I'm trying to tell you. ⁹Have you already forgotten how we fed five thousand men and their families with just five little loaves of bread and two small fish and still had lots left over? ¹⁰And what about when we fed four thousand men with their families on seven little loaves and a few small fish just a few days ago? How many full baskets were collected then? ¹¹Why don't you understand what I meant when I told you not to eat the bread of the Pharisees and Sadducees? I wasn't talking about eating, because eating is not the problem." ¹²Finally it dawned on the disciples that Jesus was not talking about actual bread but about the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Son of God

¹³Then Jesus left Galilee and headed north to the city of Caesarea Philippi. Here He asked the disciples, "Who do people really think I am?" ¹⁴They said,

"Some people think you're John the Baptist come back to life. Others think you're Elijah returned from heaven. Some think you're Jeremiah or one of the other prophets raised to life." ¹⁵Jesus asked, "Who do you think I am?" ¹⁶Peter answered, "We believe that you're the One who was to come, the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷Jesus said, "Bless you, Peter. You spoke this truth with such conviction that it obviously didn't come to you from a human source, but as a revelation from my Father. ¹⁸But don't become overconfident. You're just a small rock, as your name indicates. However, the Rock on which I will build my church is the truth that was just revealed to you. The gates of wickedness and death will not be able to stand against it. ¹⁹In the Word of God I have given you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you do according to Scripture has already been approved by heaven. What you do contrary to Scripture has already been disapproved by heaven." ²⁰Then Jesus told the disciples that they should not agitate the people or the Pharisees with the question of who He was because it could cause a reaction which would hinder His ministry.

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection

²¹He also outlined for them the events that would soon take place leading to His death. His arrest would be initiated by the chief priests, the scribes and the Pharisees. Then He would be killed, but on the third day, He would come back to life. ²²When Peter heard this, he took Jesus to one side and said, "God forbid that this should happen to you. Stop talking like that!" ²³Jesus rebuked Satan's influence on Peter and then said, "Peter, you're making things very hard for me. A minute ago you spoke for God, but now you're talking like a man who is against the things of God."

The Cost of Following Jesus

²⁴Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "You need to forget about your desire to have me drive out the Romans and free Israel, because that's not what I came to do. If anyone wishes to follow me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and be willing to suffer for me, even as I am willing to suffer and die for him. ²⁵Anyone who is only interested in this life will end up losing eternal life, but the person who is willing to give up everything to follow me will find happiness in this life and will also be given eternal life. ²⁶What value is there in gaining the whole world and losing your own soul? No amount of money can buy it back. ²⁷When I come back again surrounded by my Father's glory, accompanied by the angels of heaven, then I'll reward everyone according to what he has done. ²⁸Some of you standing here will not die before you will be given a glimpse of the glory of my second coming."

Jesus' Transfiguration

17 About six days later Jesus took Peter, James and John up on a high mountain to give them a preview of His second coming. ²It was here that Jesus was transfigured. While praying for Himself and His disciples, His face suddenly became as bright as the light of the sun and His whole body was bathed in light. ³Then Moses and Elijah appeared and stood next to Jesus and talked with Him about His crucifixion, soon to take place in Jerusalem. ⁴When Peter saw this, he said, "Lord, this is great! We need to pitch three tents here—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah!" ⁵While he was still talking, a brilliant cloud surrounded them, and a voice said, "This is my Son whom I love and with whom I am very pleased. Listen to Him!" ⁶When the disciples heard that voice, they were so afraid that they covered their faces and threw themselves on the ground. ⁷They were still shaking when Jesus touched them and said, "You can get up now. You

don't need to be afraid." ⁸When they uncovered their faces and looked up, they saw no one but Jesus, and He looked the same as before.

⁹As they made their way down the mountain, Jesus said to them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen until after my resurrection. ¹⁰The three of them responded by saying, "We thought Elijah had come down from heaven to announce the beginning of your kingdom on earth, but he didn't. Why did our teachers tell us that Elijah must come before the Messiah comes?" ¹¹Jesus said, "It's true; Elijah must come first. ¹²In fact, he's already been here, but the people refused to listen to him or recognize his mission, so they killed him. And they'll kill me too." ¹³Then the disciples realized that He was talking about John the Baptist and that the coming of Elijah had to do with preaching the kind of message Elijah preached, not the setting up of a kingdom.

Jesus Heals a Demon-possessed Boy

¹⁴When they reached the base of the mountain, a man came running to Jesus, fell on his knees and with heartbreaking emotion said, ¹⁵"Lord, have mercy on my son. He has terrible seizures and has no control over himself. He often throws himself into the fire or jumps into the water. ¹⁶I brought him all the way here to have your disciples heal him, but they couldn't. So now the scribes and Pharisees are scorning them and me." ¹⁷Jesus quietly said, "What a faithless, obstinate generation! How long must I be with you for you to understand?" Then He said to the man, "Bring your boy here. Let me see him." ¹⁸The demon threw the boy on the ground in front of Jesus. Then Jesus rebuked the demon. It came out of the boy, and he was healed. ¹⁹Later, when the disciples were alone with Jesus, they asked, "Why couldn't we cast out the demon from him?" ²⁰Jesus answered, "You had too much faith in yourselves and too little faith in God. If you had true faith, even as small as a mustard seed,

you'd be able to say to this nearby mountain, 'Out of my way!' and it would move. I'm saying this to tell you that there's no problem too big for God. ²¹However, demons are cast out, not by your own power, but through fasting and prayer and by walking humbly with God."

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection a Second Time

²²Before they left that part of Galilee, Jesus tried again to prepare them for what was coming. "It won't be long now." He said, "before I'll be betrayed and turned over to the priests. ²³They'll have me killed, but on the third day I will rise again." The disciples were grief-stricken when they heard this. They couldn't understand how such a thing could happen.

Jesus and Peter Pay Their Taxes

²⁴When they arrived in Capernaum, they were stopped by those who collected taxes. One of them asked Peter, "Don't you fellows believe in paying your Temple tax?" ²⁵Peter answered, "Of course we do!" Later when Jesus and the disciples were enjoying the hospitality of a friend and were eating together, Jesus asked him, "Peter, from whom do kings collect taxes? From members of their own family or from the people? What do you think?" ²⁶Without hesitation Peter said, "From the people, of course!" Then Jesus said, "If that's the case, then the members of the king's family are exempt, aren't they? So are Levites, prophets and priests. ²⁷But to avoid further controversy, go down to the lake, throw in a fishing line and take the first fish you catch. Then open its mouth and you'll find a small coin. Take the coin and go pay the Temple tax for all of us."

Who Is the Greatest?

18 One day, when they were sitting in the marketplace, the disciples were discussing what determines a person's greatness in the kingdom of heaven. They asked Jesus about it. ²He

called a mother with a small child over to Him. Tenderly taking the little one in His arms, He said, ³"Unless you change and become as trusting and harmless as this little child, you cannot even be admitted into God's kingdom, much less be considered great. ⁴Such innocence comes to adults only by choice. The person who humbles himself like this child is great in the sight of heaven.

The Value of Heaven

⁵"Whoever welcomes a little child or a new believer in my name welcomes me. ⁶But anyone who causes even one of these to lose their faith in me would be better off to have a large stone tied around his neck and be thrown into the sea. ⁷The world is full of temptations, but a terrible day is coming for those who destroy people's faith in me. ⁸You need to deal radically with whatever stands in your way of being saved, even if it means losing something as valuable as a hand or a foot. It's better to be physically handicapped or less successful in this life than to lose out on the next. ⁹If, for example, your eye causes you to sin, be willing to lose your eye if necessary rather than to lose out on heaven. If you must make a choice, it's better to forego greatness in this life than to be consumed by the fire of God's judgment.

The Lost Sheep

¹⁰"Don't think that little children are worth nothing. They, too, have angels watching over them, helping them to be good, and their angels are constantly going back and forth to my Father in heaven. ¹¹I have come to save all that are lost.

¹²"Let me ask you something. If a man has a hundred sheep, but one of them gets lost, doesn't he leave the others at home and personally go out and search everywhere to find that one lost sheep? ¹³And when he finds it, what does he do? He picks it up, puts it on his shoulder, and at that moment, forgets all about the

other ninety-nine sheep which are safely at home and rejoices over this one sheep that he found. ¹⁴That's how your heavenly Father feels about every child of His, whether infant or adult. He wants no one to be lost.

Dealing With a Brother Who Sins

¹⁵"If a fellow believer does something to hurt you, you should go and talk with him, no matter how painful that may be. And if the two of you can come to an understanding, you're brothers again. ¹⁶But if he won't listen to you, then ask two other believers to go with you so that whatever the two of you talk about can be verified. ¹⁷If he refuses to listen, take the matter to the church; if he doesn't listen to the church, then treat him as an unbeliever who needs to be brought back to the Lord. ¹⁸People generally have enough common sense to determine what is right and wrong, and so do you. You know what behavior heaven approves and what behavior it doesn't approve. ¹⁹If two or more of you pray about something which is in harmony with heaven, my Father will answer your prayer according to His wisdom. ²⁰In fact, wherever two or more of you meet together in my name, my presence is there with you."

The Unforgiving Servant

²¹Then Peter asked Jesus, "How many times should I forgive my brother? Is seven times enough?" ²²Jesus said, "Peter, it is not a question of how many times, but a question of your own attitude. If your attitude is right, you'll forgive him seventy times seven because you love him.

²³"God's kingdom is like a certain king who decided to check on his servants to see how well they were doing their jobs. ²⁴When he reviewed their performance, he found that one man had embezzled millions of dollars. ²⁵Now since the man had spent it all, the king, according to the custom of the land, had to confiscate the

man's property and sell his family as slaves until the year of release to recover as much of the kingdom's money as possible. ²⁶But the servant fell on his knees before the king and begged for mercy. 'Lord,' he said, 'please forgive me and I promise to pay back every cent I owe you.' ²⁷The king's heart was touched. He felt sorry for the man and his family, forgave him and kept the man on as his servant.

²⁸"This same man got up off his knees, thanked the king and promptly went out to find a fellow-servant who owed him a hundred dollars. When he found him, he grabbed the fellow-servant by the throat and demanded that he pay him immediately. ²⁹Then the man fell on his knees, asked for forgiveness and mercy, and promised to pay back every last cent. ³⁰But the man to whom he owed the money wouldn't listen and turned him over to the police who threw him in jail until his family could pay what he owed. ³¹When the king's other servants saw what happened, they could hardly believe it. They felt sorry for the man in jail and for his family, so they went and told the king. ³²The king asked to see the former embezzler whom he had just forgiven and said to him, 'You are more of a scoundrel than I thought. I forgave you the millions of dollars you embezzled and even gave you back your old job. ³³Shouldn't you have shown gratitude by being as forgiving and merciful to your fellow-servant as I was to you?' ³⁴The king was righteously angry and turned the embezzler over to the jailer until his family paid every last cent he owed. ³⁵This is what my heavenly Father will have to do if you don't forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Marriage and Divorce

19 After this, Jesus left Galilee to go down to Judea circling through the other side of Jordan. ²Again the crowds of people followed Him, and those who were sick, He healed.

³The local Pharisees also came out to

see Him. But they wanted to trap Jesus in His own words so they could accuse Him to the Jewish authorities for teaching things contrary to the law. They asked Him, "Is it right for a man to divorce his wife for any reason he chooses?"⁴ Jesus answered, "Haven't you read what the Scriptures say about the kind of relationship a man should have with his wife? In the beginning when God created the human race, He started it with two people, a man and a woman, with the idea for them to be one."⁵ This is why a man will leave his father and mother for the woman he chooses to be his wife, and God expects him to keep her and love her. They are always to be one.⁶ Therefore, if a man wants to carry out God's original plan, he shouldn't divorce his wife, because what God has joined together, man must not separate."⁷ Then they asked Him, "If that's so, then why did Moses make it legal by saying it's all right to divorce your wife as long as she's given the proper divorce papers?"

⁸Jesus said, "Moses did this because men were harsh with their wives, divorcing them over trivialities. He needed to stop this and allow for divorce only under the most unusual circumstances. Divorce has never been part of God's plan."⁹ Let me tell you that whoever divorces his wife over some triviality and remarries is living in adultery. And a man who marries a woman who divorced her husband over some triviality so she can remarry is approving what she did and is also living in adultery."¹⁰ Then Jesus' disciples got into a discussion with Him, saying, "If those are the restrictions on divorce, then it's better not to get married at all."

¹¹Jesus answered, "If you can't live with a wife as a marriage partner, then don't get married. But there are men who can carry marital responsibilities very well."¹² A person's background or his inability to father a child because of some birth defect may be the reason he chooses not to marry. Others give up

marriage to advance the gospel. Whoever is able to do this, let him do so."

Jesus Blesses Little Children

¹³When Jesus' discussion with the disciples was over, mothers with their children crowded in to see Him, asking Him to pray for the little ones and to bless them. The disciples scolded the mothers for bothering Jesus with their insignificant requests.¹⁴ Jesus said, "Don't stop these mothers from bringing their children. Let the little ones come to me. Heaven belongs to people who are as innocent as children."¹⁵ Don't hold them back. They, too, are part of my kingdom." After He had blessed each one, He continued on His way to Jerusalem.

The Rich Young Ruler

¹⁶One day a rich young man came to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good things should I do to make sure I get to heaven?"¹⁷ Jesus said, "Why do you ask me what good things you should do? Goodness comes only from God. But if you want to get to heaven, keep the commandments."¹⁸ The rich young man asked, "Which ones?" Jesus answered, "The Ten Commandments, the ones which tell you not to murder, commit adultery, steal, or lie,¹⁹ the ones that tell you to respect your parents and care about your neighbor as you do yourself."²⁰ The young man said, "I've kept these commandments all my life, yet something seems to be missing. What do you think it is?"²¹ Jesus answered, with great compassion, "If you want to have a more perfect walk with God, you need to sell what you have, give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me."²² But the young man turned and walked away, because he was very rich.

Eternal Rewards

²³Then Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "Rich people have a much harder time learning to depend on God

than poor people do. ²⁴It would be easier for a camel to force its way through the eye of a needle than for a rich man clinging to his riches to get into the kingdom of heaven.” ²⁵When the disciples heard this, they couldn’t believe it. They had been taught that rich people prospered because they had been good. So they asked Jesus, “If the rich can’t make it to heaven, how can we?” ²⁶Jesus looked at them with concern and said, “The way of salvation always looks more difficult to humans than to God. With God, all things are possible.” ²⁷Peter responded, “Lord, where do we fit in? We’ve left everything to follow you. If rich people can enjoy all their riches and God can still save them, then why are we going around the country like beggars?” ²⁸Jesus looked at His disciples and said, “You men have willingly left everything to follow me. I know that. When I come again to restore all things and sit on my throne, you will be there beside me on twelve thrones in charge of the twelve divisions of people making up my kingdom. ²⁹Anyone who leaves everything he has, brothers and sisters, parents, or wife and children because of me will receive a hundred times more spiritual blessings in this life and the gift of eternal life as well. ³⁰Many people you expect to be in heaven won’t be there. And others you would not expect to be there will be.”

Parable of Workers and Wages

20 Jesus continued, “The question of who will get to heaven is like a farmer who went down to the marketplace about six o’clock in the morning to find some men looking for work. ²When he found some, he made them an offer: He would pay them a silver coin, the normal day’s wage. When they agreed, he sent them into his vineyard to work. ³The day wore on, and about nine o’clock the farmer realized he needed more workers, so he went back to the marketplace. When he found men standing there looking for work, he said to them, ⁴‘Come work for

me, and if you’re willing to trust me, I’ll pay you a fair wage.’ They agreed, so he hired them and sent them out to work. ⁵Soon the farmer realized that he needed even more workers, so at noon he went back to the marketplace, then again at three o’clock in the afternoon. Each time men were standing there looking for work. And they all agreed to trust the farmer for their wages. ⁶As late as five o’clock, the farmer picked up some extra men to finish the harvesting before dark. He asked those standing there, ‘Have you been out of work all day?’ ⁷They said, ‘Yes, we’ve been going around from farm to farm all day, looking for work, but no one needed us. So we decided to come here to the marketplace, hoping to be picked up for at least a few hours of work before it gets dark.’ The farmer said, ‘You’re hired. Come and work for me, and when we finish today’s harvesting, I’ll pay you a fair wage.’ They gladly went to work.

⁸“In the evening, when the harvesting was done, the farmer said to his supervisors, ‘Call the men together so I can pay them. Let’s begin with those who were hired last.’ ⁹The men he had picked up at five o’clock lined up first and when they came up to the pay table, the owner gave them a silver coin, a full day’s wage, as he had promised the first ones he hired. ¹⁰At first the men who had been hired at six o’clock that morning became very excited. They reasoned that since they had worked all day, they should get proportionately more. But when they came up to the pay table and got a silver coin, the same as the others, they were angry. ¹¹They complained to the farmer and accused him of unfair labor practices. ¹²They said, ‘Some of these men worked only a few hours, and you paid them a full day’s wage, the same amount you gave us. But we worked through the hottest part of the day, and now we get the same as they do? That’s unfair!’

¹³“The farmer answered, ‘Friends, how do you figure I was being unfair? Didn’t you agree to do a full day’s work for a silver coin?’ ¹⁴Take your pay and go home.

Just be glad someone hired you today. I decided to pay all of the workers a full day's wage. ¹⁵Don't I have a right to do what I want with my own money? Why do you think it's wrong for me to pay them what I want? Are you jealous because I'm generous?" ¹⁶That's the way it will be when God's harvest ends. The last will be first, and the first will be last. Some of God's workers gladly do what they can with no thought of pay. Others work very hard for God but think only of what's in it for them."

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection a Third Time

¹⁷As Jesus made His way to Jerusalem, crowds of people followed Him. He took His disciples aside from the crowd to rest a while and said to them, ¹⁸"Not long after we arrive in Jerusalem, someone will betray me to the priests and the lawyers, and they'll sentence me to death. ¹⁹They'll turn me over to the Roman authorities, who will ridicule me, then beat me and finally crucify me. But on the third day, I'll rise from the dead." The disciples were puzzled and couldn't comprehend what Jesus was saying.

Heaven's Measure of Success

²⁰While they were resting in Jericho before going on to Jerusalem, the mother of James and John came to Jesus, asking Him if He would be so kind as to do her a favor. ²¹Jesus said, "What is it you would like me to do for you?" She said, "Lord, when you set up your kingdom, would you let my two sons sit next to you, one on your right and the other on your left?" ²²Jesus answered, "Dear mother, I know you love your sons, but they can't have the highest place in the kingdom just for the asking. First they must answer the same question that I had to settle for myself: Am I willing to obey and suffer for my Father?" When James and John heard this, they said, "Yes, Lord, we are willing!" ²³Then Jesus turned to them and said, "I know you are willing. Yes, you will obey

and suffer just as I will. But I can't say who will sit next to me in my kingdom. That's my Father's decision."

²⁴When the other disciples heard what James and John had requested, they were angry with them. ²⁵So Jesus called them all together and said, "You know how people love to exercise power over other people and that the world measures success by a man's ability to control others. ²⁶But my kingdom is different, and your standards should be different. Heaven measures success by what a man does for others, not by what they do for him. ²⁷If you want to be important, then you should be the one most willing to serve. ²⁸That is what the kingdom of heaven is all about. In my Father's house everyone cares about everyone else. So I have not come to exercise authority over people, but to serve them and to die as a ransom for their sins."

Jesus Heals Two Blind Men

²⁹Soon after this, Jesus and His disciples left Jericho and continued toward Jerusalem. As before, huge crowds of people followed them. ³⁰On the way, two blind men sitting by the roadside begging heard that Jesus was coming. As the crowds began to pass by, they called out, "Lord, Son of David, please have mercy on us!" ³¹Some from the crowd tried to stop them from shouting, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, help us! Have mercy on us!" ³²Jesus heard them, and when He came to where they were, He stopped and asked, "What is it you would like me to do for you?" ³³They said, "Lord, please give us our sight." ³⁴With tender compassion Jesus reached out and touched their eyes. Instantly they could see. Then the two men followed Him as He continued on His way.

The Triumphal Entry

21 As Jesus and His disciples approached Jerusalem, they stopped near the little village of Bethphage at the Mount of Olives. Jesus said to two of His

disciples, ²“Go into the village, and as soon as you enter, you will find a mother donkey tied to a post beside her grown colt. Just untie them and bring them here. ³If anyone tries to stop you or asks what you’re doing, tell him, ‘The Lord needs to borrow these animals for a little while. We will bring them back.’ Then he will let you take them.” ⁴This was to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah which said, ⁵“Tell the people of Zion, ‘Look! Your King is coming! He’s entering into your city quietly and humbly, riding on a donkey.’” ⁶The two disciples did what Jesus had asked them to do. ⁷They went into the little village and brought the donkey and her colt to Him. Then, suspecting that He might ride the young donkey into Jerusalem as kings of old had done during their inauguration, they took off their coats and spread them on the donkey for Jesus to sit on.

⁸The people quickly caught the significance of it, and anticipation rippled through the crowd. They, too, took off their coats and spread them in front of the donkey as Jesus rode along. Others cut off palm branches and spread them in the road. ⁹Then the crowd started singing and chanting, “The Son of David will save us! He comes in the name of the Lord! Thanks be to God! Bless His name!” ¹⁰By the time they reached the gates of Jerusalem, the whole city was caught up in the excitement. People were running everywhere, asking, “Who is this man they’re shouting about?” ¹¹Those in the procession said, “This is the prophet Jesus who has come from Nazareth in Galilee to be our King!”

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

¹²When the procession reached the Temple, Jesus went inside, and the two disciples took the donkeys back to the village. Jesus saw the outer court full of merchants buying and selling sheep and doves for sacrifices and exchanging the people’s money at a very high rate for Temple money. Boldly, He confronted

the exchangers, tipped over their tables and ordered them out. He opened the animals’ cages, untied the sheep and rebuked the vendors, saying, ¹³“The Scriptures say, ‘My Temple is a house of prayer,’ but you have turned it into a hiding place for thieves.”

¹⁴Then the blind and the lame came in to find Jesus. He responded to their requests by healing every one of them. ¹⁵Soon the priests and merchants ventured back inside and heard children singing. They saw the lame and the blind being healed and heard people praising God and chanting, “Blessed be the Messiah, the Son of David.” This especially angered the teachers and priests. ¹⁶They said, “Can’t you hear what these people and their children are saying about you?” Jesus answered, “Yes, I do. Haven’t you read David’s Psalm which says, ‘True praise is most often expressed by grateful children?’” ¹⁷Then Jesus left the Temple and went to the nearby village of Bethany, where He stayed overnight with Lazarus and his two sisters.

The Fruitless Fig Tree

¹⁸Before breakfast the next morning, He started back to Jerusalem. ¹⁹He was hungry, so when He saw a fig tree in the distance, He headed toward it. But when He got to the tree, He found no fruit. All it had were lush-looking leaves. Using this experience to teach His disciples about Israel’s spiritual condition, He said to the tree, “Since you haven’t produced anything but leaves, from now on you’ll not even produce those.” Instantly, the leaves began drying up.

²⁰The disciples were amazed and said, “Look! The leaves are shriveling up!” ²¹Jesus turned to them and said, “Don’t be surprised. If you have faith in God without doubting, you, too, will be able to do unusual things for Him. If God wanted you to, you could say to a mountain, ‘Out of my way and disappear into the sea,’ and it would. ²²When you ask

God for help, believe that you will receive it, and He will help you in ways that will amaze you."

Jesus' Authority Questioned

²³Later that morning after Jesus and His disciples arrived at the Temple, the priests and elders came to Him as He was teaching the people and said, "Who gave you authority to drive our money changers out of the Temple yesterday and to say the things you're now saying?"

²⁴Jesus replied, "Let me ask you something first. If you answer my question, then I'll answer yours and tell you where I get my authority. ²⁵Was the baptism that John practiced ordained by heaven or was it his own idea?"

The priests went into a huddle and discussed the question for a few minutes, saying to each other, "If we say that John's mission and baptism was heaven-inspired, He will say, 'Then why didn't you support him and do what he told you to do?' ²⁶If we say it was John's own idea, the people will turn on us, because they believe that John was a prophet." ²⁷So they said to Jesus, "We can't answer your question." Then Jesus said, "Then I'm under no obligation to answer yours."

Parable of the Two Sons

²⁸"But let me ask you something else. A father went to one of his two sons and said, 'Son, could you go and work in the vineyard today and help with the harvest?' ²⁹The son said, 'I will not.' But after he thought about it, he changed his mind and went. ³⁰The father didn't know this, so he went to the other son and said, 'Son, could you go and work in the vineyard today and help with the harvest?' The son said, 'Sure, father, I'll be happy to.' But after he thought about it, he changed his mind and decided not to go.

³¹Now which one of these boys obeyed his father?" The priests answered, "The first one, of course." Then Jesus said, "You're right. That's why tax collectors and prostitutes who changed their lives

after listening to John, will get to heaven before you will. ³²The reason is obvious: John preached what was right and his baptism was heaven-inspired, but you didn't believe what he said. You saw the lives of tax collectors and prostitutes being changed, yet you still didn't believe him and repent.

Parable of the Wicked Tenants

³³"I have another parable for you. A landowner planted a vineyard, and put a winepress in the middle of it. He built a wall around his vineyard to protect it and constructed a lookout tower to spot thieves. Then he leased the vineyard to professional vineyard keepers and left the country on business. ³⁴When it was time for the harvest, he returned home and told his agents to go check on the grape growers to see how the harvest was progressing. ³⁵But the ones who had leased the vineyard beat up one agent, murdered another and stoned to death a third. ³⁶Then the landowner sent still other agents, but the grape growers treated them the same way. ³⁷Finally, the landowner said to himself, 'I know what I'll do. I'll send my son to check on the harvest. They will respect him.' ³⁸But when the grape growers heard that the son was coming, they said to themselves, 'He's not only the owner's son, he's the heir! Let's kill him, and when his father dies, we can claim the vineyard.' ³⁹When the son came into the vineyard, they grabbed him, took him outside the wall and killed him. ⁴⁰Now let me ask you, When the landowner hears about this, what do you think he'll do to those people?" ⁴¹The priests answered, "He'll have them arrested and tried for murder, then lease out his vineyard to other grape growers who will recognize the landowner's right to a share of the harvest."

⁴²Jesus said, "You're right. Have you read in the Psalms that the stone the Temple builders rejected was the cornerstone? This stone is like the son in the story who was chosen by his father, but rejected by the grape growers. ⁴³If you fol-

low through with your plans to kill me, the care of my Father's vineyard will be taken from you and given to people who know how to produce fruit. ⁴⁴Don't plan to kill me, but accept me as your Cornerstone. He who falls on this Stone, his heart will be broken because of his sins, but he on whom the Stone falls will be ground to powder and scattered like dust."

⁴⁵After listening to these parables, the priests and elders knew that Jesus was aware of their plans. ⁴⁶They wanted to arrest Jesus right then and there but were afraid to because the people believed He was a prophet sent to them by God.

Parable of the Wedding Banquet

22 Then Jesus turned to the people and said, ²"The way men and women are selected for the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who prepared a banquet for his son's wedding. ³The king sent his servants to remind those who had received the royal invitation to get ready for the celebration. Soon his son would be coming with his chosen bride and the wedding would begin. But the people refused to come. ⁴Then the king called in more servants. 'Go,' he said, 'and tell those who were invited that now is the time to come. Tell them there will be roasts of veal and lamb and all kinds of special delicacies, and everything is ready. Come celebrate with me.' ⁵Some who had been invited didn't take the king's invitation seriously and continued their usual business of buying, selling and farming. ⁶Others actually mistreated the king's servants and, in some cases, killed them. ⁷When the king heard about this, he was angry. He ordered his soldiers to destroy the murderers and purge the city. ⁸Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited didn't deserve to come. ⁹So go out and invite anyone you find to come and celebrate with me.' ¹⁰The king's servants went out and invited everyone they saw to come to the wedding. In just a short the reception

hall was overflowing with guests.

¹¹"When the king came in to inspect the waiting guests, he was introduced to a man who was not wearing the wedding clothes the king had provided. ¹²The king said to the man, 'Friend, how did you get in here without being properly dressed? Aren't you a little presumptuous coming in like this?' The man was speechless and had no excuse. ¹³So the king said to his servants, 'Take this man and show him the door!' The utter remorse and weeping of this man was unfathomable. ¹⁴That's how it is with the kingdom of heaven. Everyone is given a royal invitation to come to the wedding to celebrate with the King and His Son, but few will come wearing the robe the King has provided."

Paying Taxes to Caesar

¹⁵After hearing this, the Pharisees left and made plans to trap Jesus in His own words so they could have Him arrested. ¹⁶They sent some of their brightest young Pharisees, together with the politically-minded Herodians, to trap Him with questions. They said, "Teacher, we know that you are an honest man and that you teach what is right without favoring anyone. ¹⁷So please help us out. Is it right for us to pay taxes to the Romans or not?" ¹⁸Jesus knew what their motives were and said, "Why are you trying to trap me with such a politically hot question? ¹⁹Let me see one of the coins you use to pay your taxes with." They found a coin and gave it to Him. ²⁰Pointing to the coin, He said, "Whose picture is this? And whose inscription is on here?" ²¹They said, "Caesar's, of course." Then Jesus said, "If that's the case, then give to Caesar what belongs to him and give to God what belongs to Him." ²²When they heard His answer, they were amazed. So they left and went away.

Marriage and the Resurrection

²³Later that same day the Sadducees, who deny any resurrection from the

dead, also came to trap Jesus. ²⁴They said, "Teacher, Moses told us that if a man died and left no heirs, his brother was to marry the widow and father children for him to preserve the family name and secure the property. ²⁵Now there were seven brothers. The first one got married, and soon after, he died. Since he had no children, his brother decided to marry his wife. ²⁶The same thing happened to the second, third and fourth brother until all seven of them had married her. ²⁷Finally, the woman also died. ²⁸If there is a bodily resurrection, whose wife will she be when she gets to heaven, since she was married to all seven?"

²⁹Jesus looked at them and said, "Your ideas about the resurrection are wrong. You do not understand the Scriptures or God's power. ³⁰Your argument against a resurrection is based on how things are here on earth. Have you ever thought that in heaven there might not be marriage? Or that God's people could become like the angels? In heaven everything won't necessarily be like it is here. ³¹The real answer to your question about the resurrection is found, not by looking at people in marriage, but by looking at the power of God and what He can do. Haven't you read what God said about Himself? ³²He said, 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' In other words, He is not the God of death, but the God of life. He not only gives it, but extends it. Sarah is a case in point. She was too old to have a child, but by God's power she did." ³³When the people heard Jesus' answer, they were amazed at His insight.

The Most Important Commandment

³⁴When the Pharisees heard that the Sadducees had not succeeded in trapping Jesus, they decided to send a lawyer. ³⁵He came to Jesus thinking he would let Jesus trap Himself, so he asked, ³⁶"Teacher, which do you think is the most important commandment that God gave?" The lawyer was hoping to get

Jesus to prioritize God's laws, then challenge Him on His reasons for doing so. ³⁷But instead, Jesus summarized God's laws. "You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind," Jesus said. ³⁸"This is the first and most important commandment. ³⁹And the next one is just like it. You should love and value your neighbor as much as you love and value yourself. ⁴⁰You see, the entire law rests on both these principles because they're inter-related; you can't separate them."

Whose Son Is the Messiah?

⁴¹Jesus turned to the Pharisees who were standing together and said, ⁴²"What's your opinion about the Messiah? When He comes, whose descendant do you think He'll be?" They said, "A descendant of David, of course." ⁴³He asked them, "If that is so, then why did David, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, call the Messiah his Lord? In the Psalms he says, ⁴⁴"The God of heaven will say to my Lord, "Come, sit on my right hand and share power with me until I subdue all your enemies.'" ⁴⁵If David calls the Messiah his Lord, how can the Messiah be his son?" ⁴⁶The Pharisees couldn't answer that question. From that day on they never again tried to trap Jesus in His own words.

Be Careful of False Teachers

23 Then Jesus turned to His disciples and to the people and said, ²⁴"The priests and teachers are ordained to take Moses' place. ³So do what they tell you to do, but don't do as they do. They don't practice what they preach. ⁴For example, they'll set up all kinds of ceremonial rules and regulations which the average working person has no time to carry out, and they refuse to adjust these rules to help a man in a predicament. ⁵For show, they wear little boxes of Scripture on their foreheads and long tassels on their robes. ⁶They also like to sit in the most prominent place in the synagogue and be hon-

ored at banquets. ⁷They love to have people bow to them and call them Rabbi. ⁸But don't be caught up with honors and titles. There is only One who is to be honored, and that is God. Everyone else is your brother. ⁹Don't look to anyone as your spiritual father, because there is only One who will guide you aright, and that is your heavenly Father. ¹⁰In fact, don't even let people call you 'Master' or 'Honored teacher,' because there is only One who should be your Master and Honored Teacher, He whom God has sent to save you. ¹¹If you want to be great, then go and help your neighbor and other people in need. Be kind to them, and help them in every way you can. ¹²If you put yourself first, you will be humbled. But if you put others first, you will be honored."

¹³Turning back to the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said, "You're hypocrites! You pretend to know and love God, but with the attitude you have, you turn people away from Him. You're not really interested in God's kingdom, and what you teach keeps others from getting in. ¹⁴You're supposed to teach God's law. You're hypocrites! You persuade widows to donate their houses to the Temple, but you use the money for yourselves. Then with long public prayers you pretend to be righteous. Your condemnation is justified. ¹⁵You will go to any length to convert one person, both here and abroad, but after that person is converted, he's twice as unfit for heaven than before, because of what you taught him.

¹⁶"Just think of how blind you have been. You tell the people that if they take an oath and swear by the Temple, they can change their oath because it was taken only on the authority of the Temple. But if they take an oath by the gold of the Temple, they are bound by that oath forever. ¹⁷How foolish can you be? Don't you realize what you're teaching the people? How can the gold of the Temple be more important than the Temple? Do gold and silver have more meaning than what the services of the

Temple stand for? ¹⁸And you say, 'If a man takes an oath and swears by the altar it means nothing, but if he takes an oath and swears by the gift he brings to the altar and breaks the oath, then he has sinned.' ¹⁹How blind can you be? Which is more important—your gift or the altar which points to the gift of salvation? ²⁰If a man takes an oath and swears by the altar, he is swearing by everything the altar stands for, which means that he should keep his promise as God keeps His. ²¹If a man takes an oath and swears by the Temple, he is actually swearing by the One whose Temple it is. ²²If a man takes an oath and swears by heaven, he's swearing by the God of heaven, not just by the stars in the sky.

²³"How ignorant can you be! And you consider yourselves to be teachers? In your tithing, for example, you tithe every little thing, even the herbs from your garden. That's fine; you should be honest in your tithing. But you've forgotten to teach the things that are the most important, such as justice, mercy and faith. ²⁴You blind guides! You strain your drinking water because you're afraid you'll swallow a gnat that's unclean. Considering your attitude, you might as well sit down and feast on a camel or a pig, both of which are unclean.

²⁵"It's hard to believe that you can be so foolish. All you're concerned about are the externals of religion. You keep looking at what's on the outside, like your zeal for God, but inside you're controlled by your own ego, greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶How blind can you be? First, clean the inside of your cup and in the process the outside of your cup will become clean as well.

²⁷"At present your lives are hopeless. You're like whitewashed tombs which are beautiful on top of the ground, but down inside, they're full of dead men's bones. ²⁸On the outside you appear righteous, but inside you're full of hypocrisy and evil.

²⁹"Speaking of gravesites, how careful you are to keep up the tombs of the

prophets and cover them with flowers!
³⁰At the right time you eulogize them and say to the people, 'If we had lived back then, we wouldn't have killed the prophets as our parents did.'³¹By saying this, you're admitting that God's people can turn against His prophets and even kill them. If it happened before, it can happen again.
³²In fact, you're plotting my death right now. So you're doing the same thing your parents did, no matter what you say.
³³You're as slippery as snakes. How do you expect to receive anything except total annihilation?³⁴My death will not be the end of your hatred. Other prophets and teachers will follow me and you'll kill them too. You'll have them crucified and killed or beaten in your synagogues and persecute them wherever they go.³⁵Your generation will soon reap the results of all the prophets who have been rejected or killed, from Abel, who was killed by his own brother, to Zechariah who was struck down while standing in the Temple next to the altar.³⁶The consequences of all of this wickedness will come down on Jerusalem in your own lifetime not long after you crucify me."

Jesus' Love for Jerusalem

³⁷Then Jesus expressed His longing for His people, saying, "Oh, Jerusalem, how much I care about you, even if you have killed the prophets. I long to protect you from what is coming, just as a mother hen protects her chicks and covers them with her wings. But you are too proud and indifferent to listen.³⁸Soon your Temple will be emptied of God's presence.³⁹But when I come the second time, my people will be happy to see me and will say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

The Destruction of the Temple

24 As Jesus and His disciples were leaving the Temple, they pointed with pride to the massive stones out of which the buildings of the Temple were made.²Jesus said, "Take a good look at

these buildings because you won't see them this way many more years. The time is fast coming when they'll be destroyed and not one massive stone you see will be left standing on another."⁷

Signs of the Times and the End of the World

³After they reached the top of the Mount of Olives just outside the city, some of the disciples asked Him, "When will these things happen? Will all this happen after you go away and then come back to set up your kingdom at the end of the world?"⁴Jesus looked at them and said, "The most important thing for you to know is to be careful not to be deceived.⁵Many will come and preach in my name, claiming to be sent by me, and others will even claim to be the Messiah. They will deceive many.⁶Before the end comes, there will be more and more threats of wars, but don't be discouraged or give up your faith, because God must let some of these things happen.⁷These wars will increase in scope as time goes on, and many nations will participate in them. Also, there will be great famines in different parts of the world, widespread epidemics and severe earthquakes.⁸These natural disasters will show that a new kingdom is soon to be born, just as the labor pains of a mother let her know that her baby is on its way.

⁹Those who are loyal to me will be persecuted and killed. They will be hated by all nations because they love me.¹⁰Even believers will turn from the faith and will so hate one another that they will turn each other over to the authorities.¹¹False preaching will be going on everywhere, and many people will be deceived.¹²Moral decay will be so prevalent that most people won't even know what love is.¹³But those who stand firm until the end will be saved.¹⁴The good news of the kingdom must be preached around the world for a witness and then the end will come.

The Fall of Jerusalem and End-time Deceptions

¹⁵“When you see the nation referred to by Daniel as ‘the abomination that destroys and makes desolate’ come against Jerusalem—the careful reader will understand from prophecy which nation this is—¹⁶that will be the time to flee the city and go to the mountains. ¹⁷When that happens, don’t try to pack and move out of your house; that would be too obvious. Besides, there won’t be time. ¹⁸If you’re working in the field, don’t go home to change clothes or get your coat. Just keep walking away from the city. ¹⁹Those days will be very hard on women who are pregnant or still nursing their babies. ²⁰You need to pray that you won’t have to flee to the mountains during the winter months or on the Sabbath; otherwise you’ll draw attention to yourselves.

²¹“There will be intense physical suffering when Jerusalem is destroyed such as my people never experienced before. ²²Finally, persecution will become so widespread that those who believe in me would not survive except God will step in to shorten the time. ²³During those days, if anyone says, ‘Christ has come! We saw Him here!’ or ‘We saw Him there!’ don’t believe them. ²⁴False christs and false prophets will come, and the devil will give them power to work miracles, almost deceiving the righteous.

²⁵“I’m telling you all this ahead of time so you won’t be deceived. ²⁶If they say to you, ‘We saw Him in the desert,’ don’t go there. Or if they say, ‘We met Him in a secret meeting,’ don’t believe it, ²⁷because my coming will be as visible as lightning flashing across the sky from east to west. ²⁸There will be many signs to let you know that the end of all things is at hand, just as when you see vultures grouping in the distance, you know that a carcass must be nearby.

The Coming of the Son of Man

²⁹“Some of these signs will come only

after centuries of persecution. The sun will be darkened, the moon will not shine, and falling stars will fill the night sky. Finally, the planets themselves will be moved out of their places. ³⁰Then the Son of Man will appear in the sky and people everywhere will be frightened at what they see. All the earth’s inhabitants will see me coming in the clouds with power and great glory, and people from every nation will weep and mourn. ³¹Angels will circle the globe with the blast of a trumpet and bring together all who have been loyal to God, from one end of the earth to the other.

Lesson From the Fig Tree

³²“Now learn a lesson from the fig tree: When you see it put out new shoots and leaves, you know that spring is here. ³³In the same way, you can tell when the end is near, when it’s right at the door. ³⁴This generation will not pass away before Jerusalem is destroyed. ³⁵Heaven and earth as they now are will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

No One Knows the Day or Hour

³⁶“Only my Father knows the exact time when I will come back, and He hasn’t even told me or the angels. ³⁷Just as the world was in Noah’s day, that’s how it will be immediately before I come back. ³⁸In those days, all that people thought about was eating, drinking, getting married and living it up. They did this right up to the very day that Noah and his family went into the ark. ³⁹They didn’t think what Noah had been preaching would happen until suddenly the flood hit. By then it was too late. That’s how it will be in the time of the end. Very few will really believe what my people will tell them. ⁴⁰Most people will go about their duties with little thought about the future. Those who believe and those who don’t will work together; one will be ready and the other will not. ⁴¹Women will be busy working and, again, some will believe and be ready but others will not. ⁴²In those

days my people will really need to stay awake because they will not know the exact day when their Lord will come. ⁴³If a homeowner knew what hour a thief would come to break into his house, he would keep watch. ⁴⁴So my people need to be ready, because when they least expect it, probation will close and the Son of Man will come.

The Two Different Servants

⁴⁵“The way to be ready is to keep putting God first in your life, like the faithful and wise servant who keeps feeding the master’s family at the proper times. ⁴⁶When his master returns, that servant will be blessed because he was found doing his master’s work. ⁴⁷He will promote his loyal servant and entrust him with everything he owns. ⁴⁸People who did not put God first will be like the unfaithful servant whose behavior demonstrated his belief that his master would not return for a long time. ⁴⁹He took advantage of his position, abusing his fellow servants and spending most of his time living it up. ⁵⁰But his master came back unexpectedly and surprised him. ⁵¹He relieved him of all his responsibilities and publicly stated why his servant had been dismissed. The servant’s remorse was beyond words.”

The Wise and Foolish Virgins

25 “During the time of the end the condition of my people will be similar to ten bridesmaids who took their wedding lamps and went out to wait for the bridegroom to come for his bride. ²Five of the bridesmaids were wise and prepared for a possible delay, and five of them were foolish and did not. ³The foolish took only their wedding lamps with no extra oil, ⁴but the wise took some extra oil along. ⁵The bridegroom came later than expected, and while waiting for him to come, they all became drowsy; the foolish carelessly fell asleep, and even the wise began dozing off. ⁶Then at midnight, the shout rang out over the nearby hills, ‘The

bridegroom is coming! Let’s go out to meet him!’ ⁷All the bridesmaids jumped up and lit their lamps. ⁸Then the foolish bridesmaids turned to the wise bridesmaids and said, ‘Please share your extra oil with us! Our lamps are already going out and the bridegroom is still not in sight!’ ⁹The wise answered, ‘We would love to help you, but if we share our extra oil with you, there may not be enough to last, and soon we’ll all be in the dark. You need to hurry and go buy some extra oil for yourselves.’

¹⁰“While the foolish bridesmaids were gone to buy more oil, the bridegroom came. The wise bridesmaids greeted him and, together with the bride, went to the bridegroom’s house, and the door was locked. ¹¹Soon the foolish bridesmaids returned, knocked on the door and called out, ‘Sir, please open up and let us in!’ ¹²But the bridegroom said, ‘I don’t remember you. Besides, my father has already locked the door, and he will not open it again.’ ¹³During the time of the end those who love God should keep watching for the bridegroom and make extra preparation in case of delay, because no one knows the day or hour when the Son of Man will come back.

A Parable About Investing Money

¹⁴“The situation at the end of time can also be compared to a businessman who decided to go to another country to look for new markets. Before he left, he called his managers together and divided up the responsibilities of the business among them. ¹⁵In addition, he gave one of them five thousand dollars; to another, he gave two thousand dollars; and to still another, he gave one thousand dollars, based on their skill in managing money. Then he left on his trip. ¹⁶The servant who had received five thousand dollars immediately invested it in the business and soon had made five thousand more. ¹⁷The one to whom he had given two thousand dollars did the same thing and in a relatively short time, he

brought in an additional two thousand dollars' worth of business. ¹⁸But the manager to whom he had given one thousand dollars did not invest it at all, but buried the money in the ground.

¹⁹"After some time, the businessman returned and called his managers together to see what they had done while he was gone. ²⁰The one who had been given five thousand dollars reported a five-thousand-dollar gain in business. He said to the owner, 'Sir, you gave me five thousand dollars. By taking advantage of opportunities in the business, I was able to double your money.' ²¹The owner said, 'You did some good thinking and used your talents for me wisely, so I'm entrusting you with much more. When this meeting is over, let's celebrate.' ²²The one to whom he had given two thousand dollars reported a two-thousand-dollar gain in business. He said, 'Sir, you gave me two thousand dollars. By careful trading, I was able to double your money too.' ²³The owner said, 'You, too, did some good thinking and used your talents for me wisely. Because of this, I'm entrusting you with much more. When this meeting is over, let's celebrate.' ²⁴Next it was the turn of the one to whom he had given one thousand dollars to give his report. He said, 'Sir, I knew you would be angry with me if I took a risk and lost your money. ²⁵So, rather than putting it where it could be mismanaged, I decided to keep it in a safe place. And now I can give it back to you without a loss.' ²⁶The owner said, 'You've been very irresponsible. You don't know me very well, do you? You thought I was too demanding because I expected you to invest funds in my own company and increase my profits. ²⁷Isn't it reasonable for me to expect you to use your talent for me? If nothing else, you could have deposited the money I gave you in the bank to draw interest. ²⁸I can't really trust you with anything because whenever you think things should be done differently, you do it your way. Let me have my money back, and I'll

give it to those who believe in the future and growth of my company. ²⁹Anyone who knows how to manage will invest where he can get the best returns. But those who aren't even willing to put it into the bank will have to give an account of what they have done with what has been entrusted to them. ³⁰Throw that worthless manager outside, where he will weep and gnash his teeth over what he did to lose his job.'

The Final Judgment

³¹"When the Son of God comes in all His glory and the angels with Him, He'll assume His role as Judge and King. ³²Everyone on earth will be gathered together before Him, and He will separate those who are genuinely His from those who are not, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats during shearing time. ³³He will call the sheep to His right and the goats to His left. ³⁴Then He will say to those on His right, 'You are God's children. Come! It's time for you to receive your inheritance. ³⁵When others were thirsty, you gave them water. When they were hungry, you gave them food, and when they were without a place to live, you took them in. ³⁶When they had nothing suitable to wear, you gave them clothes. When they were sick, you visited and comforted them, and when they were in jail, you didn't forget them. What you did for them, you did for me.' ³⁷Then the righteous will say, 'Lord, we never realized that when we fed the hungry we were feeding you or that when we gave thirsty people a drink we were giving it to you! ³⁸Neither did we realize that when we took strangers into our houses, we were taking you in or when we gave people clean clothes, we were giving them to you! ³⁹And we didn't know that when we visited the sick or those in prison, we were standing by you!' ⁴⁰Then the King will say, 'I know you didn't realize this because a change took place in your life, and kindness and compassion became part of your nature. What you did by car-

ing for the underprivileged was as pleasing to my Father as if you had done it for me.' ⁴¹Then He will say to those on His left, 'You can't be given a home in my Father's kingdom, for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. Leave my presence. You will perish in the same fire which will destroy the devil and his angels.' ⁴²For when I was hungry, you didn't offer me anything to eat, and when I was thirsty, you didn't offer me a drink. ⁴³When I was a stranger and alone, you didn't offer me a place to sleep, and when I needed clothes, you didn't care, and when I was in jail, you ignored me.' ⁴⁴They will respond, 'Lord, we didn't know that you were ever hungry, thirsty, homeless, in need of clothes, sick or imprisoned. If we had, we would gladly have helped you!' ⁴⁵Then the King will say, 'Because you didn't care about others, I know you don't care about me.' ⁴⁶I have no choice but to end your lives, because in my kingdom everyone cares about everyone else.'

The Plot to Kill Jesus

26 After Jesus finished talking to His disciples about the kingdom of heaven, He said, ²"The day after tomorrow the Passover begins, and the Son of God will be betrayed and crucified." ³Meanwhile, Caiaphas, the high priest, had called some of the priests, scribes and the elders to his palace. ⁴He asked them to help him decide how to get rid of Jesus without creating a disturbance. ⁵The Pharisees said, "Whatever we do, let's not do it on a religious holiday, especially on the Passover, or we'll really have a riot on our hands."

Mary Magdalene Anoints Jesus

⁶Previously, Jesus had been invited to the house of a Pharisee named Simon, whom He had healed of leprosy. ⁷While all the guests were eating, a prostitute came in whom Jesus had forgiven and healed. She had a small bottle of very expensive perfume with her and sprinkled it on

Jesus' head and feet as He was reclining near the table. ⁸His disciples saw that Jesus made no attempt to stop her. Stirred up by Judas, they all began to quietly say, "What a waste of money!" ⁹This perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor!" ¹⁰Jesus knew what was being whispered around the room. So He said to them, "Why are you making it hard for her? She did a very beautiful thing. ¹¹You will always have the poor to care for, but I'll be with you only a few more days. ¹²She seems to sense this and has perfumed my body for burial. ¹³This act of hers will always be part of the gospel story wherever it is preached, because it is an expression of her gratitude for being forgiven and healed."

Judas Betrays Jesus

¹⁴Judas felt he had been personally rebuked, so he left to go to the priests. ¹⁵Judas said, "How much will you give me if I tell you where you can find Jesus and how you can arrest Him without causing an uproar?" They agreed on thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave. ¹⁶From that point on Judas stayed in touch with the priests to let them know the best time to arrest Jesus.

Jesus and His Disciples Celebrate the Passover

¹⁷That particular year the eight-day Passover week started on Thursday evening. Two of the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Tell us where you want to eat the Passover meal so we can start preparing for it." ¹⁸Jesus said to them, "Go into the city and follow a man carrying a water pot on his head. Say to him, 'The Master's time has come. He would like to eat His last Passover meal with His disciples in one of your spare rooms.'" ¹⁹The disciples did as Jesus said. They got the man's permission to use his upstairs room and prepared for the Passover.

²⁰When evening came, Jesus and the other disciples arrived at the place, and soon they were all seated and ready to

eat. ²¹As they ate together, Jesus said, "Only a few more hours now, then one of you will betray me." ²²The disciples couldn't believe what they heard. Each one asked, "Lord, you're not talking about me, are you?" ²³After they had all asked, He said, "The one you saw dipping his bread in the bowl when I did is the one who will betray me. ²⁴All of this my Father knew ahead of time and the prophets predicted. Yet the one who will betray me is doing it of his own free will. In one way, it would have been better had he not been born because he's only bringing about his own destruction." ²⁵When Judas, who was sitting next to Jesus, heard this, he felt sure that Jesus knew about the arrangement he had made with the priests. Yet to make sure, Judas quietly asked, "Master, are you referring to me?" Jesus whispered back, "Yes, I am."

The Lord's Supper

²⁶Then Jesus prayed the Passover blessing and broke the bread, giving a piece to each of the disciples. He said, "Let's eat this bread together because it symbolizes what I'm going to do for you. I want you to think of it as my body." ²⁷Next He took a cup of unfermented wine, offered the Passover prayer of thanksgiving and said, "I want each of you to drink from this cup. ²⁸This pure juice represents my blood and the bread represents my body that I will give for the sins of the world. ²⁹I will not drink of the fruit of the vine again until we sit down together in the kingdom of heaven to celebrate." ³⁰Then they sang a hymn and left for the Mount of Olives.

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

³¹Before they left the upstairs room, Jesus said to them, "When they come to arrest me tonight, every one of you will leave me. And this, too, is according to prophecy, for Zechariah has said, 'The Shepherd will be smitten and all the sheep will flee.' ³²But, as I have told you,

on the third day after I die, I will rise again and meet you in Galilee." ³³Peter was quite disturbed and said, "Others may disown you, but I won't! I'll always be loyal to you!" ³⁴Jesus looked at Peter and said, "Before the night is over and the rooster crows twice to welcome the morning, you will disown me three times." ³⁵Peter responded, "I would die before I would disown you!" All the other disciples said the same thing Peter did.

Prayer in Gethsemane

³⁶Then they left the house, and Jesus led the way to the Garden of Gethsemane near the foot of the Mount of Olives. At the entrance Jesus said, "Make yourselves comfortable and wait here. I'm going to my usual place to pray." ³⁷However, He did take Peter, James and John with Him. By the time they were out of sight of the others and had found Christ's place of prayer, He was so depressed and felt so weak that the three disciples had to support Him. ³⁸He turned to them and said, "Everything in my body is in turmoil. I'm so weak, I feel like I'm dying. Please stay here and pray for me." ³⁹Then He went just a few steps farther and fell to the ground. In agony of spirit He prayed, "Oh my Father, please relieve me of this burden! The separation from you is almost unbearable! Nevertheless, Father, not what I want, but what you want. You know what is best." ⁴⁰Jesus struggled to His feet and staggered back to the three disciples and found them sleeping. He nudged Peter awake and quietly asked, "Couldn't you stay awake a little while to pray for me?" ⁴¹You also need to pray for yourself so that you won't be overcome by the temptations you'll be facing tonight. I know that your spirit is willing, but the body is weary and weak." ⁴²Then Jesus felt another wave of depression come over Him. He returned to His place of prayer, and falling to the ground, said, "Oh, my Father, this cup of suffering is terrible! If you can't take it away until I drink it, your

will be done!" ⁴³Again Jesus struggled to His feet and returned to His three disciples for comfort, but again He found them all asleep, for they were tired. ⁴⁴For the third time He was driven back to His place of prayer. He fell to the ground again and earnestly prayed the same prayer. ⁴⁵This time He felt His sinking spirits being lifted, and the depression left Him. He returned to the three disciples and quietly said, "You can sleep now, for it's all over. The betrayal is complete, and the authorities are already on their way to the garden looking for me." But the disciples didn't hear Him. ⁴⁶Then He woke them and said, "Come. I can hear the footsteps of my betrayer and the priests and Temple guards coming to arrest me. Let's go meet them."

Jesus Arrested

⁴⁷By the time Jesus got the three disciples to their feet, Judas had found them and had come over to where they were. Following Judas came the priests, elders, Temple guards, and a mob carrying knives and clubs. ⁴⁸Judas had bargained with the priests, saying, "Jesus will be in the Garden of Gethsemane. When we get there, it will be dark and you won't know which one He is. So the one I greet with a kiss is the man you want. Grab Him quickly and hold on to Him because He is very powerful." ⁴⁹True to his word, Judas walked up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and then kissed Him. ⁵⁰Jesus said, "Friend, why have you come to see me?" Then Judas stepped back, and the Temple guards grabbed Jesus and held Him tightly. ⁵¹When Peter saw this, he became enraged. He pulled his short sword from his belt and swung it at the high priest's servant. The young man saw the blade coming and turned his head just in time, but Peter's sword clipped off his ear. ⁵²Then Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Put your sword away! Those who fight with swords get killed with swords. ⁵³I could ask my Father for twelve thousand angels, and they would gladly come

to help me. ⁵⁴But if I did that, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled?" ⁵⁵After restoring the wounded man's ear, Jesus turned to the priests and said, "Why did you come out here with swords and clubs as if I were a common criminal? This whole week I sat with you in the Temple teaching the people. Why didn't you arrest me then? ⁵⁶Yet it has to happen this way in order for the prophecies to be fulfilled." Then Peter and all the disciples fled, just as Jesus had said they would.

Jesus Before the Sanhedrin

⁵⁷The Temple guards took Jesus out of the garden back to the palace of Caiaphas the high priest. Some of the members of the Jewish high court had been personally invited to come out in the middle of the night to help Caiaphas try Jesus. (But it was against Jewish law to have night trials for capital offenses.) ⁵⁸Peter followed at a distance, and when they took Jesus into the high priest's palace, he went and stood in the courtyard where the servants were. ⁵⁹The chief priests and elders were trying to get witnesses to testify against Jesus so they could convict Him before daybreak and have Him executed quickly. ⁶⁰None of the witnesses gave sufficient evidence for a conviction. Finally, two people gave a false testimony. ⁶¹One of them said, "I heard this man say, 'If anyone destroys the Temple, I can build it again in three days.'" The other man agreed. ⁶²Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "What do you have to say to that? Answer me!" ⁶³But Jesus said nothing. Then the high priest demanded an answer, saying, "I command you by the living God that you tell us the truth. Are you the Messiah or not?" ⁶⁴Jesus answered, "What you just said is true. And one day you will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, sitting at the right hand of God, with full power and authority." ⁶⁵Then the high priest took hold of his outer robe and ripped it in two as a sign of anguish and said, "This is blasphemy! What other evidence do we need?"

We don't need any more witnesses. This man has condemned Himself by claiming to be equal with God, and we all heard Him say it! ⁶⁶So what do you think? Do we have to carry on this trial any longer or not?" They all agreed to condemn Him, saying, "He's guilty. Let Him die." ⁶⁷Then the mob that had pushed itself into the courtroom surged forward and surrounded Jesus. Some spit in His face, others slapped Him, still others shoved Him, hoping to knock Him down. ⁶⁸Some approached Him and shouted in His face, "Prophecy, Messiah! Tell which one of us just hit you!"

Peter Denies Knowing Jesus

⁶⁹While all this was going on, Peter was out in the courtyard sitting near a fire trying to warm himself. A young girl came up to him and said, "Aren't you a disciple of Jesus, the Galilean?" ⁷⁰Peter denied that he was and said it loud enough for everyone to hear, "I don't know what you're talking about!" ⁷¹As he got up to walk toward the gate, another young girl came up to him and said to those standing around the fire, "This man is one of the followers of Jesus, the Nazarene!" ⁷²Peter turned around to face her and again denied that he knew Jesus. ⁷³Later, as he was leaning against the wall by the gate, someone said to him, "There's no doubt that you're one of them because you talk like Him." ⁷⁴Then Peter took an oath and called down curses on himself, if he were not telling the truth. "I told you," he said, "I don't know the Man!" Just as he finished speaking, a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵Instantly, Peter remembered what Jesus had told him only a few hours previously: "Before the rooster crows twice, you will three times deny knowing me." Shocked at what he had just done, Peter rushed out the gate and ran back to the garden. Finding Jesus' place of prayer, he threw himself to the ground, confessed his sin and wept bitterly.

Jesus Taken to Pilate

27 At the first break of dawn, all the priests and elders were called together for the official meeting of the high court. Those who had not been present during the night were asked to accept the unofficial verdict that Jesus should be executed for blasphemy. Some, like Nicodemus, objected, saying it had been done illegally. But the majority agreed and confirmed the verdict. ²So they bound Jesus and took Him to Pilate, the Roman governor, to have him accept their decision, because the Jews had no authority to execute anyone.

Judas Hangs Himself

³When Judas saw what was happening and that Jesus was not using His power to free Himself, he rushed up to the high priest to return the thirty pieces of silver, and said, ⁴"I'm the criminal! I've done a terrible thing! Take this back! I sent an innocent man to death!" But Caiaphas said to him, "That's your problem, not ours! Get out!" ⁵Then Judas threw the money down in front of him and went out and hanged himself. ⁶The priests picked up the money and said, "We can't put this money in the offering because it's blood money. What shall we do with it?" ⁷They decided to use it to buy a field where they could bury strangers. ⁸That's why it's now called the Cemetery of Blood. ⁹All this was fulfilled as spoken by Jeremiah and Zechariah, who said, "They will take thirty pieces of silver for Him, a value which they themselves thought He was worth. ¹⁰With it, they will buy a potter's field, just as the Lord has said."

Pilate Questions Jesus

¹¹It was still early in the morning when the priests arrived with Jesus at Pilate's palace. As He stood before the Roman governor, Pilate asked Him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "It is as you say." ¹²Again the priests and el-

ders accused Him of blaspheming God and being a traitor to Rome. But Jesus said nothing. ¹³Pilate looked at Jesus and said, "Don't you hear what they're saying about you?" ¹⁴But Jesus still said nothing, which made Pilate marvel at the prisoner's self-control.

Jesus Condemned and Barabbas Set Free

¹⁵It was the custom at the Passover feast for the Roman governor to release for the Jews a political prisoner of their choice. ¹⁶So Pilate brought out the most notorious prisoner he had, a self-styled savior of Israel called Jesus Barabbas. ¹⁷After he had quieted the crowd, Pilate asked, "Which prisoner should I release to you? Jesus Barabbas? Or Jesus, the Messiah?" ¹⁸Pilate referred to Jesus as the Messiah because he knew that it was over a religious question and jealousy that they wanted Jesus to be crucified. ¹⁹Then Pilate took his seat as judge and was ready to address the crowd when a messenger handed him a note from his wife which read, "Don't have anything to do with convicting the Man the Jews are bringing to you. He is innocent. I had a disturbing dream about Him and have been terribly troubled ever since you left." ²⁰By this time the priests and elders had persuaded the crowd to ask for the release of Barabbas and shout for the crucifixion of Jesus. They told the people that Barabbas was pro-Israel and that Jesus was not. ²¹Pilate again stood up and asked the crowd, "Which of these two should I let go?" The crowd shouted back, "Barabbas!" ²²"What do you want me to do with Jesus, the Messiah?" Pilate asked. The crowd shouted back, "Crucify Him!" ²³"Why?" asked Pilate, "He has committed no crime!" But the crowd shouted louder than ever, "Crucify Him!"

²⁴When Pilate saw the angry mood of the crowd, rather than releasing Jesus which might cause a riot and be reported to Rome, he decided to wash his hands of the matter, thinking that in so doing, he

was following his wife's suggestion. He had a basin brought and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood. Do with Him what you want." ²⁵Then the crowd roared back, "Let His blood be on us and on our children!" ²⁶So the governor let Barabbas go and ordered Jesus to be scourged before being taken out for crucifixion.

Soldiers Mock and Scourge Jesus

²⁷So the Roman soldiers took Jesus down to the courtyard and called out the whole palace guard to watch the sport. ²⁸First, they stripped Him naked, then they put an old red military robe over His shoulders. ²⁹Next, they got a long branch from a thorn bush and twisted it into a crown which they pushed rudely into His scalp so it would stay there. Then they got a stick and forced Him to hold it like a scepter. To climax it all, they knelt down in front of Him and laughingly said, "Honor to the King of the Jews!" ³⁰Then the soldiers spit in Jesus' face and some took the stick out of His hand and beat Him on the head. ³¹After they had their fun, they took off the robe, tied Him to the whipping post, and scourged Him as Pilate had ordered until His back was torn open and bleeding. Then they untied Him, put His own robe back on Him, laid the crossbeam on His shoulder and led Him out of the courtyard and through the city to be crucified.

Jesus Is Crucified

³²But because of the scourging, His loss of blood and lack of food, Jesus didn't have strength enough to carry the heavy crossbeam. So the soldiers took a man from the crowd named Simon, originally from Cyrene in North Africa, who expressed sympathy for Jesus. The soldiers then ordered him to carry the crossbeam, which he gladly did. ³³Finally they reached the place of execution, a little hill just outside of the city which is called Golgotha, which means The Place of the Skull. ³⁴There they offered Jesus a drink

of wine mixed with drugs to help kill the pain. But when He tasted it He spit it out. ³⁵The soldiers drove spikes through His hands and feet far into the wood, then hoisted the cross, bracing it against the edge of the hole and letting it fall into place. That done, the soldiers sat down and gambled for His seamless robe which someone had given to Him. David had prophesied, "They will divide my garments among them and will gamble for my robe." ³⁶Then the soldiers sat down to watch Him die. ³⁷On the cross over Jesus' head, they had put the sign ordered by Pilate which said, "Jesus, King of the Jews." ³⁸Two insurrectionists with Barabbas were crucified with Jesus, one on His right and the other on His left. ³⁹As the custom was at these executions, people came from everywhere to express their contempt. They were allowed to pass by each low-set cross, spitting on and cursing those crucified. When they came to Jesus, they shook their heads and said, ⁴⁰"Aren't you the One who said that if anyone destroyed the Temple, you could build it again in three days? If you're the Son of God as you say you are, then show us what you can do to save yourself! Come down. Those nails shouldn't stop you!" ⁴¹The priests, together with the scribes and elders, also scoffed at Him, at His "illegitimate" birth and at the claim of His mother's virginity. Pointing their fingers at Him, they laughed, ⁴²"This man saved others, but now He can't even save Himself! If He's the Messiah, the King of Israel, let Him perform one of His miracles and come down from the cross. Then we'll believe Him!" ⁴³He said He put his trust in God, but our God would come and help Him! So how can He say that He's the Son of God?" ⁴⁴Then the two criminals who were crucified with Him joined the crowd in making fun of Him and cursing Him.

Jesus Dies

⁴⁵About noon, it suddenly started to get dark, and soon heavy clouds covered

not only the place of crucifixion but the whole area. It was so dark that people had to grope their way back into the city. Even the soldiers became uneasy. This unnatural darkness lasted until about three o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁶At that time Jesus cried out, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ⁴⁷Those who stood by heard what He said but thought He was asking God to send Elijah to come and help Him. ⁴⁸Someone, wanting to be helpful, ran to get a sponge and soaked it with the drink they had offered Jesus earlier that morning. He put the sponge on a long stick and was ready to offer it to Him, ⁴⁹but others stopped him and said, "No, wait! Let's first see if Elijah will come to help Him." ⁵⁰Suddenly Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "It is finished!" and bowed His head and died.

⁵¹At that instant, the curtain of the Temple separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place ripped in half from top to bottom. Then a violent earthquake struck, the ground shook and rocks broke off the surrounding mountains. ⁵²The graves of a number of God's people were opened. ⁵³And when Jesus rose from the grave, they arose with Him and went into the city and appeared to many as living witnesses of the resurrection. ⁵⁴When the Centurion and the soldiers with him saw the darkness and felt the earthquake strike immediately after Jesus died, they were terrified. The Centurion cried out, "Truly He must have been the Son of God!"

⁵⁵Many of the women who had followed Jesus throughout His ministry and had cared for Him and His disciples were watching from a distance. ⁵⁶One of the women was Mary Magdalene, the prostitute whom Jesus had forgiven; also Mary, the mother of the younger James and Joseph; and Salome, the mother of the Zebedee brothers.

Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb

⁵⁷It was late in the afternoon and the Sabbath was approaching. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, both members of the Jewish high court who had followed Jesus secretly, now stepped out boldly declaring their belief in Him. ⁵⁸Joseph went to Pilate and asked permission to take Jesus' body down from the cross and bury it. ⁵⁹Pilate granted his request. So Joseph, together with Nicodemus and one of the disciples, took down the body, wrapped it in a clean linen sheet, ⁶⁰and placed it in his own new tomb cut out of the rock. Then they rolled a huge boulder in front of the tomb and left to prepare for the Sabbath. ⁶¹But Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of the younger James and Joseph, sat there and watched the tomb a little while longer.

Pilate Agrees to a Guard

⁶²The next day, though it was the Sabbath, the priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate and said, ⁶³"Sir, we remember that this deceiver, when he was still alive, predicted that in three days He would rise again. That's tomorrow. ⁶⁴So we would like for you to place a Roman guard at the gravesite tonight and tomorrow. His disciples might come during the night and try to steal His body so they can tell the people that He rose from the dead. If this happened, our people would be worse off than before." ⁶⁵Pilate agreed and sent a detachment of Roman guards with them. ⁶⁶So the priests went to the gravesite to make sure the entrance to the tomb was closed. They poured some hot wax on places where the edge of the stone touched the tomb to be sealed with the Roman Seal so no one would dare roll it away. They told the guards to stay alert because they could expect grave robbers to come during the night to steal the body.

He Is Risen

28 After the Sabbath was over and the night was almost gone, just as it began to dawn on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of the younger James and Joseph, approached the tomb from different directions. Each was hoping that someone would be there to roll away the stone so they could finish taking care of the body. ²Just before this, an earthquake had occurred when Gabriel, the angel of the Lord, came down from heaven, rolled away the huge stone and sat on it. ³His face was as bright as lightning, and his robe glistened like freshly fallen snow. ⁴The Roman soldiers were so afraid that they shook with fear, and when they saw Jesus come out of the tomb, they fell down like dead men. ⁵Later, when the women came, Gabriel, took on the guise of a young man and said, "Don't be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus, the One who was crucified. ⁶The good news is that He is not here. He's risen! Come, see for yourselves. The place where His body was is now empty. ⁷Go quickly and tell the good news to Jesus' disciples that He has risen from the dead just as He promised. He will meet them in Galilee just as He told them He would." ⁸The women, both fearful and joyful, ran back to tell the disciples what they had seen.

Women Meet Jesus and Worship Him

⁹On their way into the city Jesus met them and said, "Good morning!" The women couldn't believe their eyes. They fell on their knees, put their arms around His feet and worshiped Him. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid. Now go and tell my disciples that I have risen and for them to go to Galilee and I'll meet them there."

Soldiers Bribed

¹¹While this was taking place, some of the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb went to Caiaphas and to the chief priests and told them everything that had

happened. ¹²The priests met with some of the elders and after carefully discussing the matter, decided to offer the soldiers a large sum of money if they would tell a different story. ¹³They told them to get the other guardsmen quickly, before they could talk to Pilate. When all the soldiers were there, the priests and elders said, "Don't tell anyone that Jesus rose from the dead, but rather that you fell asleep during the night and his disciples stole the body. ¹⁴If the governor hears that you fell asleep on duty, we'll satisfy him to make sure he overlooks the whole thing." ¹⁵So the soldiers accepted the money and agreed to say that Jesus' body was stolen. This false report is still circulating.

The Great Commission

¹⁶Meanwhile, the eleven disciples went to the mountain in Galilee where they were supposed to meet Jesus. ¹⁷When they met Him, they fell on their knees and worshiped Him. But some people doubted, even after seeing Him. ¹⁸Jesus spent a number of days with the disciples. Then before He left, He said, "All power in heaven and in earth has been given to me. ¹⁹So go and tell people of all nations the good news and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰Teach them everything I've taught you. I'll always be with you, even until the end of the world."

MARK

John the Baptist

1 The good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, began like this. ²Ancient prophets spoke for God, saying, "Look, I'm going to send a special messenger to prepare the way for my Son before He comes. ³His voice will ring out in the Judean wilderness: 'Get ready! The Lord is coming! Prepare the way for Him by turning from your sins!'" ⁴When John the Baptist arrived, he did just that; he made his home in the wilderness and preached a message of repentance. He also baptized people as a sign of the forgiveness of sins and a changed life. ⁵It seemed as if the whole country went out to the wilderness to see him, especially the people from Jerusalem. Many confessed their sins and were baptized by John in the Jordan River. ⁶John looked like one of the ancient prophets because he wore a short robe made from camel's hair with a strip of leather around his waist for a belt. He ate locust fruit and wild honey. ⁷He preached to the people, saying, "Someone is coming who is mightier than the ancient prophets, with a message even more important than mine. I don't consider myself worthy to untie His sandals. ⁸I only baptize with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!"

Jesus Is Baptized

⁹It was during this time that Jesus left Nazareth, which is in the province of Galilee, and made His way to the Jordan River in Judea where John was. There Jesus, too, was baptized by John. ¹⁰When He came up out of the water, the heavens opened and the light of the Holy Spirit came down and hovered over Him in the form of a dove. ¹¹This was followed by a voice from heaven, saying, "You are my only begotten Son. I love you and am pleased with what you have done."

Jesus Tempted by Satan

¹²From here Jesus was led by the

Holy Spirit to a most desolate place in the wilderness to fast, pray and prepare for His mission. ¹³He was there for forty days surrounded by wild animals. He was severely tempted by the devil to use His divine powers to feed Himself. When it was all over, He was so exhausted that angels from heaven had to come to revive His dying body.

Jesus Begins His Ministry

¹⁴Soon afterward John was arrested and put into prison for telling Herod that his adulterous relationship with his half-brother's wife was wrong. About that time Jesus went to Galilee, preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. ¹⁵He said, "The time is fulfilled! The kingdom of God is here! Repent! Believe the good news that I'm telling you, and your lives will be changed!"

Jesus Calls Four Fishermen

¹⁶One day as Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, He stopped and watched Peter and his brother Andrew throw a large fishing net into the sea. ¹⁷He called out to them, "Come and follow me, and I'll teach you how to fish for people!" ¹⁸Without hesitation they left their nets and their fellow fishermen and followed Him. ¹⁹Jesus continued his walk along the shore and saw James and John, the Zebedee brothers, sitting in their father's boat mending nets. ²⁰Jesus called to them as He had to the other two brothers, and immediately they got up, left their father and the other workers sitting in the boat and followed Jesus.

Jesus Casts Out Demons

²¹Together the five walked to the nearby town of Capernaum. The next Sabbath, Jesus went to the local synagogue and taught the group of people assembled there. ²²They were amazed at His teaching, both at what He said and the authoritative way He said it, because

He didn't teach like the scribes who were always twisting the Scriptures to fit their tradition. ²³This particular Sabbath there was a man present who was demon-possessed. He stood up and shouted, ²⁴"Leave us alone! What do we have to do with you? You're Jesus from Nazareth, aren't you? Have you come to punish us? I know who you are! You're the Holy One of Israel!" ²⁵Jesus rebuked the demon, "Stop shouting and come out of him!" ²⁶Immediately the demon threw the man down and into convulsions and then, with a shriek, left him. ²⁷Everyone was awestruck. They said to each other, "We've never seen anything like this before! What kind of teacher is this? His authority is amazing! He tells the demons what to do, and they do it!" ²⁸News of what Jesus had done spread quickly throughout the whole region of Galilee.

Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-law

²⁹After the services, Jesus and His four disciples went to Peter's house to eat. ³⁰When they arrived, they found that Peter's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. ³¹Jesus went into the room where she was resting, took her hand and asked her to sit up. Immediately the fever left her. She got up, dressed and helped prepare a meal for them.

Jesus Heals After the Sabbath

³²When the Sabbath was over, the townspeople brought all their sick, even those who were demon-possessed, to Jesus to be healed. ³³Seemingly the whole town gathered outside of Peter's house. ³⁴That evening Jesus healed many people of all kinds of diseases and cast out many demons, telling the demons to come out quietly, which they did.

Jesus Gets Up Early to Pray

³⁵Then early the next morning, a long time before daybreak, Jesus left Peter's house and went up into the hills to a secluded place to talk with His Father. ³⁶Later, Peter and the other three disci-

ples went looking for Him. ³⁷When they found Him, they said, "People are already at the house waiting to see you!" ³⁸Jesus said to them, "Let's not go back there. Let's go to the next town so I can heal those people and teach them also. I have to spread the good news as far and wide as I can." ³⁹He did just that, going throughout Galilee preaching in the local synagogues, healing the sick and casting out demons.

Jesus Heals a Leper

⁴⁰Near one town a leper came to Jesus. He knelt down in front of Him and said, "I know that if you will, you can heal me." ⁴¹When Jesus saw this man's condition, He was moved with compassion. He reached out and touched him and said, "Of course I want you to be clean! You're healed!" ⁴²Instantly, the leprosy was gone and the man was healed. ⁴³Before Jesus sent him away, He spoke earnestly to the man, saying, ⁴⁴"Now don't stop to talk to anyone before you go to the priests. Let them see you and pronounce you clean, then carefully carry out the ritual which Moses gave to lepers. This will let everyone know that you're healed and that you're allowed to go home and live in the community." ⁴⁵But the man didn't listen. He thought that Jesus was just being modest, so he told everyone he met how Jesus had healed him. This greatly upset the priests, especially since the man hadn't yet carried out the prescribed ritual. So Jesus decided to leave town, because He knew He would attract other lepers and be accused of breaking down the restrictions of the ritual law. He decided to carry on His ministry in a more isolated area, but before long people found Him and once again huge crowds came to see Him.

Jesus Heals a Paralytic

2 Some time later Jesus returned to Capernaum, and people soon discovered where He was staying. ²In a matter of hours so many came to see Him that

the house was jammed with people. Outside they crowded around the open windows to listen to Him preach the word of God to them. ³Then four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat, hoping to ask Jesus to heal their friend. ⁴But because of the crowd, they couldn't get near Jesus. Someone suggested they climb up on the flat roof, lift off the roofing material and lower the man down right in front of Jesus. And that's what they did. ⁵When Jesus saw what was happening, He admired their faith. Then He said to the man who had been lowered in front of Him, "Son, don't worry about your past sins. They are forgiven." ⁶Some of the scribes and Pharisees heard Him say that and said to themselves, ⁷"Who does He think He is, claiming to forgive sins! No human can do that—only God! That's blasphemy!"

⁸Immediately Jesus knew what they were thinking. He turned to them and said, "Why are you questioning what I just did?" ⁹Do you think that I've committed blasphemy and given this man a false hope? Let me ask you, Which takes more power, to forgive sins or to heal a paralyzed body? ¹⁰To help you understand that I have power to forgive sins, I will show you that I also have power to heal." He then turned to the paralyzed man and said, ¹¹"Get up, pick up your mat and go to your home." ¹²Instantly, the man's body responded. He stood to his feet, reached down and folded his mat, made his way through the crowd and walked home praising the Lord. The people were dumbfounded and praised God, saying, "Never have we seen anything like this before!"

Jesus Calls Matthew

¹³Then Jesus left the house and went down to the lake, with crowds of people trailing behind Him. He planned to continue teaching the people there. ¹⁴On the way He passed a public tax booth and saw Levi Matthew sitting there collecting taxes. Jesus looked at Matthew and said, "Come, follow me." Matthew got up,

asked his assistant to take over and followed Jesus.

¹⁵Jesus later went to dinner at Matthew's house. Many others who were considered outcasts and sinners by the Jewish authorities were there, in addition to the disciples. ¹⁶When the scribes and Pharisees who were spying on Jesus saw Him eating with such people, they asked His disciples, "How can your Master eat with people like that when He knows that some of them are collecting taxes for the Romans and others are living in open sin?" ¹⁷When Jesus overheard their conversation, He said to them, "People who are well don't need a physician, only people who are sick. I did not come to call to salvation those who think they've achieved righteousness, but those who are asking God for help."

Questions About Fasting

¹⁸John the Baptist's disciples, who fasted weekly just as the Pharisees did, also came to Jesus and asked Him, "Why don't your disciples fast weekly like we and the Pharisees do?" ¹⁹Jesus answered, "Do you think that members of a wedding party should fast when they're at the table with the bridegroom? That wouldn't be the right thing to do, would it? ²⁰But when the bridegroom leaves and the wedding party is over, there will be plenty of time to fast. That time will come. ²¹You can't take a new piece of cloth and use it to patch a rotting garment, because the old cloth will give way and the hole will be bigger than before. ²²No one pours fresh grape juice into old leather bags because they can't take the pressure. They would split open and the juice would be lost. People put fresh juice into new leather bags. And that's how it is with the good news of the kingdom."

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

²³Some time later, on a Sabbath morning, Jesus and His disciples were walking past a wheat field on their way back from

worship. Since they hadn't had breakfast, they broke off some heads of wheat, took the kernels and ate them.²⁴ Some of the Pharisees, also returning from the synagogue, noticed what the disciples were doing. They came to Jesus and said, "Can't you see what your disciples are doing? They're harvesting on the Sabbath and that's against the law!"²⁵ Jesus answered, "Haven't you read in Scripture about David's experience and what he and those with him did when they were hungry?"²⁶ Remember how they went to the Sanctuary to see Abiathar, the high priest, and told him that they were hungry and needed food? He gave them the showbread which was against the law for anyone to eat except the priests."²⁷ Then to clarify, Jesus added, "You see, man was not created to serve the Sabbath; the Sabbath was made to serve man."²⁸ I am the Lord of the Sabbath. I know what's right to do on the Sabbath and what isn't."

Jesus Heals a Man on the Sabbath

3 Another time when Jesus and His disciples went to the synagogue, they saw a man there with a shriveled arm.² Some of the Pharisees in the congregation had come to spy on Jesus, to see whether or not He would heal on the Sabbath so they could accuse Him of breaking the law.³ In spite of this, when Jesus saw the man's shriveled arm, He said to him, "Come up front."⁴ When the man came, Jesus turned to the congregation and said, "Which is worse, to do good on the Sabbath or to do evil? Is it better to make someone whole on the Sabbath or to let him suffer?" But they just sat there and said nothing.⁵ Jesus was hurt as He looked around the congregation because not one of them seemed to know what He was talking about. Their minds were already made up about what should and shouldn't be done on the Sabbath. So Jesus turned back to the man with the shriveled arm and said, "Stretch out your arm." As the

man did his best to hold up his shriveled arm, it suddenly straightened and became like the other one.⁶ Immediately the Pharisees left the church and went to confer with the Herodians about how to get rid of Jesus.

Large Crowds Follow Jesus

⁷ When the service was over, Jesus and His disciples left and went down to the lake. A large crowd followed Him made up not only of people from Galilee,⁸ but also of people from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, from the other side of the Jordan River and from as far away as Tyre and Sidon. They all had heard about Jesus and wanted to see the things He was doing.⁹ At the lake Jesus asked the disciples to get one of their boats ready just in case He needed it, for there were so many people there that He was almost crowded into the water.¹⁰ Jesus had already healed many people, but the crowd kept pushing in to try to touch Him, especially those who had severe ailments, for they all were eager to be healed.¹¹ Those who were demon possessed fell down in front of Jesus shouting, "You are the Son of God! Yes, you are! You are!"

¹² Jesus commanded the spirits to stop shouting because this could bring on a public disturbance if the people began to argue over who He was instead of listening to what He had to say.

The Twelve Disciples

¹³ Later that day Jesus climbed a hill with the disciples whom He had called. When they were all together,¹⁴ He made them apostles and set the twelve apart to work with Him in preaching the good news of the kingdom.¹⁵ He also gave them power to heal the sick and to cast out demons.¹⁶ Simon, whom He had renamed Peter, was one of the apostles,¹⁷ as well as James and his brother John, the sons of Zebedee who were known as the Sons of Thunder.¹⁸ The others were Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus,

Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot from Cana,¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed Him. After this meeting, they all went down to Peter's house.

A Divided House Cannot Stand

²⁰As soon as they arrived, people began crowding around the house and pushing their way into it, trying to see Jesus. He and His disciples couldn't even eat. ²¹By this time, Jesus' relatives had heard what He was doing and were trying to find Him, hoping to convince Him to return home. They thought He had lost His mind to challenge the Pharisees and to claim that He was Lord of the Sabbath. ²²Also teachers from Jerusalem were there accusing Him of being possessed by the devil and of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. ²³Jesus said to them, "How can Satan cast out other demons and expect his kingdom to survive? ²⁴A kingdom that's divided will not last. ²⁵Even a family that's divided won't last. ²⁶If Satan turns against his own demons, his kingdom can't possibly survive, and eventually his end will come. ²⁷You know that no one can break into another man's house to rob him without first tying him up. Then he'll be free to take what he wants. Before anyone can take men and women away from Satan, he must be able to subdue the devil, not be possessed by him.

The Unpardonable Sin

²⁸"There is no sin that God cannot forgive, even if a man curses Him. ²⁹But if a man attributes the work of the Holy Spirit to the devil, then all possibility of spiritual healing is gone. He can only look forward to facing the consequences of his own sins." ³⁰Jesus spoke the way He did because the people had accused Him of being controlled by the devil.

Jesus' Mother and Brothers

³¹Meanwhile, Jesus' mother and step-brothers arrived and tried to see Him, but they couldn't get near the house be-

cause of the great crowd of people. So they sent word to Him to come out. ³²When the ones sitting near Jesus heard the message, they said to Him, "Your mother and brothers are outside, wanting to see you." ³³Jesus said, "Who makes up my family? Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" ³⁴He looked at the people crowding around Him and said, "You are mothers and brothers to me!" ³⁵In fact, anyone who is interested in doing my Father's will is my brother or sister or mother." Then He went out to see His family.

Parable of the Sower

4 Later Jesus went down to the lake so the people could hear Him better. The crowds followed right behind Him. There were so many people that Jesus had to get into a fishing boat and push a little way off shore because the people crowded right down to the water's edge. ²From the boat, Jesus taught the people, saying, ³"Do you see that sower up there on the hillside? ⁴When a man sows his field by hand, some seeds fall on the edge of the road, and the birds are right there to eat them up. ⁵Some of the seeds fall on rocky patches that don't have much topsoil. They're the first to come up because the soil there is shallow. ⁶After a couple of hot days with no rain, they dry up because their roots don't go deep enough to get the moisture they need. ⁷Other seeds fall among newly sprouted thorns, but the thorns grow faster than the seeds and choke them out, and they never grow big enough to bear fruit. ⁸But some of the seeds fall on good ground, take root, grow up healthy and bear fruit yielding a crop thirty, sixty or one hundred times more than what was sown. ⁹If you have ears to hear, then listen to what I've just said."

The Reason for Parables

¹⁰When Jesus was alone with His disciples, they asked Him what that parable meant. ¹¹He said, "I speak plainly to you

about the kingdom and what God has revealed, but there's a reason why I use parables when I teach the people. ¹²One reason is to separate those who want to know from those who don't. The Holy Spirit will help those who sincerely want to understand. And those who don't are like people who have eyes but see nothing and ears but hear nothing. They're afraid of being converted and having to change their ways.

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Sower

¹³"If you didn't understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand my other parables? Let me help you. ¹⁴The sower sowing on the hillside represents a man sharing the good news of salvation from the Scriptures. ¹⁵The edge of the road represents people who are impressed as they hear the good news, but Satan is right there to take away any lasting impression that the word may have made. ¹⁶The rocky soil represents people who are delighted to receive the good news ¹⁷but don't let the truth go deep into their hearts, and when they are persecuted for their faith, they give up. ¹⁸Those who are represented by the seed that falls among thorny weeds are also glad to receive the good news, ¹⁹but the day-by-day responsibilities, the chance to make more money or the desire to have more conveniences brings on pressures, and soon the word is choked out, making it unfruitful. ²⁰But some people are impressed by the good news, accept it, commit themselves to it and continue to give it top priority. They bear fruit, some more than others, but they all produce a plentiful harvest.

Light Under a Basket

²¹"Let me ask you, do people buy a lamp and then cover it up with a basket or hide it under a bed? Don't they put it on a lampstand so people can see by it? ²²Nothing is hidden but what will be exposed. The good news of the kingdom is not something to be kept secret, but

should be shared with everyone. ²³Those who have ears should listen to what I have to say. ²⁴You need to be careful what you listen to and believe, because the devil will mix error with truth. But the more truth you give out, the more will be measured out to you. ²⁵Those who love the truth and share it with others will be rewarded, and those who don't will lose what they have.

Parable of the Good Seed

²⁶"The kingdom of God is like a man who sows good seed. ²⁷Day after day he works and sleeps and goes about his other chores with confidence, knowing that the seed will sprout and grow even though he can't explain how it all happens. ²⁸But it does happen, and he knows that the soil will produce a harvest without his help. It first produces the blade, then the ear and finally the full-grown corn in the ear. ²⁹Then, as soon as the corn is ready, he calls his workers to reap what he sowed.

Parable of the Mustard Seed

³⁰"To what else should I compare the kingdom of God so you can understand it better? ³¹Well, it's also like a tiny mustard seed which is one of the most insignificant seeds you can plant. ³²But look at it after it sprouts and grows. When it's fully grown, it's like a little tree and bigger than any garden plant you have. It even has branches and leaves and the birds think it's a tree and come and nest there."

Jesus' Use of Parables

³³Jesus taught the people by using many more parables like these whenever they were ready to listen. ³⁴In fact, He hardly taught without using parables. Then, when He was alone with His disciples, He would apply the parables to spiritual truths.

Jesus Calms the Storm

³⁵By the end of the day, after Jesus had healed many people and taught them and

explained the parables to His disciples. He said to them, "Let's go across the lake." ³⁶So Jesus dismissed the people and sent them home. Then the disciples got into the little fishing boat with Him and pushed off to cross the lake, and a couple of other fishing boats sailed with them. ³⁷When they were about halfway across, a gale-force wind suddenly swept down the slopes from around the lake, whipping up the waves. Within minutes they found themselves in a fierce storm, their boats filling with water. ³⁸In the midst of all this, Jesus was curled up at one end of the boat, His head resting on a makeshift pillow, peacefully sleeping through it all. The disciples became so desperate that they shook Him and said, "Master, wake up! Don't you care what happens to us? We're about to drown!" ³⁹Jesus, knowing that the demons were causing the fierce wind, stood and said to the storm, "Peace, be still." Instantly the wind stopped and a great calm came over the lake. ⁴⁰He turned to the disciples and said, "Why were you so afraid? Don't you trust God?" ⁴¹When the disciples saw what had happened, they were awestruck and said to each other, "What kind of power does He have that even the wind and the waves obey Him?"

Two Demon-possessed Men Healed

5 They went across the lake to the province of Decapolis, not far from the city of Gadara. ²As soon as Jesus and the disciples set foot on the beach, one of two madmen living in a cave charged down the hill heading straight for them. It was clear to everyone that he was demon-possessed. ³They had been living among the empty tombs for some time. When the authorities had arrested the most aggressive one, he broke his chains and escaped. ⁴Because this had happened so often, the authorities finally gave up and left him alone. ⁵Day and night he would terrorize people traveling that hillside road, screaming at them and cutting himself with sharp stones until his body was cov-

ered with blood. ⁶Now he came charging down the hill directly at the disciples who turned and ran, but Jesus stood His ground. When the man came near Jesus, he suddenly fell on his knees as if to worship Him, then shouted, ⁷"What do you want with me? You are Jesus, the Son of the Most High God! In the name of God I ask you not to torture me!"

⁸Before Jesus cast the demons out of the man, He said, ⁹"Tell me your name." One of the demons answered, "I don't have one name; I have many names because we are many." ¹⁰Then the spokesman for the demons pleaded with Jesus not to make them leave that part of the country. ¹¹On a nearby hill was a large herd of swine. ¹²The demons begged Jesus, saying, "Please let us go into the pigs and possess them." ¹³Jesus gave them permission, and the demons came out of the men and went into the pigs. Suddenly the poor animals rushed down the hill and into the lake, and all two thousand of them drowned.

¹⁴Then the herdsmen ran back to town to tell the owners what had happened. On the way they told everyone they met. Soon people flocked in from everywhere to see for themselves who it was who had done this thing. ¹⁵When they arrived, they saw the madman and his friend sitting near Jesus, fully dressed, talking intelligently and participating in the conversation. The people were amazed at what they saw. ¹⁶Those who had seen everything happen rushed into town and told what they had seen, including what had happened to the large herd of pigs. ¹⁷Then the pig farmers and the people from Gadara came out and pleaded with Jesus to leave the area because they were afraid He would ruin their business. ¹⁸Sadly, Jesus complied with their request. He had hoped that His ministry would help them to see that people were more important than pigs, but because He wasn't wanted, He and His disciples returned to their boats. The healed men begged Jesus to take them

along. ¹⁹Jesus said, "I want you to stay here. Go home and tell your friends and neighbors how God has had compassion on you and how you were healed." ²⁰The men did just that, and wherever they went throughout the province of Decapolis, they told people the wonderful thing that Jesus had done for them. When the people heard their testimony, they were amazed.

Jesus Heals a Woman and Restores a Girl to Life

²¹Jesus and His disciples crossed back over the lake, and as soon as He got to the other side, people came from everywhere to see Him. ²²While He was by the lakeside, one of the local synagogue leaders named Jairus came and fell on his knees in front of Jesus ²³and begged Him, saying, "My young daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her and heal her so she will live!" ²⁴Jesus said He would come and began following Jairus to his house, and a large crowd followed them.

²⁵A woman who had been menstruating almost continuously for the last twelve years was in the crowd. ²⁶Over the years she had gone to many physicians, using all her life savings in the process, but without success. In fact, her condition was getting worse. ²⁷When she heard about Jesus, she joined the crowd and gradually pushed her way to the front, telling herself, ²⁸"If I can only get close enough to reach out and touch His robe, I know I'll be healed." ²⁹The instant she did so, the bleeding stopped. Suddenly she felt better and knew she had been healed. ³⁰At that same moment Jesus turned around, knowing that healing power had gone out of Him. He asked, "Who touched my robe?" ³¹The disciples said, "With all these people pushing back and forth, how can you ask such a question?" ³²But Jesus looked around and saw, hiding in the crowd, the woman who had touched Him. ³³The woman was so afraid she was shaking all over, but she pushed her way through the crowd,

fell on her knees and told Jesus the whole story. ³⁴Jesus said to her, "Don't be afraid. You're healed now so be glad and go home and enjoy your family."

³⁵While He was speaking, others who had just come from Jairus' house pushed through the crowd and said to Jairus, "Sir, your daughter is dead. There's no use bothering the Master anymore." ³⁶Jesus overheard the news and said to Jairus, "Don't lose hope. Believe in me, just as this woman did." ³⁷Then He turned to the people and asked them not to follow Him. He also told the disciples to stay with the people, but He did take Peter, James and John with Him. Led by Jairus, they went to his house as quickly as they could. ³⁸The professional mourners had already arrived, as had some of the relatives, and the house was full of weeping people. ³⁹Jairus, Jesus and the disciples had to push their way in. Jesus then said to the professional mourners, "Why are you crying and making such a commotion? The girl isn't dead; she's sleeping." ⁴⁰They laughed in His face. Then He insisted that everyone go outside and wait. When everyone was out, He, the parents and the three disciples went into the bedroom where the dead girl was lying. ⁴¹Jesus took the child's hand and said, "Little girl, I want you to get up." ⁴²Instantly, she opened her eyes, sat up and got out of bed. She looked around, then ran to her father and mother who stood there astounded to see their twelve-year-old daughter alive. ⁴³Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat and not to broadcast what He had done to avoid undue publicity.

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

6 From Capernaum, Jesus and His disciples went on to Nazareth where He had been brought up. ²On the Sabbath, Jesus went to the synagogue and spoke. When the people heard Him they were amazed and inspired by what He said. They asked, "Where did He learn all this? Where did He get such insight? Where

does He get power to work the miracles that He does?"³ But then as He showed them their need to be born again, they said, "Isn't this the carpenter's boy, Mary's son? Aren't James, Joseph, Jude and Simon, the sons of Joseph, His stepbrothers? And don't we know His stepsisters too? Who does He think He is to come here to tell us what we need?" And they became angry.⁴ Jesus overheard their whispered conversations and quoted a commonly known proverb, "A prophet is honored and respected wherever he goes, but not in his own hometown either by his relatives or those he grew up with."⁵ So He didn't work many miracles there except to lay His hands on a few people who believed that He could heal them.⁶ He was amazed at the lack of faith that people in Nazareth had. So He left to go and teach in other places.

The Mission of the Twelve

⁷About this time, He sent the twelve disciples out two by two to preach, teach, heal and, if need be, to cast out demons.⁸ He told them not to take anything with them—no food, no bag and no money in their belts; if they needed a staff they could get one later.⁹ He told them to wear their sandals but not to worry about an extra change of clothing.¹⁰ He also said to them, "If you're invited to stay at someone's house, stay there until you decide to leave town. Don't move from house to house because that will not give the townspeople a good impression of you.¹¹ If you go to a town and the people don't want you to stay, don't force yourself on them. Leave and go to another place. Shake the dust off your feet as a sign against them. They have had more light than the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah."¹² So the disciples went out preaching, inviting men and women to repent and change their ways.¹³ They also cast out demons, anointed the sick with oil and prayed for people to be healed. And God healed them.

John the Baptist Beheaded

¹⁴When Herod was told all that Jesus was doing, he said, "This man sounds like John the Baptist risen from the dead; that's the reason He can do all these miracles."¹⁵ Others said, "He sounds like Elijah." Still others said, "It almost seems like Moses has come back to life or maybe one of the other prophets."¹⁶ But Herod insisted, "There is no doubt. He is John the Baptist, the one I beheaded. He's risen from the dead."¹⁷ Herod said this because he had arrested John to save his wife Herodias from humiliation over their marriage. She had been the wife of his half-brother Philip but had left him for Herod.¹⁸ John the Baptist had been telling the people that the royal couple was living in adultery.¹⁹ That's why Herod's wife, Herodias, hated John and wanted to have him executed.²⁰ Herod had protected John and hesitated to arrest him because he believed that John was a good man led by God. Herod enjoyed listening to John, but was bothered by what he preached.²¹ Finally the time came for Herodias to act. It happened at Herod's birthday party when the banquet hall was packed with high officials, military men and other dignitaries from all over Galilee.²² At the height of the party, Herodias sent her daughter in to dance for the guests. She performed so well that everyone was enthralled. Having had too much to drink, Herod said to the girl, "Ask for anything you want, and I'll give it to you."²³ To show that he meant what he said, he confirmed his offer with an oath, "Whatever you ask for, I promise you can have it, even up to half of my kingdom."²⁴ She thanked him, then left the banquet hall to find her mother and said, "What do you think I should ask for?" Without hesitation her mother replied, "Ask for the head of John the Baptist so we can finally end the embarrassment he has caused us."

²⁵The young woman came back to the king and said, "I would like to have the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

²⁶The king was stunned and so were his guests. He hadn't expected a response like that, but because he had given his word and taken an oath to confirm it in front of his guests, he couldn't back down. ²⁷He called for the executioner and ordered him to bring in John's head on a platter. The executioner immediately went to the prison and beheaded John. ²⁸Then he brought John's head into the party on a platter and gave it to the girl, who, in turn, took it to her mother. ²⁹The next morning, when John's disciples heard about it, they went to the prison and asked for his body and took it and buried it in a tomb.

Feeding the Five Thousand

³⁰After Jesus' twelve disciples came back from their mission, they told Him everything that had happened, what they had taught and what they had done. ³¹Jesus said, "Let's go find an isolated spot in the wilderness where we can be alone to talk and get some rest." He said this because people were constantly coming to see Him and His disciples that they didn't even have time to eat. ³²So they got into one of the fishing boats and pushed off to find a quiet place not too far from the lake where they could be by themselves. ³³But the people saw them leave, noticed in what direction they were heading and then hurried around the lake to find them. As they went, people from other villages along the way joined them and they found where Jesus and His disciples were.

³⁴When Jesus saw all these people and realized how far they had walked, He had compassion on them. They seemed to have as little direction as sheep without a shepherd. So He started to teach them many things. ³⁵Late in the afternoon the disciples came to Jesus and said, "This place is a long way from town and it's late in the day. ³⁶Don't you think we ought to dismiss the people so they can go to the nearby villages to buy something to eat before it gets dark and the

marketplaces close up?" ³⁷Jesus said, "We had better feed them." The disciples said, "You don't mean that we should buy food for all these people, do you? That would cost about two hundred days' wages!" ³⁸Jesus answered, "How much food do we have? Check to see." After checking, they came back and said, "All we have are five little loaves of bread and two small fish." ³⁹Then Jesus told the people to find a comfortable place to sit where there was grass and to form into small groups. ⁴⁰They sat down and grouped themselves into clusters of about fifty to a hundred.

⁴¹After the people were seated, Jesus took the five little loaves of bread and the two small fish, looked up to heaven and said the blessing. Then He broke the loaves and gave them to His disciples to distribute among the people. He also gave them the fish to hand out. ⁴²The people ate until they were full and there was plenty for everyone. ⁴³Afterward the disciples collected twelve baskets full of leftovers. ⁴⁴They had fed about five thousand men, and some of them had their wives and children with them.

Jesus Walks on Water

⁴⁵As soon as they had picked up the leftovers, Jesus asked His disciples to get into the boat and head up the lake to Bethsaida while He dismissed the people. He sensed that a move was underway to make Him king in place of Herod. ⁴⁶After the people and the disciples were gone, He climbed part way up a mountainside to pray. ⁴⁷That evening while He was alone in prayer, the disciples were rowing hard to cross the lake. Suddenly a storm came up, and they struggled to stay on course but couldn't. ⁴⁸Jesus could see them in the distance, battling against the wind and waves. When they were exhausted from rowing against the storm, Jesus walked down the mountainside and out onto the lake toward them. At first, He acted as if he would walk right past them. ⁴⁹When they spotted Him,

they thought they were seeing a ghost and cried to God for help. ⁵⁰They were scared to death. Then Jesus called out with a strong voice and said, "Cheer up! I am Jesus! Don't be afraid!" ⁵¹Then He walked over to them and when He touched the boat to climb in, the wind stopped, the waves quieted and the lake was calm. The disciples, dumbfounded and stunned by what they had seen, tried to comprehend it all. ⁵²In fact, they were still trying to understand how five thousand men could be fed with five little loaves of bread and two small fish.

Many Healed by Touching Him

⁵³Finally they reached the coastal plain of Gennesaret just south of Capernaum and disembarked. ⁵⁴As soon as Jesus stepped out of the boat, the people recognized Him. ⁵⁵They ran to get their sick and carried them to Jesus on mats to be healed. Soon the whole region was astir. ⁵⁶In fact, wherever Jesus went, whether through the countryside or into a city or village, people would lay their sick ones in the streets of the marketplaces to be healed. Others looked for Him so they could just touch His robe, and all those who did so were made well.

Evildoing Begins Within

7 One day some of the local Pharisees and visiting teachers from Jerusalem joined the crowds that were following Jesus. ²When they saw some of the disciples eating without having gone through the ceremonial ritual of washing their hands, they criticized them in front of the people. ³Before the Pharisees ate, they would wash their hands in just a certain way, some washing clear up to their elbows. They taught the people to do this as a religious requirement handed down from generation to generation. ⁴When they came home from the market, they would not eat until they had washed their hands this way. Other rituals involved thoroughly washing each cup, plate, or water pitcher just before using it. ⁵So,

when the scribes and Pharisees saw the disciples eating without having washed their hands that way, they asked Jesus. "Why don't your disciples follow the ritual that we follow before they eat?" ⁶Jesus answered, "Isaiah's prophecy about you is certainly correct when he wrote, 'These leaders will talk a lot about me, but they don't really love me.' ⁷Their worship of me is meaningless because they teach the people to do things that they themselves thought up.' ⁸What you're doing is undermining God's law by constantly focusing on rituals.

⁹"It's no wonder that God's Law has become meaningless to the people; you're constantly emphasizing the importance of your own traditions. ¹⁰Let me give you an example of what I mean. Moses said, 'Respect your father and mother. Anyone found cursing and disowning his parents should be tried and then put to death.' ¹¹But you come along with your traditions and say it is acceptable to say to parents, 'I have promised to give all my money to the Temple, so I'm sorry I can't really help support you since the money now belongs to God.' ¹²Then you make this kind of negligence even worse by saying, 'If you spend any of your money to help your parents instead of giving it to support the Temple, you'll be cursed of God.' ¹³You've made the fifth commandment meaningless because of your warped sense of values and emphasis on tradition. And you do other things just like it."

¹⁴Jesus turned to the people and said, "Listen and understand what I have to tell you. ¹⁵Nothing on the outside of a person can morally defile him. It's what comes out of him that hurts him, not what goes in. ¹⁶Think carefully about what you just heard me say." ¹⁷Then Jesus, seeing an opportunity to get away from the crowds for a short while, accepted an invitation to someone's house for dinner. When they were comfortably seated, the disciples asked Him what He was talking about. ¹⁸He said to them, "You mean that you

don't understand what I just said to the people? Can't you see that whatever goes into a man from the outside, like dirt from his unwashed hands, cannot make him morally unclean? ¹⁹It doesn't affect his relationship with God, because it goes into his stomach, passes through his intestines, then out of his body. ²⁰It's what comes from his heart and out of his mouth that morally affects a man. ²¹From the heart come such things as evil thoughts, adultery, murder, ²²theft, envy, hostility, deception, lust, suspicion, blasphemy, pride and foolishness. ²³All this comes from within and is morally wrong; these are what make a man unclean."

A Canaanite Woman's Faith Rewarded

²⁴Then Jesus left with His disciples and headed northwest to the region of Tyre and Sidon. While there, He was invited to one of the homes. He was hoping to have a little peace and quiet, but word got around that He was there and people started coming. ²⁵A woman whose daughter was devil-possessed heard where Jesus was and came and knelt at His feet, asking for help. ²⁶She was Greek, born in Phoenicia in Syria. She begged Jesus to cast out the demons who were tormenting her daughter. ²⁷Then Jesus, demonstrating to the disciples their own prejudice toward non-Jews, turned to her and said, "It isn't right to take the children's food from the table and feed it to the family dogs. God's healing power is reserved for His children." ²⁸But the woman answered, "That's true, Lord, but even dogs are given the leftovers after the children have eaten." ²⁹Jesus responded, "Because of your faith, go in peace; your daughter is healed." ³⁰When the woman reached home, she found her daughter completely free from the control of demons.

Jesus Restores a Man's Speech

³¹Leaving the area of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus returned to the sea of Galilee and went on to the province of Decapolis.

³²There the people brought to Him a deaf person who also had a speech impediment and begged Jesus to heal him. ³³He took the man aside, put His fingers in his ears, took a little saliva and touched the tip of the man's tongue. ³⁴Then He looked up to heaven, sighed and said, "Ephphatha!" meaning, "Open up!" ³⁵Instantly the man's ears were opened and his tongue was loosed so he could both hear and speak clearly. ³⁶Jesus told the people not to tell anyone what had happened; however, the more He tried to explain the real purpose of His ministry, the more they shouted His praise. ³⁷They were so amazed, they told everyone they met, "This Jesus from Nazareth can do anything! He just healed a deaf-mute, and now the man hears and speaks!"

Feeding the Four Thousand

8 Because of this, it wasn't long before thousands of people came to hear Jesus. He said to His disciples, ²"I feel sorry for these people, because they've been with me for nearly three days, and most of them haven't had much of anything to eat. ³If I dismiss them, some of them might not make it home since they've come such a long way." ⁴The disciples answered, "How can we feed all these people when there's not a market for miles around where we can buy anything?" ⁵Jesus said to them, "How many loaves of bread do we have?" They counted and said, "Seven." ⁶Jesus asked the people to sit down on the ground. He took the seven loaves they had, thanked God for them, broke each one in half and gave them to the disciples to give to the people. ⁷The disciples also had a few small fish which they gave to Jesus. He blessed them also and told the disciples to distribute them as well. ⁸The people ate until they were satisfied. Afterward, the disciples collected seven baskets full of leftovers. ⁹The number of people Jesus fed that day was over four thousand men, not counting women and children. When they had finished eating, Jesus sent them

on their way. ¹⁰Then He got into a boat with His disciples and asked to be taken across the lake to Magadan.

The Pharisees Ask for a Miracle

¹¹When He arrived, the Pharisees came and started asking Him questions. They wanted Him to work a miracle as a sign from heaven proving that He was who He claimed to be. ¹²Jesus felt the sting of their skepticism, heaved a deep sigh and said, "Why do you ask for a miracle as proof of who I am? I will not work a miracle to do so." ¹³Then He left them, got back in the boat and told His disciples to sail north across the lake.

The Yeast of False Doctrines

¹⁴Now the disciples had given away all the leftovers from the day before and had forgotten to keep any bread for themselves. All they had with them was one small loaf which was not enough to feed thirteen men. ¹⁵As they were thinking about what to do, Jesus said to them, "Watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." ¹⁶They said to each other, "What did He mean by that? Is He trying to tell us what kind of bread to always bring along?" ¹⁷When Jesus saw how confused they were, He said to them, "Why do you not understand what I'm saying? And why do you think I'm talking about food? Are your hearts that insensitive to spiritual values?" ¹⁸You have eyes to see, ears to hear and brains to think with. Don't tell me that you've already forgotten what you just saw and heard. ¹⁹Don't you remember what happened to the five loaves of bread I broke to feed five thousand people? After everyone ate, how many baskets full of leftovers did you pick up?" They said, "Twelve." ²⁰Then Jesus said, "And what about the crowd of four thousand and the seven loaves of bread? How many baskets full of leftovers did you pick up then?" They said, "Seven." ²¹"How is it then," He asked, "that you think I'm concerned about how much bread we have in the boat? Can't you un-

derstand that I'm talking about the leaven of legalism and politics?"

Jesus Heals a Blind Man

²²They landed near Bethsaida, and the people began to bring their sick to Jesus to be healed. Among them was a blind man. ²³Jesus took the blind man's hand and led him out of the village. Jesus stopped and put a little saliva on the man's eyelids. Then He asked him to open his eyes and tell Him if he could see. ²⁴The man said, "Yes, I can see! But the people look like tree trunks walking around!" ²⁵Jesus told the man to close his eyes and again touched the man's eyelids. Then He asked the man to open his eyes as wide as he could. The man did, and his eyes focused so he could see everything clearly. ²⁶Jesus said to him, "Don't go back into the village, but go straight home. Don't tell anyone along the way what happened; otherwise, too many people will come looking for me and we could be accused of causing a disturbance."

Peter Confesses Jesus As the Son of God

²⁷Then Jesus and His disciples headed north toward Caesarea-Philippi, and as they were walking along, He asked them, "Who do people think I am?" ²⁸They said, "Some think you're John the Baptist raised from the dead. Others think you're Elijah returned from heaven or one of the ancient prophets come back to preach." ²⁹Jesus asked, "Who do you say I am?" Without hesitation Peter spoke up and said, "You are the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God!" ³⁰Then He told them not to tell anyone who He was because it would stir up the authorities to arrest Him, which could end His ministry.

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection

³¹He also told them that even though He was the Messiah, He would have to suffer at the hands of His own people. First, He would be rejected by the elders, the priests and the teachers, then He

would be arrested and executed. But on the third day He would rise again. ³²He spoke about these things freely and openly. Finally, Peter couldn't keep quiet and took Jesus aside and rebuked Him for even thinking that way, much less talking about it. ³³Jesus then turned to His disciples and rebuked the Satanic influence around them, saying, "Get behind me Satan!" Looking straight at Peter, He said, "You're only thinking about what's important to man, not what's important to God."

The Cost of Following Jesus

³⁴Later that day when a large crowd was following Him, Jesus suddenly stopped, called His disciples and the people close to Him, and said loud enough for everyone to hear, "Whoever wants to follow me must be willing to deny himself, take up his cross and carry out God's will for his life as I do for mine. ³⁵Whoever tries to save his life by turning away from me will lose eternal life, but whoever is willing to lose his life out of love for me and the gospel will be saved. ³⁶What profit is there in gaining the whole world and all the good things of this life if it causes you to lose your own soul? ³⁷What can a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸If anyone is ashamed of me and my teaching, I will be ashamed of him when I return in the glory of my Father with the holy angels."

9 Then Jesus concluded by saying to His disciples, "Some of you standing here will see the power of God's coming kingdom before you die."

Jesus' Transfiguration

²Six days later Jesus chose Peter, James and John to go with Him to the top of a mountain to be alone. When they reached the top, Jesus' body was suddenly transformed right before their eyes. ³His robe became brilliantly white, even whiter than snow and whiter than anyone

on earth could make it. ⁴And Elijah and Moses stood next to Jesus, one on each side of Him, and started talking with Him. ⁵Then Peter burst out, "Master! This is a great place! Let's put up three holy tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah!" ⁶Peter was so afraid that he didn't realize what he was saying. ⁷Just then a cloud came and hovered overhead. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son whom I love very much. Listen to what He has to say." ⁸Then it was all over. As the disciples looked around, they saw no one with them but Jesus.

⁹As they walked back down the mountain, Jesus told them not to tell anyone what had happened until after His death and resurrection. ¹⁰They were stunned by the thought of His death and tried to figure out what He meant by His resurrection. ¹¹So they asked Jesus, "Why do our teachers tell us that Elijah must appear before the end comes and the general resurrection can take place?" ¹²He said, "It's true that Elijah must come first before everything can be restored. The Scripture also says that the Messiah will have to suffer many things and that His own people will reject Him. ¹³John was sent to represent Elijah, and in that sense he has already been here, but the people treated him as they wished. All this was according to Scripture."

Jesus Heals a Demon-possessed Boy

¹⁴When they got to the bottom of the mountain where they had left the other disciples, they saw a large crowd listening to the scribes and Pharisees questioning them. ¹⁵As soon as the people saw Jesus, they were overcome with awe, but ran to greet Him. ¹⁶Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "What are they questioning you about?" ¹⁷Before they could answer, a man said, "Teacher, I brought my son to your disciples to be healed from devil possession. ¹⁸An evil spirit has been controlling him, telling him where to go and what to do. It throws him to the ground, and he starts foaming at the

mouth as if he's raving mad. Then he grinds his teeth and his body stiffens as if he were dead. I asked your disciples to heal him, but they couldn't."

¹⁹Jesus said, "What an unbelieving generation! How much longer do I have to be with you to show you the power of God? Bring the boy here."²⁰As soon as they brought the boy to Jesus, the spirit took hold of him, throwing him to the ground, convulsing and foaming at the mouth.²¹Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening?" He answered, "Since he was a child."²²In fact, many times the demon has thrown him into a fire to burn him or into the water to drown him. If you can do anything, please have mercy on us and help him!"²³Jesus said to the father, "It's not a question of if I can. It's a question of whether you believe I can."

²⁴The father cried out, "Teacher, I do believe, but please help me overcome my unbelief! Please give me the kind of faith I need!"²⁵By this time people were gathering from all directions and Jesus decided to end the conversation. He turned to the boy and, speaking to the demon, said, "Come out and leave the boy alone. Don't ever bother him again!"²⁶After letting out a shriek and throwing the boy into a giant convulsion, the evil spirit came out, but the boy lay there as if he were dead. In fact, the people said, "Look! He's dead!"²⁷But Jesus stepped over to him, took him by the hand and helped him up.²⁸Later when Jesus and His disciples were eating lunch at someone's house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why couldn't we cast out the demon?"²⁹Jesus answered, "This can only be done through prayer and walking humbly with God."

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection a Second Time

³⁰Then they left the area and traveled throughout Galilee, staying away from the more populated areas because He didn't want people to know where He was.³¹This gave Jesus a chance to prepare His

disciples for what was coming. He said, "The Jewish leaders will soon reject the Son of Man. They will turn me over to the Romans who will execute me, but after three days I will rise again."³²The disciples still didn't understand what Jesus was talking about, but they were afraid to ask Him exactly what He meant.

Who Is the Greatest?

³³After they arrived at Capernaum, they were eating at Peter's house when Jesus asked His disciples, "What were you arguing about on the road earlier today?"³⁴They didn't answer Him because they had been arguing about which one of them would be the greatest when Jesus set up His kingdom.³⁵After lunch He turned to His disciples and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be willing to serve others and be last of all."³⁶Soon some mothers with children came to see Jesus. He took one of the little ones in His arms, then turned to His disciples and said,³⁷"Anyone who welcomes these children in my name welcomes me. And he who welcomes me welcomes the One who sent me."

Jesus Forbids Exclusiveness

³⁸Later, John said to Jesus, "Master, we saw someone using your name to cast out demons, but since he wasn't one of us, we stopped him."³⁹John thought Jesus would compliment him, but instead Jesus said, "You should not have stopped him, because no one can use my name to cast out demons, then turn right around and say bad things about me."⁴⁰If he isn't against us, he's for us.⁴¹Anyone who is kind enough to give you a cup of water to drink because of me will be rewarded for even such a small act as that.

The Value of Heaven

⁴²"Anyone who causes a little child or a newly baptized adult to lose faith in me and sin deserves to have a stone tied to his neck and be thrown into the lake."⁴³You must be willing to sacrifice any-

thing that would take you away from me, even something as valuable as your right arm. It is better to be physically handicapped and be in the kingdom of God than to go through life physically whole only to lose eternal life and be consumed in the lake of fire. ⁴⁴That fire will do its work as thoroughly as worms eat a dead body or a forest fire burns trees. ⁴⁵Anything that holds you back spiritually needs to be removed. If you have to sever your foot to keep from straying away from God, do so. Why go through life striving to be a great success if it means sacrificing eternal life for the fires of hell? ⁴⁶As I said, the lake of fire will do its work as thoroughly as worms eat a dead body or a forest fire burns trees. ⁴⁷Whatever perverts your spiritual vision, get rid of it. It's better to lose an eye, if you have to, and be in God's kingdom than to be praised by men and be thrown into the lake of fire. ⁴⁸Placing anything above the kingdom of God will have its consequences as surely as worms attack a dead body or a forest fire burns trees.

Worthless Salt

⁴⁹"Every person's loyalty to me will be tested just like every sacrifice brought to the altar with salt is burned with fire. ⁵⁰Salt is good, but whenever it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? So make sure you have the salt of discipleship in your heart. If you don't, your love for me means nothing. Now be at peace with each other."

Marriage and Divorce

10 From Capernaum Jesus went through Galilee, across the Jordan River and down into Judea. Again people crowded around Him, and, as His custom was, He started teaching them.

²Soon some of the Pharisees came to trap Him theologically, asking, "Is it right for a man to divorce his wife?" ³Jesus asked, "What did Moses say about it?" ⁴They said, "Moses allowed divorce as long as it was done legally and put in

writing." ⁵Jesus replied, "True, but it was because men were disowning their wives for every little thing. That's why Moses made that law. ⁶When God created man and woman, He had no intention that they divorce. ⁷God's original plan was for a man to leave his father and mother and stay with his wife. ⁸For in His sight, when two people are married, they're no longer considered two but one. ⁹You need to be careful not to pull apart what God has joined together."

¹⁰Later His disciples asked Jesus the same question the Pharisees had. ¹¹Jesus answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife in order to marry another woman is just as guilty as if he had been unfaithful and committed adultery. ¹²It's the same for a woman. If she seeks a divorce because she wants another man, she is just as guilty as if she had been unfaithful and committed adultery."

Jesus Blesses Little Children

¹³Soon a group of mothers were crowding around, trying to bring their children to Jesus for a blessing. His disciples told them to go away. ¹⁴When Jesus saw what they were doing, He was very displeased and said, "Don't stop these mothers. Let the little ones come to me, for the kingdom of God belongs to those with childlike faith. ¹⁵In fact, unless people are as trusting as these little children, they cannot possibly have part in God's kingdom." ¹⁶Then Jesus reached down and picked up one little toddler after another and blessed every one of them.

The Rich Young Ruler

¹⁷Later, as Jesus and His disciples were walking down the road, a wealthy young man ran to catch up with them. When he did, he knelt down in front of Jesus and said, "Good Teacher, what must I do to have eternal life?" ¹⁸Jesus said, "Why do you call me good? No one can be called good except God. ¹⁹What do the commandments say? They tell you that you should not commit adultery or kill or

steal or lie or cheat, and that you should honor your parents.”²⁰ The young man said, “Teacher, I’ve lived by these commandments all my life, ever since I was a child.”²¹ Jesus’ heart went out to him, and He said, “There’s one thing you lack. Go and sell what you have, and use your money to help the poor. This will be like putting money into the bank of heaven. Then come and follow me.”²² The young man’s face fell and he went away sad because he was very wealthy.

With God All Things Are Possible

²³After he left, Jesus looked at His disciples and said, “It’s very hard for rich people to change. Yet they need to in order to be saved in God’s kingdom.”²⁴ The disciples were stunned. Then Jesus explained, “It isn’t easy for those who make a lot of money to change, even if they’ve earned it legitimately.”²⁵ For a rich person clinging to his possessions to enter the kingdom of God is as impossible as a camel trying to force its way through the eye of a needle.”²⁶ These statements by Jesus really confused the disciples. They turned to each other and said, “If the rich whom it seems God has blessed can’t be saved, what hope do we have?”²⁷ Jesus interrupted them, saying, “Salvation is totally the work of God, and what may seem impossible to you is possible with God.”²⁸ Then Peter said, “We don’t have much money to give to the poor, but we’ve left everything we had to follow you.”²⁹ Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth: No one who has to leave his home, his brothers, sisters, parents, wife, children or lands, because he loves me and wants to help spread God’s good news will fail to receive his reward.”³⁰ He will receive one hundred times more satisfaction than money, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, or property can give him, even though he may be persecuted for what he believes. And he will be given eternal life.³¹ Many people who are now thought to be first will be last, and others thought to be last will be first.”

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection a Third Time

³²They continued their journey toward Jerusalem. Jesus was leading the way and the disciples were lagging behind, still trying to figure out what Jesus meant by what He had said. As they followed, they doubted and were afraid. Jesus let the twelve catch up with Him, then told them what to expect.³³ “We’re going to Jerusalem,” He said, “but it won’t be a time of joy. The Messiah will be betrayed into the hands of the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will arrest Him, sentence Him to death, then turn Him over to the Romans to be executed.”³⁴ They will make fun of Him, scourge Him, spit in His face and kill Him. But three days later He will rise to life again.”

The Request of James and John

³⁵About this time James and John, the Zebedee brothers, and their mother approached Jesus with a special request, saying, “Master, we know that you’re willing to give us anything we ask for. So could you do something special for us?”³⁶ Jesus said, “What is it that you want me to do for you that’s so special?”³⁷ They said, “Let us sit next to you when you set up your government, one of us on your right and the other one on your left.”³⁸ Jesus answered, “You don’t know what you’re asking for. Can you drink from the same cup of suffering that I will drink from? Are you ready to take on the same sacrificial mission I have?”³⁹ They said, “We’re ready!” Then Jesus said, “You will indeed soon taste rejection just as I am tasting it, and you will soon be baptized with the same suffering that I am being baptized with.”⁴⁰ However, who will sit next to me in heaven, whether on the right or the left, is not for me to decide, but my Father will give those seats to whom they belong.”⁴¹ When the other disciples found out what James and John had asked, they were extremely upset with them.⁴² So Jesus called all twelve of them together and said, “You know that

in the world, those who govern exercise their authority and expect people to serve them. ⁴³But that's not what I want you to do. The one who wants to be the greatest among you must be willing to serve the rest of you. ⁴⁴And whoever wants to be the chief must be a servant to all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of God has come, not to be served, but to serve and to give His life to save as many as He can."

Jesus Heals Two Blind Men

⁴⁶When Jesus and His disciples approached Jericho, the people streamed from their houses and followed them. When they reached the outskirts of the city, they saw blind Bartimaeus sitting with his friend by the side of the road, begging. ⁴⁷Someone told him that Jesus was coming, so he started yelling, "Jesus, divine Son of David, have mercy on us!" ⁴⁸People tried to quiet him because they were embarrassed with his constant yelling. But he shouted even louder, "Divine Son of David, have mercy on us!" ⁴⁹When Jesus came near the place where Bartimaeus sat, He stopped and said, "Go, bring him here." Someone went over to Bartimaeus and said, "Stand up! Jesus wants to see you. Come, I'll help you." ⁵⁰Bartimaeus threw his robe aside, jumped up and, guided by others, he and his friend came to Jesus. ⁵¹Jesus asked, "What is it that you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus said, "Rabbi, my friend and I want to see again!" ⁵²Jesus answered, "Be on your way; because of your faith, you're healed." Instantly, Bartimaeus and his friend could see! They joined the people and followed Jesus.

The Triumphal Entry

11 As Jesus and His disciples neared Jerusalem by way of Bethany and Bethphage, He stopped at the Mount of Olives overlooking the city and, turning to two of His disciples, said, ²"Go into the village just ahead of you. As soon as you go in, you'll find a young donkey which has never been ridden tied to a post next

to its mother. Untie it and bring it here. ³If anyone asks what you're doing, tell him that the Lord needs to borrow the donkey for a little while and you'll bring it back."

⁴The two disciples did as they were told. When they got to the village, they found a young donkey tied to a post in front of a house near the entrance of the town just as Jesus had said. So they started to untie it. ⁵Some of the townspeople standing nearby called out, "What are you men doing with that donkey?" ⁶The two disciples repeated what Jesus had told them to say, and the people let them go. ⁷They led the donkey to the top of the Mount of Olives. Suddenly they realized that what Jesus was about to do had for centuries been a symbolic act of kings prior to their coronation. Joyfully, they took off their robes and laid them on the young animal. Jesus then mounted the donkey, and the disciples led Him into Jerusalem. ⁸When the people saw this, they felt sure that Jesus was about to proclaim Himself King of Israel. Excitedly, some of them took off their robes and spread them on the road while others broke off palm branches and laid them in His path. ⁹Still others ran ahead, shouting, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessings on Him who comes in the name of the Lord." The people behind Jesus shouted hosannas in response. ¹⁰Together they shouted, "Blessings on the kingdom of our father David! Blessings on Him who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna! Hosanna to the King!"

¹¹When the procession reached the Temple, Jesus dismounted and told the two disciples to take the donkey back while He went inside. He took a last look at everything in the Temple, then He and the twelve left Jerusalem and went to Bethany.

The Fruitless Fig Tree

¹²Early in the morning before breakfast, they left Bethany and started back toward Jerusalem. They were all hungry. ¹³When Jesus saw a fig tree in the distance covered with leaves, He headed straight toward it, expecting to find some

figs. But when He got there, He couldn't find a single one. Although it was a bit early in the season, this particular tree, because it was so full of leaves, should have had some ripened figs. ¹⁴Jesus said to the tree, "Never again will you deceive people with your pretense." The disciples wondered why He would speak that way to a tree, but later they understood that it was a symbol of Israel.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

¹⁵Arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus went to the Temple and ordered those who were buying and selling to leave. When they refused, He tipped over the tables of the money changers and the shelves of caged pigeons and drove the merchandisers out. ¹⁶He refused to let them come back into the Temple to sell their animals or to exchange people's money. ¹⁷Then He sat down and taught the people, saying, "It is written: 'God's house is a house of prayer for all people, but some have turned it into a den of robbery and fraud.'" ¹⁸When the chief priests and teachers of the law heard what Jesus had said and done, they determined to have him killed. They would have done so right then, but they feared the people because many believed what He was saying. ¹⁹Late that afternoon Jesus left the Temple and went back to Bethany.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

²⁰The next morning as He returned to Jerusalem, He took the same route He had taken the day before. The disciples were amazed that the fig tree Jesus had cursed was already dead. ²¹Then Peter, remembering what Jesus had said to the tree the morning before, exclaimed, "Master! Look at that fig tree! You cursed it only yesterday and today the whole tree is dead!" ²²Jesus answered, "If you had the right kind of faith in God, ²³you could tell a mountain to throw itself into the sea, and it would be done for you. God can remove any obstacle that stands in the way of your ministry. ²⁴As you pray, ask God to

give you the faith to believe that He will help you, and He will do so.

Forgiveness and Prayer

²⁵"But when you pray, you need to forgive others. Only then can your heavenly Father forgive you your sins. ²⁶If you don't forgive others, your Father can't forgive you your sins and give you what you ask for."

Jesus' Authority Questioned

²⁷Soon they arrived in Jerusalem and went to the Temple. As they walked in, the chief priests, teachers and elders were waiting for Jesus. ²⁸They said to Him, "By what authority did you do the things you did yesterday? Who gave you that authority?" ²⁹Jesus answered, "Let me ask you a question first. If you can answer my question, then I'll answer yours and tell you who gave me the authority to do what I did. ³⁰What do you think about the ministry of John? Who authorized him to preach and to baptize? Was it God or was it his own idea?" ³¹They stepped aside and said to each other, "If we tell Him that John's ministry was authorized by God, He'll say, 'Why then didn't you believe what he said and do what he told you to do?' ³²And if we tell Him, 'We think John's ministry was his own idea,' we'll anger the people, because they believe John was a prophet." ³³So they said to Jesus, "We can't answer that question." Jesus replied, "Then neither will I answer your question about who authorized me to do what I did."

Parable of the Wicked Tenants

12 Then Jesus turned to the people and began telling them stories. "A certain landowner planted a vineyard, built a wall around it, then put in a winepress and a watchtower to guard the land. He leased it out to vineyard keepers, then left to take care of some business elsewhere. ²When the harvest season came, he sent one of his agents to the tenants to collect his percentage of

the profits from the sale of the grapes. ³But the tenants caught the agent, beat him up and sent him back home. ⁴So the owner sent another agent to collect his rightful share of the harvest's profits. But the tenants threw stones at him, struck him on the head until he was covered with blood and sent him back home. ⁵So the owner sent a third agent, and when he came to the vineyard, the tenants killed him. That's what happened every time an agent was sent. ⁶Now the landowner had only one son and he loved him very much. He decided to send him, telling himself, 'I know they'll respect my son.' ⁷But when the tenants saw the son coming, they said to each other, 'This is the heir to the vineyard. Let's kill him and then, according to the law, the old man will have to give us first claim to the vineyard.'

⁸"So they grabbed the son, killed him and threw his body over the vineyard wall. ⁹Let me ask you, what do you think the owner will do? You know very well what he will do. He'll come back and have the tenants arrested and tried for murder. Then He'll turn the vineyard over to someone else. ¹⁰Haven't you noticed what the Scriptures say in the Psalm that we sing as a hymn of thanksgiving? 'The stone the Temple builders rejected was the stone they needed to support the corner. ¹¹The Lord did this to point us to the Messiah. We marvel at His wisdom.'"

¹²The Jewish leaders who were listening wanted desperately to arrest Jesus, but they held back because of the people. They knew that He had told this parable to expose their plans, but they didn't dare touch Him, so they left Him alone and went their way.

Paying Taxes to Caesar?

¹³A little later the Jewish leaders hand-picked some Pharisees and Herodians to see if they could get Jesus to say something they could arrest Him for. ¹⁴When these men arrived, they said, "Teacher, we know that you're an honest man, that

you're not pressured into doing or saying anything that isn't right and that you teach God's truth, no matter what. Do you think it's right for Israelites to pay taxes to Caesar?" ¹⁵Should we do this or shouldn't we?" Jesus knew their reason for asking this and said, "Why are you trying to trap me into saying something that you can use against me? Do any of you have a penny? Let me see it." ¹⁶They gave Him a penny. He looked at it and asked, "Whose picture and words are engraved on this penny?" They said, "Caesar's." ¹⁷Then Jesus answered, "Give to Caesar what belongs to him and give to God what God expects you to give to Him." They stood there dumbfounded.

Marriage and the Resurrection?

¹⁸Afterward the Sadducees came. They did not believe in the resurrection. Their intention, too, was to trap Jesus. They said, ¹⁹"Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies and leaves a wife but no children, then his brother should marry her so she can have children to keep the family line from dying out, and these children would then inherit his share of the property.' ²⁰Now we know of a case in which seven brothers were involved. The oldest brother married and died, leaving his wife without children. ²¹Then the next brother married her, but soon he also died before the woman had any children. The next brother did the same, and so on. ²²Now as incredible as it may seem, seven brothers were involved in this arrangement. Each one married her and died without leaving children. Finally, the woman died also. ²³If people rise from the dead, whose wife will she be when she's resurrected? After all, she was married to all seven of them."

²⁴Jesus answered, "You're blind to what the Scriptures say about the resurrection and the power of God. You compare everything in the next life to what you understand about this life. On that basis, you then reject the plainest teaching of Scripture. ²⁵Have you ever thought it possible that God could have plans for

His people other than for them to marry and reproduce? When they are raised from the dead, they will be like the angels in heaven who have no need to perpetuate their own kind because they never die. ²⁶Now concerning the resurrection, haven't you read about Moses' experience recorded in Exodus, how God spoke to him out of the burning bush, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'? ²⁷What was God telling Moses? He was telling him that He was the One who activated Sarah's dead womb, giving through Abraham life to Isaac who, in turn, gave life to Jacob. Therefore, God is not the end of life but the Giver of life! So your idea that there is no life after death is wrong."

The Most Important Commandment

²⁸One of the young lawyers who overheard Jesus' conversation with the Sadducees admired how expertly Jesus answered the question, so he asked, "Teacher, which of God's commandments is the most important?" ²⁹Jesus answered, "The most important commandment is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord. ³⁰You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind and all your strength.' This is the most important commandment. ³¹But the next commandment is just as important which says, 'You should care about your neighbor as you care about yourself.' No other commandments are as important as these two." ³²The young lawyer responded, "Teacher, you spoke very well because there is only one God and no one in all of creation is like Him. ³³For someone to love Him and to give Him all his heart, his intellect and his physical strength, and then to care about his neighbor as much as he cares about himself is more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices one can afford to give." ³⁴Jesus was pleased with his response and said to him, "Keep thinking that way and you'll be on your way to God's kingdom." After this, no one was tempted to trap Jesus in His own words again.

Whose Son Is the Messiah?

³⁵So He continued teaching in the Temple with the Jewish leaders listening in. He said, "Why do teachers say that the Messiah is the human descendant of David? ³⁶David doesn't call Him his son, but calls Him his Master. While under inspiration, David said, 'The God of Israel said to my Master, "Come sit on my right side until I have made your enemies subject to you."' ³⁷Now, if David calls the Messiah his Master, how can the Messiah be his son?" But no one was able to answer Him, not even the Jewish leaders. The common people, even though they didn't understand everything Jesus said, gladly listened to Him.

Be Careful of False Teachers

³⁸Then Jesus turned to the people and said, "Be careful of teachers who dress to impress others and who love to have people introduce them with great show. ³⁹They're always concerned with their own status and upward mobility and don't mind advancing themselves at the expense of others. ⁴⁰Such teachers exploit widows by putting on a pious front in order to get their money."

The Widow's Offering

⁴¹As Jesus was teaching, He was sitting fairly close to the Temple offering box. He began watching the people bring their offerings and how they put them in the box. Many who came were quite well-to-do and gave large amounts with a flourish so others would notice. ⁴²Then a poor widow came up to the box. She looked first one way, then the other, and when no one was looking, quickly dropped in two pennies. ⁴³Jesus drew the disciples' attention to her and said, "This poor widow has given more than all the others. ⁴⁴Even though they gave generously, they gave from their overflow. She gave out of her poverty and what she needs to live on."

The Destruction of the Temple

13 That afternoon as they left the Temple, one of the disciples said to Jesus, "Master, have you noticed the huge blocks of granite that were used to build our Temple?" ²Jesus answered, "Don't equate the future security of Israel with these massive stones. These blocks of granite will one day be pried apart and the Temple will be destroyed."

Signs of the Times and the End of the World

³When they got to the top of the Mount of Olives just outside the city with the Temple in full view, Peter, James, John and Andrew came to Jesus privately and said, ⁴"Master, tell us more about what will happen to the Temple. Will there be signs to let us know when this will be?" ⁵Then Jesus began outlining the future. "First of all," He said, "you need to be careful that you're not deceived. ⁶Many self-appointed messiahs will come before the end and say, 'Listen to me.' Some people will be so gullible as to believe and follow anyone. ⁷There will be wars and threats of war, but don't worry, because these things have to happen before the end can come. ⁸Nations will fight against nations and kingdoms will wage wars more intensely as the end approaches. Also, there will be earthquakes in unexpected places, famines will ravish whole countries and troubles will be everywhere. These signs will be only the beginning of things to happen just before the end.

⁹"Don't be surprised if you find yourselves in trouble. You will be arrested, tried before juries, sentenced to be beaten—sometimes even in a synagogue courtyard. You'll be brought before state officials and heads of governments because of me. But your testimony before these men will give them an opportunity to hear the gospel and be saved. ¹⁰You see, the good news of salvation with its hope of the resurrection must go to every nation before the end can come.

¹¹"When you're arrested, don't worry about what you're going to say. Don't try to plan your speech ahead of time. Trust the Holy Spirit and be ready to say whatever He tells you to say. He will put the right words into your mouth and will speak for me through you. ¹²In those days, even brothers will turn their own brothers over to the police to be arrested and killed. Fathers will turn in their sons. Children will turn against their parents and betray them to the authorities. ¹³Everyone will hate you because of your loyalty to me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

The Fall of Jerusalem and End-time Deceptions

¹⁴"Furthermore, when you see 'the power that destroys and makes desolate' come with armies to attack Jerusalem as Daniel points out—if you study carefully what he said, you'll understand—then you should leave the city and head for the mountains. ¹⁵When you leave, do it quickly. If you live in the city, don't take time to pack. ¹⁶If you live in the country, don't rush home for things you might need. ¹⁷Those will be hard days, especially for pregnant women and for mothers nursing their little ones. ¹⁸Pray that you don't have to leave during cold weather. ¹⁹The overall suffering will surpass anything that has happened to God's people since the beginning of creation and it won't happen the same way again. ²⁰Destruction of life will be so terrible during those days that God will have to stop it or no one will survive. ²¹In those days, religious excitement will know no bounds. When someone tells you, 'We saw the Messiah over here!' or 'We saw Him over there!' don't believe a word they say. ²²Many will make messianic claims in those days, telling people that God has given them a message promising deliverance. Some will even work miracles to prove it, trying to deceive God's people. ²³The reason that I'm telling you these things beforehand

is so that you'll know what to look for.

The Coming of the Son of Man

²⁴“Some of these same things will happen just before the end comes. There will be supernatural signs in the heavens. The sun will be darkened and the moon will not shine. ²⁵Also, showers of falling stars will make it look as if the whole sky is going through a convulsion. ²⁶Then the Son of Man will appear in the clouds with power and great glory. ²⁷He will send His angels to gather His people from every part of the globe and from every place under heaven.

Lesson of the Fig Tree

²⁸“Let me illustrate what I have said by pointing you to the fig tree. When the branches of a fig tree become soft and begin to bud, everyone knows that spring is here and summer is coming. ²⁹So when you see the things I've just told you about happening around you, you can be sure that the end is close, right outside your door. ³⁰In fact, these events will occur so rapidly that those who see some of them will live to see the end. ³¹What I'm telling you is so certain that heaven and earth will pass away before my words will pass away.

No One Knows the Day or Hour

³²“However, you'll not be able to pinpoint the exact hour or even predict the exact date when the end will come. Even the angels don't know the precise time. I don't either; only my Father knows. ³³So the best thing to do is to stay alert, watch what is happening and pray. You don't know when the end will come. ³⁴The Messiah is like a man taking a long trip who put his servants in charge of his house and fields. He assigned to each man his work and told the one at the door to keep watch. ³⁵So keep watching because, even though you see these things you won't really know when the end will come. You will be like this man's servants who don't know whether their

master is coming back in the evening, at midnight, just before dawn or sometime in the morning. ³⁶You need to stay awake so when your Master suddenly comes, He will not find you spiritually asleep. ³⁷What I've told you is not only for those living in Jerusalem, but also for those living at the end of time. Stay awake!”

The Plot to Kill Jesus

14 Two days later came the Passover Feast, followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The leading priests and teachers were still trying to figure out how to arrest Jesus and have Him executed without causing a public disturbance. ²They said to themselves, “Let's not attempt it on a feast day because the risk of upsetting the people is too great, especially on a religious holiday like this one.”

Mary Magdalene Anoints Jesus

³Previously, Jesus had accepted an invitation to Simon's house in Bethany for dinner. Simon was the Pharisee whom Jesus had healed of leprosy. While Jesus was at dinner, a woman named Mary brought in a small bottle of very expensive perfume and began sprinkling it on His head and feet. ⁴Some, when they realized what expensive perfume she was using, murmured among themselves, “What a waste!” ⁵This perfume could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to help the poor.” So they spoke harshly to her. ⁶Jesus, sensing their displeasure, said, “Don't bother the woman. Let her finish what she's doing. She's been directed by heaven to do something special for me. ⁷You will have plenty of opportunities to give to the poor because people are always in need of help, but I won't be with you very much longer. ⁸She has done what she could and perfumed my body for burial. ⁹I tell you that wherever the gospel is preached around the world, her act of kindness and love will also be preached as a memorial to her.”

Judas Betrays Jesus

¹⁰That same afternoon, Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve disciples, went to the chief priests to offer to betray Jesus. ¹¹After the priests listened to Judas, they gladly accepted his offer and promised to give him money. From then on Judas waited for just the right time to carry out his plans.

Jesus and His Disciples Celebrate the Passover

¹²On Thursday, the day the Passover lamb was to be sacrificed, the disciples asked Jesus, "We need to prepare the Passover Supper as all our people do, but where do you want us to eat it?" ¹³Then Jesus called two disciples from the group and said to them, "Go back to Jerusalem, and just as you get inside the city limits, you'll see a man carrying a large ceramic waterpot on his head. Follow him. ¹⁴Go into the same house that he does and find the owner. Say to him, 'Our Master would like to eat the Passover supper with His disciples in your spare room.' ¹⁵Then he'll show you a large upper room, well furnished and prepared for us. Thank him, then make the other preparations needed for this evening." ¹⁶The two disciples left and went into town where they saw a man carrying a large ceramic waterpot on his head. They followed him, and everything else took place just as Jesus had told them. Then they made all the necessary preparations.

¹⁷That evening Jesus came into town with the rest of His disciples. ¹⁸When they sat down to eat, Jesus said, "One in our group eating with us tonight will betray me." ¹⁹This came as a shock to them, and one by one they said, "You're not talking about me, are you, Master?" ²⁰He answered, "It is the one who keeps dipping his bread into the bowl when I do. ²¹The Son of Man will soon die just as the Scriptures say, but I feel sorry for the man who is going to betray me. It would have been better for him if he had never been born than to grow up to do this."

The Lord's Supper

²²When they were ready to eat, Jesus took the bread and blessed it. Then He broke it and passed it to the disciples, saying, "Take some of this bread and eat it as a symbol of my body." ²³Then He took the cup of unfermented wine, gave thanks and passed it to the disciples to drink from, which they each did. ²⁴Jesus said, "The pure juice which you just drank represents my blood that I will shed for the sins of the world. This will fulfill the covenant my Father and I made from the beginning. ²⁵And I will not drink the fruit of the vine again until we sit down to eat together in God's kingdom." ²⁶Then they sang a hymn and left for the Mount of Olives just outside the city.

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

²⁷As they walked along, Jesus said, "Tonight, every one of you will leave me. This is what Zechariah meant when he said, 'They will smite the Shepherd and the sheep will scatter.' ²⁸But I will always love you. When I rise again, I'll meet you by the lake of Galilee where we had such good times together." ²⁹Peter answered, "All the other disciples may leave you, but I certainly won't!" ³⁰Jesus said, "Let me tell you, Peter, you will not only leave me, but in the morning before the rooster crows twice, you will have denied knowing me three times." ³¹This prediction caused Peter to insist further, "I will never deny you! I'm willing to die for you!" And all the other disciples said the same thing.

Prayer in Gethsemane

³²When they came to the garden called Gethsemane just outside the city, Jesus said to His disciples, "Stay here while I go on to a place where I can be alone to pray." ³³Then He asked Peter, James and John to come part way with Him. As they walked on into the garden, Jesus became very depressed, but the disciples didn't know what to say to help Him, so they said nothing. ³⁴Then Jesus said, "I feel so

depressed, my heart seems to be breaking. Why don't you stay here and pray for me? I need to talk to my Father." ³⁵He walked just a little way and fell on His knees. Then, clinging to the ground, He prayed that He wouldn't have to go through what was ahead of Him. ³⁶He said, "Dear Father, everything is possible for you, so please remove this bitter cup of suffering that I'm drinking. But your will is more important than mine. I'll do whatever you want me to do." ³⁷Then He got up from His knees and went back to the three disciples and found them sleeping. Gently shaking Peter awake, He said, "Simon, why are you sleeping? Can't you pray for me for even one hour? ³⁸You need to stay awake and pray so you won't give in to temptation. I know your spirit is willing, but your body is tired." ³⁹He returned to where He had prayed before and went through the same struggle. Again He made the same decision to do what His Father wanted Him to do. ⁴⁰When He went back to the disciples the second time, He found them still asleep. He gently tried to wake them up to talk to them but found that they were so groggy they didn't even respond. ⁴¹Again He went and prayed. When He returned to the sleeping disciples the third time, He said, "Are you still sleeping? In one way I'm glad you were able to get some rest, but that will have to be enough. One of our own has betrayed me." ⁴²Then He shook them awake and said, "You'd better get up now because my betrayer is already coming through the garden with the authorities to have me arrested."

Jesus Arrested

⁴³While Jesus was still speaking to His sleepy disciples, Judas, came looking for Him. Behind him were men with torches, soldiers with swords, Temple officials, priests and elders, and a mob carrying sticks and clubs. ⁴⁴Judas had told the authorities that he would find Jesus for them and give Him a kiss. He would be the One they should arrest; the others they should

let go. ⁴⁵So as soon as Judas saw Jesus, he said, "Rabbi, I finally found you!" Then he drew Jesus close and kissed Him on both cheeks. ⁴⁶Immediately the soldiers stepped forward, grabbed Jesus and told Him that He was under arrest. ⁴⁷But when Peter saw this, he pulled his short sword from his belt and swung at the servant of the high priest. The man quickly moved his head, but still, the sword sliced off his ear. ⁴⁸Jesus healed the man, then said to the crowd, "Look at all your swords and clubs! You must have come out here expecting to arrest a vicious criminal. Why do you need all these weapons to arrest me? ⁴⁹Every day this week you saw me teaching in the Temple. Why didn't you arrest me then? It would have been much easier for you. But the prophecies about me must happen for the Scriptures to come true." ⁵⁰Suddenly the disciples turned and ran, leaving Jesus standing there alone.

⁵¹One of the younger followers was determined to stay with Jesus. When the soldiers saw this, they reached out to grab him, but that night he wore only a tunic. When they took hold of his garment, ⁵²he twisted out of it and ran home half naked.

Jesus Before the Sanhedrin

⁵³Then they led Jesus away to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers whom Caiaphas had called were there. ⁵⁴Peter decided to turn around and follow the mob at a safe distance. He was able to get into the courtyard of the high priest's palace and mix with the servants who were warming themselves by the fire. ⁵⁵Meanwhile, the chief priests and other council members who were inside tried to get someone to witness against Jesus to give them enough evidence to secure a death sentence, but they couldn't find anyone. ⁵⁶A number of people testified against Him but their testimonies proved false because they contradicted each other. ⁵⁷Some lied about Him and twisted His words, saying, ⁵⁸"We heard

Him say, 'I will destroy this Temple and build another one in three days without the help of anyone.'" ⁵⁹But their testimony didn't agree enough to use against Him. ⁶⁰Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Don't you have anything to say? Don't you hear what these people are saying about you?" ⁶¹Jesus didn't answer. So again the high priest spoke to Him and said, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of God, or not?" ⁶²Jesus said, "I am. And one day you will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, sitting at the right hand of God, exercising the full authority and power of God." ⁶³When the high priest heard this, he took hold of his robe and tore it in two and said, "We don't need any more evidence to convict Him! ⁶⁴We've just heard His blasphemy! He made Himself equal with God! Is there any question about what we should do with Him?" So the council members pronounced Him guilty and worthy of death. ⁶⁵Then those standing near Jesus began to spit on Him. Others blindfolded Him, then slapped Him and laughingly said, "If you're equal to God, tell us who will hit you next! Come on, prophesy!"

Peter Denies Knowing Jesus

⁶⁶While all this was going on, Peter was still outside in the courtyard warming himself by the fire. Then one of the maids of the high priest walked up to the fire. ⁶⁷When she saw Peter standing there warming himself, she said, "You were with Jesus, the One called the Nazarene." ⁶⁸But Peter denied it. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said and walked over to the entryway. Just then a rooster crowed. ⁶⁹A little later another maid saw him leaning against the wall and said, "This man is one of those I saw with Jesus!" ⁷⁰Again Peter denied knowing Jesus. Then others spoke up, "The girl is right. You are one of Jesus' disciples! Your Galilean accent gives you away." ⁷¹Then Peter took an oath and called down curses on himself, if he were not telling the truth. "I don't know the

Man!" ⁷²Just then, the rooster crowed a second time, and Peter remembered what Jesus had told him the previous evening. He had said that before the rooster crowed twice, Peter would disown Him three times. Ashamed of what he had just done, Peter hurriedly left the courtyard, ran all the way back to Gethsemane and wept bitterly.

Jesus Taken to Pilate

15 As soon as day began to dawn, the chief priests called an official meeting of the national council, because the one they had held during the night was illegal. The elders, teachers and priests consulted together and confirmed the previous night's decision. Then they tied Jesus up and took Him to Pilate, the Roman governor, to have the death sentence ratified. ²Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews as you claim to be?" Jesus said, "Yes, it's just as you say." ³Then the chief priests accused Jesus of many things, but He said nothing. ⁴Finally, Pilate turned to Jesus and said, "Aren't you going to say anything to defend yourself? Don't you hear all the charges that they're bringing against you?" ⁵Jesus still said nothing. And Pilate was amazed.

Jesus Condemned and Barabbas Set Free

⁶It was the custom at the Passover Feast for the Roman governor to release a Jewish prisoner requested by the people. ⁷Recently the Romans had arrested a Jew called Jesus Barabbas and two of his insurrectionists for attempting to overthrow the Roman government and committing murder in the process. ⁸The crowd began chanting for Pilate to release a prisoner as he usually did. ⁹He tried to influence their choice by asking, "Wouldn't you like me to release the man who claims to be your King?" ¹⁰Pilate made that suggestion because he was convinced that Jesus was innocent and that His conviction was a political move

plotted by the priests. ¹¹The priests told the people to shout for the release of Barabbas and not for Jesus. ¹²Once again Pilate tried to get the crowd to ask for Jesus' release, saying, "If you want me to release Barabbas, then what should I do with the Man who claims to be King of the Jews?" ¹³The crowd yelled back, "Crucify Him!" ¹⁴Pilate answered, "Why? What crime has He committed?" But the crowd screamed even louder, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" ¹⁵Trying to avoid a riot which could have political consequences, Pilate gave in to the crowd's demand. Disgusted with the Jewish leaders, he ordered Jesus to be scourged and Barabbas to be released. Then he gave permission for Jesus to be crucified.

The Soldiers Mock and Scourge Jesus

¹⁶So the Roman soldiers led Jesus into the palace courtyard and called the whole detachment of troops from their barracks to come and watch the fun. ¹⁷They draped a purple robe over Jesus' shoulders, made a wreath out of a thorn branch to serve as a crown and forced it down on His head. ¹⁸Then they mocked His claim to be a king by shouting in His ear, "Hail to you, King of the Jews!" ¹⁹They also hit the crown of thorns with their sticks, driving the thorns deep into Jesus' head. They spat in His face and cursed Him as they knelt down in front of Him in a pose of worship. ²⁰When they finished having their fun, they took away the robe, scourged Him, put His own clothes back on Him to hide His mangled back and led Him away to be crucified.

Jesus Is Crucified

²¹On the way to the execution site, the soldiers realized that Jesus had been scourged too severely to carry the cross. So they grabbed a man from the crowd named Simon, a Jew from North Africa, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Simon picked up the crossbeam under which Jesus had collapsed and carried it through the streets of Jerusalem to the crucifixion

site. ²²Finally, they reached the outcropping of rock called Golgotha, which means the Place of the Skull. ²³There they offered Jesus fermented wine mixed with drugs to kill the pain, but He refused to take it. ²⁴After getting the cross ready, they nailed His hands and feet in place, then raised the cross and let it fall into the hole. After the soldiers divided Jesus' clothes, they gambled to see which of them would win His seamless robe. ²⁵It was about nine o'clock in the morning when Jesus was crucified. ²⁶The plaque Pilate ordered to be nailed on the cross just over Jesus' head read, "The King of the Jews." ²⁷The two criminals who were crucified with Jesus, one on His left and the other on His right, had been arrested for insurrection along with Barabbas. ²⁸This was what the Scripture had predicted when Isaiah said, "He will be counted as a criminal." ²⁹As the people filed by, they shook their heads and shouted up to him, "So you are the One who said you would destroy the Temple and build it again in three days! ³⁰Why don't you come down from the cross and save yourself? Then we'll believe you!" ³¹The leading priests also made fun of Him, saying to each other and to the teachers of the law standing nearby, "If He really worked as many miracles to help others as they say He did, then why doesn't He work a miracle to save Himself? ³²If He's really the Messiah, the King of Israel, then why doesn't He come down from the cross so we can see and believe that He's the One He claims to be?" The two criminals who were crucified with Jesus also cursed Him and insulted Him.

Jesus Dies

³³At noon, heavy dark clouds rolled across the sky and enveloped the whole countryside in an eerie darkness for the next three hours. ³⁴Then, about three o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus shouted, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you left me?" ³⁵Some people standing nearby heard Him and said, "Listen!

He's calling for Elijah!" ³⁶Someone ran and filled a sponge with drugged wine, put it on a stick and offered it to Jesus. But He refused it. Someone else said to those nearby, "Let's stay here to see if Elijah will come and get Him down from the cross." ³⁷Suddenly Jesus gave a loud shout. Then He died. ³⁸At that instant, the heavy Temple curtain separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy tore in half, beginning at the top and splitting all the way to the bottom. ³⁹When the captain of the Roman guard who was standing in front of the cross saw everything happening and the way Jesus died, he said with conviction, "This Man was truly the Son of God!"

⁴⁰Some of the women nearby were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the younger James and Joseph, and Salome the wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John. ⁴¹These were the ones who had helped Jesus when He was in Galilee. Other women from various parts of the country who had followed Jesus to Jerusalem were also there.

Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb

⁴²All this happened late Friday afternoon shortly before sundown when the Sabbath would begin. ⁴³Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Jewish high council who longed for the coming of God's kingdom, boldly went to see Pilate to ask for permission to take down the body of Jesus and bury it. ⁴⁴Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus had died so soon and sent for the captain of the guard, not only to verify it, but to find out the time when Jesus had died. ⁴⁵After he was satisfied that Jesus was dead and not just unconscious, he gave Joseph permission to take the body. ⁴⁶Joseph bought some white linen cloth and took it to Golgotha, where, with the help of others, he took down the body, wrapped it and laid it in his own nearby tomb carved out of the rock. Then they rolled a huge boulder in front of the tomb to close it. ⁴⁷Mary Magdalene and

Mary, the mother of the young James and Joseph, saw where they laid His body.

He Is Risen

16 The next night after the sun had set and the Sabbath had ended, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of the younger James and Joseph, and Salome, the wife of Zebedee, bought additional burial spices so they could go to the tomb to anoint the body first thing in the morning. ²Then very early Sunday morning, the first day of the week, just as dawn was breaking, they went to the burial site. ³On the way they said to each other, "Who's going to roll away that huge stone for us from the opening of the tomb?" ⁴But when they came to the tomb, the large stone had already been rolled away. ⁵This seemed strange to them, so they cautiously went inside the tomb and saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting to the right of the stone slab where Jesus' body had been. The women stood there, dumbfounded and frightened. ⁶The young man said to them, "Don't be afraid. I know you're looking for Jesus from Nazareth who was crucified. He's not here. He is risen. Look and see for yourselves. The body is gone. ⁷Go back to Jerusalem and tell His disciples, especially Peter, that Jesus has risen and will meet them by the lake of Galilee as He said He would." ⁸Two of the women turned and ran from the tomb back to the city, frightened and bewildered, yet full of joy at what they had seen and heard. However, they didn't tell anyone but the disciples what had happened because no one would have believed them.

Mary Magdalene Sees Jesus

⁹Mary Magdalene was the first one Jesus talked to after His resurrection. She was the one whom Jesus had freed from demons seven times. She went to the tomb early that morning and, finding it empty, ran and told the disciples that His body had been stolen. ¹⁰When she returned to the tomb and saw Jesus, she

was so excited, she ran back to the city to tell the disciples who were still there mourning. ¹¹But when she told them that Jesus was alive and she had talked to Him, they didn't believe it.

Jesus Appears to Two Disciples

¹²Later that day, Jesus appeared to two of His followers as they walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus. ¹³They, too, ran and told the disciples what had happened, but the disciples didn't believe them either.

The Great Commission

¹⁴That evening, Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples as they were eating. He gently rebuked them for their lack of faith and refusal to believe the reports of His resurrection. ¹⁵Then He said to them, "Go and preach the good news of

God's love to the whole world. ¹⁶Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved, but those who do not believe will be found guilty. ¹⁷Those who believe will be able to work miracles. They will cast out demons in my name and will preach in languages they never learned. ¹⁸When they're bitten by poisonous snakes or drink something poisonous, they won't be hurt. And they will lay their hands on the sick and the sick will be healed."

Christ Ascends

¹⁹After the Lord had stayed with them many days, He ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father. ²⁰Then the disciples went everywhere preaching the good news, and the Lord confirmed His word by the miracles He did through them.

LUKE

Luke's First Book to Theophilus

1 Most excellent Theophilus, there are many who have attempted to put in writing what Christians believe and what has happened among us. ²Many reports about Jesus were handed down to us by those who serve Him and from the beginning witnessed what He did. ³I've examined all these reports very carefully for some time, and directed by the Holy Spirit, I have written an orderly account for you. ⁴This way you will know that the things you were taught are true.

John's Birth Announced

⁵In the days of Herod the Great, king of the Judean territory, there was a certain Jewish priest named Zechariah who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was Elizabeth, a descendant of Aaron, the first Jewish high priest. ⁶Both were upright, honest people, keeping God's commandments and carrying out the instructions the Lord had given priestly families. ⁷This couple had no children of their own because Elizabeth was unable to have any. Now both of them were old and she was well beyond childbearing age.

⁸It so happened that Zechariah was in Jerusalem in the Temple taking his assigned turn as priest. ⁹That particular day he went into the Holy Place to offer incense ¹⁰while a large crowd of people stood outside saying their prayers. ¹¹Suddenly an angel of God appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense, a sign of favor. ¹²Zechariah stood there stunned, too scared to move. ¹³Then the angel spoke reassuringly to him, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah. Your prayer for a child is heard and your wife Elizabeth will give birth to a son whom you will call John. ¹⁴Both of you will be happy and so will many others because of his birth. ¹⁵He will be called to do a great work for the Lord. He will live a simple life, never tasting wine or any other alcoholic drinks, and

will be guided by the Holy Spirit from the day he is born. ¹⁶During his ministry he will bring many of the children of Israel back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷He will go ahead of the Messiah and preach with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will soften the hearts of parents toward their children and help the disobedient to understand what righteousness means and prepare men and women to receive the Messiah."

¹⁸When Zechariah found his voice, he said to the angel, "How will I know that this will really happen? After all, I'm an old man and my wife is up in years."

¹⁹The angel answered, "I am Gabriel, and I stand in the very presence of God. He sent me to share this good news with you. ²⁰However, since you question what I've told you, let me give you a sign to help you believe. You will be unable to speak again until the things I've told you have happened and your wife Elizabeth gives birth to a baby boy."

²¹Meanwhile, the people waiting for Zechariah to come out to bless them, wondered what was taking him so long. ²²Finally he came out but couldn't talk, and the people understood from his gesturing that he had had a vision, but he was unable to speak, just as Gabriel had said. ²³A few days later, he completed his priestly assignment in the Temple and left for home.

²⁴Soon afterward his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for the next five months, she stayed at home to take care of herself. ²⁵She said, "God has been good to me in my old age. He has answered my prayer to give me a baby and has taken away my disgrace among the people."

Jesus' Birth Announced

²⁶In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a little city located in the province of Galilee. ²⁷Gabriel appeared to Mary, a young virgin engaged to be married to a man named Joseph whose ances-

tor was King David. ²⁸Gabriel said to her, "Greetings, Mary. You are highly favored of God. May His blessing be with you. You have been selected over all the women in Israel." ²⁹When she saw Gabriel, she was frightened and confused about what he was saying. She tried to figure it out, but couldn't. ³⁰Then Gabriel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. God has been very gracious to you. ³¹You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you shall call Him Jesus. ³²He will be the Son of God and will do great things for the Most High. God will give Him the throne of King David, His ancestor. ³³He will rule over all the descendants of Jacob forever, and His reign will never end."

³⁴When Mary heard this, she said to Gabriel, "I can understand how God can make this happen between two old people as He did with Abraham and Sarah, but how can this happen to me when I'm not even married?" ³⁵Gabriel answered, "Your pregnancy will be by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the Baby you give birth to will be holy because you'll be giving birth to the Son of God. ³⁶God has blessed your cousin Elizabeth, who never expected to have a baby at her age, and now she's six months pregnant. Soon she'll have a baby boy. ³⁷With God, nothing is impossible." ³⁸Mary said, "I gladly submit myself to the will of my God to be His servant. Let it happen to me just as you said." With that, Gabriel disappeared.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

³⁹Immediately Mary started making preparations to visit her cousin Elizabeth who lived in one of the southern villages in the province of Judea. ⁴⁰When she got there, she told Elizabeth everything that had happened and that she was pregnant without being married. ⁴¹As Elizabeth listened to Mary tell her experience, the baby inside of her jumped for joy. Then the Holy Spirit inspired her, and she said, ⁴²"God has blessed you, Mary! You are the most honored woman in all the history of Israel! And God will surely bless

the Baby you're carrying. ⁴³So who am I, that the mother of Israel's long-expected Messiah, should come to visit me? ⁴⁴Why am I so favored? As soon as I heard the sound of your voice, the baby inside of me jumped for joy! ⁴⁵Bless you, you believed the angel and it happened! You're pregnant! And all the other things he told you will happen too!"

Mary's Song of Praise

⁴⁶Then Mary, inspired by the Holy Spirit, responded, "I want to praise the Lord! ⁴⁷I love Him with all my heart and soul. He is my God and my Savior. ⁴⁸He has chosen me to give birth to His Son—me, the least known of all the women in Israel. And to think that all generations will call me blessed for having given birth to the Messiah. ⁴⁹The Mighty One has done this and made this unheard-of thing happen. Blessed be His holy name. ⁵⁰In every generation His mercy and graciousness have been with those who wish to honor Him, and it will always be that way. ⁵¹Look what He has done mightily in the past, how He scattered the proud when they became rebellious. ⁵²He removed kings and rulers from their thrones and exalted the unknown and the poor. ⁵³He fed thousands of hungry people with good things from heaven while the proud and the rich went away hungry. ⁵⁴He has always been ready to help Israel, according to His mercy. ⁵⁵He promised to bless Abraham and his descendants forever." ⁵⁶Elizabeth invited Mary to stay with her for the next three months. So Mary stayed until Elizabeth had her baby.

The Birth of John

⁵⁷When the time came, Elizabeth gave birth to a healthy baby boy. ⁵⁸When her relatives and neighbors heard that everything had gone well, they knew that the Lord must have been with her for a woman her age to deliver a baby so easily. They all were happy for her and praised the Lord.

The Circumcision of John

⁵⁹Eight days after the baby was born, he was circumcised. According to custom, the relatives wanted to call him Zechariah after his father. ⁶⁰But Elizabeth said, "Not so! We're going to name him John!" ⁶¹Then the relatives said, "There is no one in our family history named John." ⁶²So they asked the baby's father what he thought the boy should be called. ⁶³Zechariah asked for something to write on. Then he wrote, "The boy's name is John." The relatives were amazed that he chose to call the boy John. ⁶⁴Then suddenly Zechariah's voice returned, and the first thing he did was praise the Lord. ⁶⁵The relatives and neighbors were filled with awe to hear Zechariah talk again. News of his recovery spread throughout that whole area of Judea. ⁶⁶Everyone who heard it took it to heart and said, "With all this happening, what kind of a man will this baby grow up to be?" And so it was that from the day of his birth, the Lord was with him.

Zechariah's Prophecy

⁶⁷Now while Zechariah was praising God in front of his relatives and neighbors, the Holy Spirit came upon him and the old man prophesied, saying, ⁶⁸"Praise the Lord God of Israel because He has come to redeem His people! ⁶⁹He has given evidence of His power to save us through One from the lineage of David. ⁷⁰As He has said to us through His holy prophets who lived long ago, ⁷¹'I will deliver you from your enemies and from the hand of those who hate you.' ⁷²He will be merciful as He promised our fathers, and will not forget His covenant. ⁷³He will keep the oath He made with Abraham ⁷⁴and deliver us from our enemies to serve Him in freedom and without fear. ⁷⁵He will help us to live righteous lives throughout our days. ⁷⁶This baby will grow up to be a prophet for the Most High God and he will go ahead of the Lord to prepare people's hearts for His coming. ⁷⁷He will help

them know the way of salvation and experience the forgiveness of sin. ⁷⁸He will help them understand the tender mercy of our God, and God's grace will flood the earth like the morning sun. ⁷⁹It will shine on those living in spiritual darkness and in the shadow of death and will guide our feet in the way of peace." ⁸⁰And so the baby grew, gaining physical and spiritual strength every day. When he was grown, he lived in the deserted hills of Judea until he began His public ministry.

The Birth of Jesus

2 About this time Caesar Augustus declared a nationwide census in all the countries throughout the Roman Empire. ²In Judea the census and tax registration was completed under Quirinius, the governor of Syria, when Judea became part of his province. ³Everyone in that part of the Roman Empire was required to register in the city or town where his ancestors came from. ⁴Joseph lived in the city of Nazareth in the province of Galilee. He had to travel all the way down to Judea to the little town of Bethlehem and register there, because he was of the lineage of David. ⁵He also had to register Mary, who had married him and was about to have her baby. ⁶While they were there, the time came for Jesus to be born. ⁷All the rooms in town were full so they had to spend the night in a cattle stall. That's where she gave birth to her firstborn, a Son. She wrapped Him in strips of cloth and laid Him in a box where animals feed, because there was nowhere else to stay.

The Shepherds in the Field

⁸At that time of year around Bethlehem, shepherds stayed in the field all night with their flocks. ⁹Suddenly the angel Gabriel appeared to them, and God's glory surrounded them. The shepherds were terrified. ¹⁰But he said to them, "Don't be afraid. I'm bringing you good news that will thrill your hearts and bring joy to people everywhere. ¹¹A few hours ago, the Lord's Messiah, your Savior, was born in

Bethlehem, the city of David. ¹²This is how you will know Him: You'll find Him lying in a manger, wrapped in strips of cloth." ¹³Suddenly, the whole sky was filled with angels who praised God by singing, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth to those who love God and with whom He is pleased!"

¹⁵As soon as the angels disappeared, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go into Bethlehem and find this Baby the Lord has told us about!" ¹⁶They left one in charge of the sheep and went quickly to Bethlehem. There they found Mary and Joseph. The Baby was wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger. ¹⁷When they saw Him, they knew He was the One they were looking for. Then they went into town spreading the news, telling everyone what they had been told about Him. ¹⁸All who heard what the shepherds said were amazed at their story. ¹⁹And Mary treasured all the things that happened and kept them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned to their sheep, praising God for all the things they had heard from the angels, what they had seen with their own eyes and what they had been told by Mary and Joseph.

Jesus Dedicated

²¹On the eighth day, the parents had the Baby circumcised. They called Him Jesus, as the angel had told them to when Mary conceived.

²²After she had waited out the prescribed forty days of ceremonial purification before appearing in public, Joseph took Mary and the Baby to Jerusalem to have Him dedicated. ²³This, too, was according to Jewish law which says, "Every male that opens the womb is to be set apart for the Lord who has a special claim on him." ²⁴Joseph and Mary also carried out the ceremonial law which requires even the poorest parents to at least offer the sacrifice of two pigeons or turtledoves.

Simeon Praises God

²⁵There was a man living in Jerusalem

called Simeon, a good man who loved God. He was very eager for the Messiah to come to comfort Israel. ²⁶The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that before he died he would see the Messiah with his own eyes. ²⁷That particular morning, the Holy Spirit prompted him to be in the Temple when Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to be dedicated. ²⁸When Simeon saw the Baby, he knew this was the Messiah. He gently took the Child from Mary's arms, held Him up and praised God, saying, ²⁹"O Lord, you have kept your word to me. ³⁰You have let me see the Instrument of your salvation ³¹which you are sending to us to save all people. ³²He will be a saving light to the world and an honor to Israel."

³³Joseph and Mary were amazed as they listened to what he said about Jesus. ³⁴Then Simeon handed the Baby back to Mary, blessed her and said, "This Child has been born to bring us salvation and many in Israel will accept Him as the Messiah but many others will reject Him. ³⁵In doing so they will show what's really in their hearts. And when you hear what some people will say about Him, their words will be like a sword going through your own soul."

Anna the Prophetess Bears Witness

³⁶There also was a prophetess named Anna in Jerusalem, the daughter of Phanuel, who belonged to the Jewish tribe of Asher. She was married when she was young and lived happily with her husband for seven years before he died. ³⁷She had remained a widow and was eighty-four years old. She spent all her time in the Temple and could be found there any time, day or night, fasting, praying and worshiping God. ³⁸Just as Simeon finished talking to Mary, Anna came into the Temple and, seeing the Baby, began praising God. She then talked about the Child to all who were looking for the Messiah to come to free Jerusalem.

Return to Nazareth

³⁹After Joseph and Mary had finished dedicating their Baby according to the ceremonial law as given by the Lord, they went back to their home in Nazareth in the province of Galilee. ⁴⁰Here the Child grew up, becoming physically and spiritually stronger each day. He was filled with heavenly wisdom and the grace of God was upon Him.

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

⁴¹Once a year His parents went to Jerusalem to observe the festival of the Passover. ⁴²When Jesus was twelve years old, they took Him along. ⁴³After the festival was over, Mary and Joseph started back home. In the squeeze of the crowd leaving the city and caught up as they were in conversation with people, they didn't realize that Jesus had stayed behind. ⁴⁴They supposed He was in the crowd with some of their relatives or friends. So they traveled the whole day without realizing that He wasn't along. When evening came and the group they were with stopped, they asked everyone they knew if they had seen Him, but no one had and they could not find Him. ⁴⁵They feared for His life and returned to Jerusalem to look for Him.

⁴⁶It took Mary and Joseph all the next day to get back to Jerusalem, finally arriving late that night. Early the next morning, they started looking for Jesus. As they entered the Temple courtyard, His voice caught their attention and they found Him with the doctors of theology, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷Everyone who heard Him was amazed at His understanding and insight. ⁴⁸When Mary and Joseph saw and heard Him, they too were amazed. On the way home His mother said, "Son, why did you stay behind? You had us scared nearly to death. Your father and I have been worried sick looking for you!" ⁴⁹He said to them, "You shouldn't have worried so. Didn't you know I needed to spend time in my Father's house learning

more about what He wants me to do?"

⁵⁰But they didn't understand the meaning of what He was saying.

Jesus Grows in Wisdom and Favor

⁵¹They traveled back home to Nazareth and, as before, He obediently listened to His parents. Mary continued teaching and training Him, and she treasured all the precious experiences in her heart. ⁵²Jesus continued to develop physically, to increase in wisdom and to mature in His relationships with God and man.

John the Baptist Begins His Ministry

3In the fifteenth year of the Roman Emperor Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate was governor of the province of Judea, Herod Antipas was ruling the province of Galilee. His brother Herod Philip ruled the territories of Iturea and Trachonitis, while Lysanias was over the region of Abilene. ²Both Annas and Caiaphas were high priests in Jerusalem. Annas had retired and Caiaphas, his son-in-law, held office. At this time God through the Holy Spirit told John, the son of Zechariah who was now living in the wilderness near Jerusalem, to begin his public ministry. ³So John went all through the area between the Jordan River and Jerusalem, preaching to the people to return to God, repent and change their way of life. When they repented of their sins, he baptized them. ⁴This fulfilled the prediction of the ancient Hebrew prophet Isaiah, "There will come a lone man preaching in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord and make it easy for Him to come. ⁵Fill in the valleys and lower the mountains; straighten out the sharp curves and smooth over the rough places. ⁶Then people from everywhere will come to see the salvation of the Lord.'"

John Preaches Change

⁷Often John would say to the crowds that came to be baptized by him, "Some of you here are spiritual leaders and people think of you as harmless, but you're

like snakes hiding in the grass ready to strike. Why are you here? Are you afraid of what's going to happen to you when the Messiah comes? ⁸You need to live the kind of lives that reflect the love of God and not keep telling yourselves, 'We are descendants of Abraham, so everything's going to be all right.' I want to tell you that God can create a whole new people out of these desert stones and increase the descendants of Abraham overnight. So don't tell me that it's our ancestry that makes us a spiritual people.

⁹The time has come when heaven's ax will chop down all trees not bearing fruit and throw them into the fire. A fruit tree is valued for its fruit, not its name."

¹⁰People asked him, "What shall we do?" ¹¹He said, "If you have two coats and see someone shivering in the cold without one, give him one of yours. If you have plenty to eat and you come across a man who hasn't had anything to eat, feed him." ¹²Then some of the tax collectors who were under conviction and wanted to be baptized asked him, "Preacher, what do you want us to do?" ¹³John answered, "Stop collecting more taxes from people than you have been ordered to take." ¹⁴Soldiers also heard him and they, too, wanted to know what they should do. He said to them, "Don't be violent and hurt innocent people. Don't extort money from them or accuse them falsely. And don't keep grumbling and complaining about your pay when you're already better off than a lot of people."

¹⁵John's ministry created such an expectation in people's hearts that some wondered whether John himself could be the Messiah. ¹⁶But John kept preaching, saying, "I'm baptizing you with water, but Someone is coming who is much more qualified to baptize you than I am. I'm not even fit to unfasten His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and transform you, not just cover you with water like I do. ¹⁷He will do some harvesting when He comes. He will separate the kernels of wheat from the chaff, store the

wheat in His barn, and throw the chaff into the fire which can't be put out until the chaff is gone."

¹⁸There were a lot of other things John told the people. ¹⁹He even told them that Herod had done wrong by taking his half-brother Philip's wife away from him. He also told the people other evil things that Herod had done. ²⁰Later Herod had John arrested, adding another injustice to the wicked things he was doing.

John Baptizes Jesus

²¹One day as John was baptizing, Jesus came to be baptized. After coming up out of the water, He knelt on the bank and offered a public prayer of thanksgiving. Suddenly the sky opened up, ²²and the light of the Holy Spirit descended in the shape of a dove and hovered over Jesus' head. Then a Voice from heaven said, "You are my much-loved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

²³Jesus was about thirty years old at this time, and according to His human ancestry, He was the son of Joseph and Mary who had lived in Nazareth. From them His ancestry goes back to Heli, ²⁴to Matthat, to Levi, to Melki, to Jannai, to Joseph, ²⁵to Mattathias, to Amos, to Nahum, to Esli, then to Naggai, ²⁶to Maath, to Mattathias, to Semein, to Josech, to Joda, ²⁷to Joanan, to Rhesa, to Zerubbabel, to Shealtiel, to Neri, ²⁸to Melki, to Addi, to Cosam, to Elmadam, to Er, ²⁹to Joshua, to Eliezer, to Jorim, to Matthat, to Levi, ³⁰to Simeon, to Judah, to Joseph, to Jonam, to Eliakim, ³¹to Melea, to Menna, to Mattatha, to Nathan, and to David. ³²And from David the ancestral line goes back to Jesse, to Obed, to Boaz, to Salmon, to Nahshon, ³³to Amminadab, to Ram, to Hezron, to Perez, to Judah, ³⁴to Jacob, to Isaac, to Abraham, to Terah, to Nahor, ³⁵to Serug, to Reu, to Peleg, to Eber, to Shelah, ³⁶to Cainan, to Arphaxad, to Shem, to Noah, to Lamech, ³⁷to Methuselah, to Enoch, to Jared, to Mahalalel, to Kenan,

³⁸to Enosh, to Seth, to Adam, who was the son of God.

Jesus Tempted by Satan

4 After Jesus was baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit, He left the area of Jordan and was guided by the Spirit to a desolate place some distance from Jerusalem. ²There He stayed for forty days, and during that whole time He ate nothing. At the end of His fast He was severely tempted by the devil. ³The devil came to Him in the form of an angel and said, "If you're really the Son of God, then use your power to turn some of these bread-shaped stones into bread to feed yourself. If you don't, you're going to die." ⁴Jesus answered, "It is written, 'Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God.'" ⁵The devil picked Jesus up bodily and carried Him to the highest mountain in the area for a panoramic view of the beauty spots of the world and the most luxurious living available. ⁶Then he said to Jesus, "This kind of living can easily be yours. In fact, I'll turn the whole world over to you and surrender my claim to it ⁷if you will worship me just once." ⁸Jesus answered, "Get away from me, Satan, because the Scripture says, 'You are to worship God and serve only Him.'" ⁹Next, Satan carried Jesus to the highest point on the Temple wall overlooking the valley below. "If you are really God's Son," he said, "then why don't you jump into the valley from here?" ¹⁰The Scripture teaches that God will send His angels to watch over you to keep you safe. ¹¹His angels will hold you up so you won't even stub your toe." ¹²Jesus answered, "You can't pick and choose from Scripture, for the Word of God also says, 'Don't take the Lord's protection for granted by doing something foolish.'" ¹³So the devil decided to stop tempting Jesus for the time being and carried Him back to the wilderness where he left Him.

Jesus Begins His Ministry

¹⁴Then Jesus, filled with the Spirit's power, returned to the province of Galilee where He had grown up, and His fame soon spread throughout the region. ¹⁵He taught the people whenever He had an opportunity, whether in the synagogue or on the street, and everyone who heard Him praised what He said.

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

¹⁶He also went to His hometown of Nazareth, and as His boyhood habit had been, He attended the synagogue on the Sabbath. On this particular Sabbath, the one in charge asked Him to give the Scripture reading. ¹⁷The scheduled reading for the day was from Isaiah the prophet. When they handed Him the scroll, He unrolled it and found the place where it said, ¹⁸"The Spirit's power is with me because He has chosen me to preach good news to those who are poor, to heal those with broken hearts, to deliver those who are prisoners of sin, to give sight to those who can't see, to set people free from their heavy burdens ¹⁹and to announce that this is the year of the Lord." ²⁰When He finished, He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. Everyone in the synagogue sat there spellbound by the meaning He brought to the words of the prophecy by the way He read them.

²¹Then He said, "This Scripture is being fulfilled before your very eyes, and what you heard is true." ²²The people were thrilled by what He had read and marvelled at the gracious words He spoke. Then someone said, "But isn't this the son of Joseph who had a carpenter shop in town? How then can this young man apply all these things to Himself?" ²³Jesus said, "I know that you're ready to quote the proverb to me which says, 'Physician, demonstrate your skills on yourself and your family first.' In other words, you'd like me to work some miracles here at home before you believe what I say about myself is true." ²⁴Then

He paused and with sadness in His voice said, "No prophet is accepted in his own country." ²⁵This is especially true in Israel. In the days of Elijah when it hadn't rained for three-and-a-half years and the drought had spread throughout the country, there were many widows living in Israel. ²⁶But God didn't send Elijah to any of them, because their hearts were too insensitive to the Holy Spirit. So He sent Elijah to stay with a non-Israelite widow living in the village of Zarephath near Sidon. ²⁷In Elisha's day there were also numerous lepers in Israel, but Elisha healed none of them except Naaman the Syrian, who believed what Elisha said."

²⁸When the people heard Jesus say that non-Israelites had more faith than they did, they took it as a gross insult and instantly turned against Him. ²⁹With tempers flaring, they stood to their feet, shouting at Him. Then they grabbed Him and dragged Him from the synagogue through the streets to the brow of the hill the city was built on, determined to throw Him down the cliff. ³⁰But by the time they got there, He had gently freed Himself from their grip and quietly walked back through the crowd and went on His way.

Jesus Casts Out Demons

³¹From Nazareth Jesus went to Capernaum which was also in Galilee, and there, too, He attended Sabbath services, read the Scripture and commented on it as He was asked to do. ³²The people there marvelled at His kindly manner of teaching and at the gentle authority in the tone of His voice. ³³On this particular Sabbath, there was a man attending the synagogue who was demon possessed. As Jesus was commenting on the Scripture He had just read, this man suddenly cried out, ³⁴"Leave us alone! What do we have to do with you? Have you come here to kill us? We know who you are! You're Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy One born of God!" ³⁵This disrupted the whole service, so Jesus decided to stop

the man's shouting. He spoke to the demon and said, "Come out of him!" The demon threw the man down and after a severe struggle came out of him. ³⁶At first everyone was awestruck. When the people finally found their voices, they said, "What power this Man has! He speaks to the demons with authority, and they do what He says!" ³⁷Because of this Jesus' fame quickly spread through that whole area of Galilee.

Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-law

³⁸After the morning service, He and His disciples went to Simon Peter's house for lunch. When they got there, Peter's mother-in-law was in bed with a high fever, so they asked Jesus to heal her. ³⁹He went to her bedside, rebuked the fever, and immediately it left her. Then she got up and helped prepare a meal for them.

Jesus Heals After the Sabbath

⁴⁰Later that day, after the sun had set, all kinds of sick people besieged Peter's house. Some even had to be helped along by their relatives and friends. Jesus laid His hands on them and everyone who came was healed. ⁴¹Many of these people were demon possessed, and as He cast the demons out, they would shout, "Yes! You are the Son of God!" When He would tell them to stop shouting, they obeyed because they knew who He was.

Jesus Preaches in Galilee

⁴²This went on until late into the night. After a few hours of sleep, Jesus made His way out of town before day-break to an isolated spot where He could be alone to pray. When morning came, the people found Him and begged Him to stay and not go to another town. ⁴³He said to them, "As much as I would like to, I can't stay. I have to take the good news of God's kingdom to other places too, because that's what God wants me to do." ⁴⁴So He left Capernaum, but He continued to teach and

preach in many synagogues throughout the province of Galilee.

Jesus Calls Four Fishermen

5 One day, it so happened that Jesus was teaching by the Lake of Galilee near the Plain of Gennesaret, and the crowds got so big and the people so close that He was almost pushed into the lake. ²He noticed two empty fishing boats floating nearby and men rinsing out their nets as they stood in the shallow water next to their boats. ³He climbed into Simon Peter's boat and asked His disciples to push Him a little way off shore. Then He sat down and, from the fishing boat, continued to teach the people. ⁴After He had finished speaking, He turned to Simon Peter and said, "Push out a little farther where the water is deep; then have your men throw out their nets." ⁵Peter answered, "Master, we fished all night and didn't catch a thing. This is the wrong time of day to fish, but if you say so, we'll do it." ⁶They threw out their nets and caught so many fish that when they tried to pull them in, their nets began to break. ⁷They shouted to their partners in the nearby boat to come and help them. Soon both boats were so loaded with fish that they nearly sank.

⁸When Simon Peter saw this, he fell on his knees in front of Jesus and said, "O Lord, I'm a sinful man! Why do you even come near me? I am unworthy!" ⁹He said this because he and all the others in the boat were amazed at this huge catch of fish. They knew it was a miracle. ¹⁰James and John, who were in the other boat, were amazed also. Then Jesus said to Peter, "Don't act so surprised at this huge catch of fish; from now on I want you to fish for men." ¹¹When they got back to shore, they left their boats, their nets and the huge catch of fish with the hired help and followed Jesus.

Jesus Heals a Leper

¹²In a certain city a man covered with leprosy recognized Jesus, fell on his

knees in front of Him and said, "Lord, if you would, you could heal me and make me clean." ¹³Jesus reached out, touched him and said, "I do want to heal you. Be clean." Immediately the leprosy left him. ¹⁴Then Jesus told him not to broadcast that he was healed until after the priest officially pronounced him clean and he had offered the sacrifices specified by Moses as a public testimony of being cured. ¹⁵But the man told everyone he met what happened before he went to the priest. When word got out about what Jesus had done, the priests immediately accused Him of breaking the law. But when the people heard what had happened, still more came to hear Him and to be healed. ¹⁶Then He left the area and went to an isolated place to have some time for prayer.

Jesus Heals a Paralytic

¹⁷One day while Jesus was teaching the people, the Pharisees and teachers from Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem also sat down to listen. The power of the Lord came upon Jesus to heal the sick. ¹⁸The house where they met was surrounded by crowds of people trying to get a glimpse of the visiting dignitaries and to hear the discussion. In the meantime some men had come carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. They tried to get through the crowd into the house to lay their friend in front of Jesus so He could heal him. ¹⁹But they couldn't figure out how to get through, so they decided to go to the back of the house, hoist themselves up to the flat roof, then use ropes to pull their friend on the mat up behind them. Once on top, they carefully lifted the covering of the roof and lowered their friend right down in front of Jesus. ²⁰When Jesus saw the love these men had for their friend and the confidence they had that He would heal him, He looked at the man on the mat and said, "My friend, your sins are forgiven." ²¹When Jesus said that, the Pharisees said to themselves, "That's blasphemy! Nobody can forgive sins except God!"

²²Jesus knew what they were thinking

and said to them, "What are you thinking? Are you upset by what I just said? ²³Which requires more power: To say, 'I forgive you your sins' or 'I heal you; stand up and walk'? ²⁴To let you know that God has given the Son of Man authority on earth to forgive sins, I will heal him." Then turning to the paralytic, He said, "Stand up, pick up your mat and go home." ²⁵Instantly the man stood to his feet, rolled up his mat and walked through the crowd, praising God. ²⁶Everyone who saw what had happened stood there awestruck. When they finally found their tongues, they, too, praised and glorified God. Filled with amazement, they said to each other and to everyone they met, "Today we've seen the most incredible thing!"

Jesus Calls Matthew

²⁷After this Jesus went on His way. As He went through one town, He saw a Jewish tax collector named Levi Matthew sitting at his tax table collecting taxes for the Romans. Jesus stopped and said to him, "Come, follow me." ²⁸Matthew got up, left his assistants and his tax booth and followed Jesus. ²⁹Later Matthew invited Jesus over to his house for dinner to which he had also invited a large number of other tax collectors and friends. ³⁰When the Pharisees and teachers of the law heard about it, they complained to Jesus' disciples, saying, "Why do you men eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" ³¹Jesus overheard it and answered their question, "People who are well don't need a physician, only people who are sick. ³²My mission is not to call righteous people to repentance, but sinners."

Questions About Fasting

³³They challenged Him, saying, "Look at the disciples of John. They're always fasting or praying, trying to live more righteously, and so do disciples of the Pharisees. But all your disciples do is accept invitations to dinner parties!" ³⁴Jesus said to them, "Have you ever heard of groomsmen fasting in the presence of the

bridegroom? ³⁵The time will come to fast, but it will come after the bridegroom is gone." ³⁶Then He shared with them some lessons from life. "Nobody mends an old rotting garment with patches of new cloth, because the old garment won't be able to stand the strain and will soon tear again. ³⁷Nobody puts fresh grape juice into an old dried-out leather bottle, because the old bottle isn't flexible and will split wide open. Then the grape juice will be lost, and the bottle will be useless. ³⁸But fresh juice needs to be put into flexible new leather bottles. Then the juice and the bottles both will be preserved. ³⁹It's also true that people accustomed to drinking old wine don't suddenly turn to new wine. At first they're skeptical until they taste the new wine."

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

6 The next Sabbath, while Jesus was still in the area, He and His disciples were passing through a wheat field on their way back from the synagogue. They started picking heads of wheat, rubbing them in their hands to free the kernels and eating them for their breakfast. ²Some Pharisees who were also on their way back from the synagogue said to them, "Why are you harvesting on the Sabbath? Don't you know it's against the law?" ³Jesus answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he was hungry? ⁴He went to the Sanctuary and the high priest gave him the consecrated bread to satisfy his hunger and that of his companions. But no one is supposed to eat that bread except the priests." ⁵Then He said, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath and knows what is right to do because He's the One who set it apart."

Healing on the Sabbath

⁶On another Sabbath when Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, a man sat in the congregation with a shriveled arm. ⁷The scribes and Pharisees were sitting there waiting to see if Jesus would heal this man so they could accuse Him of

breaking the Sabbath. ⁸Jesus knew what they were thinking but, even so, He looked at the man with the shriveled arm and said to him, "Would you come up and stand in front of these people?" The man did so. ⁹Then Jesus turned to the scribes and Pharisees and said, "I ask you. Is it right to do good on the Sabbath or is it better to do nothing and let evil have its way? Is it better to heal a person or to let him suffer?" ¹⁰After looking around and waiting for an answer, He turned back to the man and said, "Stretch out your shriveled arm." As the man made an effort to obey, suddenly his arm was completely healed. ¹¹When the scribes and Pharisees saw this, they became very angry and walked outside to see what to do next.

The Twelve Disciples

¹²Then Jesus and His disciples went into the hill country to find a quiet place to be alone and pray. Jesus prayed all night, communing with His Father until His energy was renewed and He felt refreshed. ¹³When daybreak came, He chose from His disciples twelve men and commissioned them to be His apostles. ¹⁴Simon Peter was one of them, as was Andrew his brother. Also among them were the two Zebedee brothers, James and John. The others were Philip, Bartholomew, ¹⁵Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, ¹⁶Judas, also called Thaddaeus, who was the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who became the traitor.

Jesus Teaches and Heals

¹⁷After Jesus had commissioned them, they came down from the hill country to the plains below. Soon they were surrounded by great crowds of people who had come from Judea, Jerusalem, and as far away as Tyre and Sidon on the coast to see and hear Jesus. Many of them wanted to be healed. ¹⁸Among them were some who were demon possessed. They, too, wanted Jesus to heal them,

and He did. ¹⁹Many believed that if they could just touch Him, they would be healed, and they were. In fact, before the day was over there was not a sick person in the whole crowd.

The Beatitudes

²⁰When Jesus found a little knoll, He made Himself comfortable and said to His disciples, "Happiness doesn't come from being rich. You can be poor and still be happy because you know that God's whole kingdom is yours.

²¹"Happiness can come to those who are hungry because they know that one day their hunger will be satisfied. Happiness can come to those who weep because they know that one day their lives will be full of laughter.

²²"Happiness can come out of situations where men hate you, refuse to associate with you, insult you and falsely accuse you before authorities because of me. ²³When that happens to you, don't be sad, because heaven knows all about it and is ready to reward and honor you for it. What you'll go through for me will be no different from what the prophets went through.

²⁴"I feel sorry for those who think of nothing else but being rich, because they'll have to be satisfied with the happiness they get from that.

²⁵"I feel sorry for those whose life is nothing but pleasure seeking. They have their happiness now because that's the only kind they really want. The day will come when they'll weep and mourn, but all their tears will not be able to change things.

²⁶"I also feel sorry for people whose only purpose in life is to be accepted and well spoken of. That's the same kind of happiness that motivates false prophets.

Love Your Enemies

²⁷"Let me tell you how to experience real happiness. Love your enemies, do something good for those who don't like you, ²⁸say something good about those

who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you and exploit you to further their own interests. ²⁹If anyone slaps your face, don't hit him back. Let him slap you on the other cheek also. Have the same attitude when someone comes to rob you; don't fight with him. If he wants your coat, let him have it. If he wants your shirt, let him have that too. ³⁰Give something to everyone who asks you to help them. If someone borrows something from you and you keep reminding him to return it but he keeps forgetting, let him have it. ³¹Treat everyone as you would like them to treat you.

³²"If you care only about those who care about you, what's so different about that? Thieves and gang members care about each other too. ³³If you love only those who love you, do you expect to be rewarded for that? Sinners do the same thing. ³⁴If you loan money, tools or other things only to those from whom you expect some kind of return, what's so great about that? Some public officials do that all the time. ³⁵But show your enemies what love is by doing nice things for them. Don't do it to get something back from them. You'll be rewarded for what you do because you're the children of God who is kind and gracious, even to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶So be as merciful and kind as your heavenly Father is.

Judging Others

³⁷"Don't judge or condemn people for what they've done to you; God doesn't condemn you for the hurts you have caused Him. He forgives you. Treat others the same way. ³⁸Have a giving attitude in all you do and you'll get back more than you give. God will return blessings to you abundantly—packed in and flowing over. Whatever you give out to others will be given back to you.

³⁹"Can blind people lead blind people? Won't they both fall into the ditch? Why, then, follow someone who doesn't know where he's going or what he's doing? ⁴⁰You see, discipleship means following

your Teacher and not doing things contrary to what He taught you. ⁴¹Don't look for faults in your brother's life. You will be so concerned with the speck of inconsistency you see there that you'll miss seeing the massive changes you need to make in your own life. ⁴²How can you say, 'Brother, let me help you get that speck out of your eye,' when you can't see the massive beam in your own eye? That's being hypocritical. You need to change your own life first, and then you'll be able to get close to your brother to help him make the changes he needs to make.

A Tree Is Known by Its Fruit

⁴³"A good tree does not produce bad fruit, and a bad tree will not produce good fruit. ⁴⁴Every tree is known by the kind of fruit it produces. You don't go to a thorn bush expecting to pick figs or to brambles to pick grapes. ⁴⁵A good man out of the goodness in his heart will do good things, while a bad person out of the evil in his heart will do bad things. Everything you say and do comes from the feelings you have inside.

Two Builders

⁴⁶"Be honest. If you call me Lord, then do what I say. ⁴⁷Anyone who listens to me and does what I ask him to do is like a man who builds a solid house. ⁴⁸First of all, he digs deep into the soil to make sure the footings of the house will be on solid rock. Then, when the house is finished and the floods come and the waters surge around the house, it will stand because he built it on solid rock. ⁴⁹But the person who listens to me and doesn't do what I ask him to do, is like a man who builds a house without a foundation. When the floods come and the waters surge around the house, it will be washed away and its destruction will be complete."

Jesus Heals the Centurion's Servant

7 After Jesus finished talking to the people, He decided to go to Capernaum. ²A Roman officer's personal slave

who was highly respected and like one of the family had become terribly sick and was at the point of death. ³When the officer heard about Jesus' power to heal, he asked some of the religious leaders to ask Him to come to his house and heal his servant. ⁴They went to Jesus and said, "There's a Roman officer who needs your help, and he deserves all the help you can give him. ⁵He loves our people and the Jewish nation. He even built a synagogue for us right here in town." ⁶So Jesus followed the Jewish leaders toward the officer's house. While they were going, making little progress because of the crowd, the officer himself came to see Jesus and said, "Lord, I wish you wouldn't trouble yourself to come to my house because I don't feel worthy to have you come. ⁷That's the reason I didn't come to see you but asked others to speak for me. All you have to do is to command the sickness to go away, and it will, and my servant will be healed. ⁸I know how the chain of command works because I'm an officer and have soldiers under me who recognize my authority. All I have to do is command a soldier to go, and he goes, and another to come, and he comes, and to command my trusted servant to do this or that, and he does it." ⁹When Jesus heard this, He was amazed at the kind of faith this Roman officer had in Him. He turned to the people and said, "I tell you, I haven't found anyone with this kind of faith anywhere in Israel!" ¹⁰Then Jesus said to the Roman officer, "Because you have believed in me, it will be done." The officer returned home, and when he got there, he found his servant well.

Jesus Raises a Widow's Son

¹¹The next day, Jesus made His way to the little city of Nain, accompanied by His followers and many other people. ¹²As He approached the city gate, a funeral procession was on its way out. A widow's only son had died and a large crowd made up of relatives, friends and sympa-

thetic townspeople was following the men carrying the body. ¹³Jesus stepped aside to let them by, and as the weeping mother passed, His heart went out in compassion for her. As she looked up at Him, He said, "Don't cry." ¹⁴Then He stopped the procession, walked over to the litter on which the body lay, touched it and said, "Young man, I am telling you, Get up!" ¹⁵The young man opened his eyes, sat up and began to talk. Then Jesus presented him to his mother. ¹⁶The people were dumb with amazement. When they found their tongues, they praised God, saying, "A great prophet has come to visit us. God has not forgotten His people." ¹⁷The news of what Jesus had done spread throughout Judea and all the regions of Israel.

John the Baptist

¹⁸This news was also shared with John the Baptist by his disciples while he was in prison. ¹⁹Then John sent two of them to Jesus with the question: "Are you the One who has come to save us or should we look for someone else?" ²⁰When the two men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to ask you whether or not you are the One who will deliver Israel or if the real Deliverer will come later." ²¹Jesus asked them to come along and answered their question by healing people of all sorts of diseases, physical problems, demon possession and even blindness. ²²Finally, near the end of a long day of healing and teaching, He turned to the two disciples and said, "Go back and tell John what you have seen and heard. Tell him that the blind can now see, the lame can walk, the lepers are clean, the deaf can hear, the dead are raised and the good news about God is being spread everywhere. ²³Also, tell him that his doubts will disappear and his former confidence will return if he accepts me for who I am."

²⁴After John's disciples left, Jesus turned to the people and said, "When John was preaching in those desolate areas outside

of Jerusalem, why did you go out to see him? What did you expect to see out there? A blade of grass blowing in the wind? ²⁵Why did you go all the way out there to see him? Did you expect to see a man modeling the latest fashion? You know that those who wear expensive clothes and live in comfort don't come to live in desolate places like John did. ²⁶Then why did you go all the way out there to see him? What did you expect to see? Wasn't it to see and hear a prophet? Of course it was! And you saw more than just an ordinary prophet. ²⁷You saw the man of whom the Lord through Malachi said, 'I will send a special messenger to the people before I come to prepare the way before me.' ²⁸I want to tell you that John is this messenger. This makes him greater and more important than any prophet who has ever lived. Yet anyone who has the privilege of seeing the growing kingdom of God is more privileged than John." ²⁹All those who had heard John preach and had been baptized by him praised God for him, including the tax collectors. ³⁰But the Pharisees and the experts in Jewish law rejected John's preaching and refused to be baptized by him.

³¹Jesus said, "What should I compare the people of this generation to, and what are they like? ³²They are like two groups of children who were trying to play together. One group said to the other, 'We pretended we were playing wedding and sang happy songs for you, but you refused to dance. Then we pretended we were playing funeral and sang sad songs for you, but you refused to cry. We don't know what you want.' ³³When John the Baptist came, he lived in the desolate regions around Jerusalem, fasted, prayed and never touched a drop of wine. And some of you said, 'That man's a fanatic; he's demon possessed!' ³⁴Now the Son of Man has come, eating and drinking with anyone who invites Him, and some of you say, 'Look at that glutton and drunkard! How can He make the claims He does if He's a friend of tax

collectors, sinners and other such rejected members of society?' ³⁵But God's wisdom will be seen to be right by those who follow it."

A Prostitute Forgiven

³⁶Then one of the Pharisees who had been following Jesus openly invited Him to dinner. Together with His disciples, Jesus went to the Pharisee's house, and soon they were all reclining on small dinner couches around the large table. ³⁷While they were eating, a former prostitute who now believed in Jesus came into the house with a small bottle of very expensive perfume. ³⁸She went to where Jesus was reclining and knelt by His feet crying, wetting them with her tears. She then wiped them with her hair and began sprinkling the expensive perfume on His head and feet. ³⁹Everyone stopped eating and watched her. When the host saw it, he was upset and said to himself, "How can this man be a prophet, much less the Messiah? If He were what He claims to be, He would know that she's a prostitute and wouldn't let her near Him."

⁴⁰Jesus knew what His host was thinking and quietly spoke to him so as not to embarrass him in front of his guests. He said, "Simon, I would like to ask you a question." The Pharisee graciously said, "Go ahead, Master, ask it." ⁴¹Jesus said, "There were two people who owed a rich man some money. One owed him the equivalent of five hundred days' salary and the other one owed him fifty days' salary. ⁴²When neither one of them had any way of paying off the loan, the man generously cancelled both debts. Tell me, which one of these two men do you think would show the greatest appreciation?" ⁴³Simon answered, "I suppose the man who had the largest debt." Jesus said, "You're right." ⁴⁴Then He looked toward the woman who was now sitting at His feet and said to Simon, "Have you noticed how hospitable this woman has been to me? When I arrived, no servant offered a basin of water to wash our dusty feet. But

this woman has washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵In fact, when I came, you did not welcome me with a kiss on the cheek that Jewish brothers normally give each other. But this woman didn't hesitate to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶You did not offer the fragrant oil that people often furnish for their house guests' heads, but she has put the most expensive perfume on my head and feet. ⁴⁷Though people call her a prostitute, she asked me to forgive her and I did. As you can see, she appreciates forgiveness and her heart overflows with gratitude. But those who don't feel a need to be forgiven express little gratitude."

⁴⁸Then Jesus looked directly at the woman and said, "Don't be embarrassed. As I've told you, your sins are forgiven and I appreciate what you just did." ⁴⁹Those nearby heard what He said and whispered to each other, "Does this man claim to forgive sins?" ⁵⁰Then Jesus said to the woman so everyone could hear, "Your faith in me is what has saved you. May the peace of God go with you."

Women Follow Jesus

8 Following this experience, Jesus went through every city and village in the area, preaching and sharing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve disciples went with Him wherever He went. ²There were also some women who followed Him, some of whom He had healed or freed from demon possession, such as Mary Magdalene whom He freed from demons seven times. ³And there was Joanna, the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household, as well as Susanna and many others who used their resources to help Jesus and His disciples.

Parable of the Sower

⁴In one place, a large crowd of people came together from a number of surrounding towns to see Jesus. He started teaching them by using illustrations from nature. Looking at a nearby hill where men were sowing, He said to the people,

⁵"Once a sower went out to his field to sow. While he was sowing, some of the seed fell on the edge of the nearby road, and travelers came along and stepped on the seeds, then birds came and ate up the rest. ⁶Some of the seed fell on rocky areas in the field. They were the first to spring up, but they didn't last long because there wasn't enough soil to hold the necessary moisture. ⁷Other seed fell under thorn bushes. When they sprang up, the bushes choked them so they couldn't grow. ⁸But some seed fell on good, rich soil. When these matured, they yielded an abundant harvest." Then He called out to everyone, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear what I'm saying!"

The Reason for Parables

⁹Later His disciples asked Him, "Lord, what were you trying to teach us with that parable?" ¹⁰He answered, "I'll explain this parable to you, because I want you to understand what the kingdom of God is all about. But publicly I'll have to let the parables stand as they are so no one can pick up something I say and use it against me. As Isaiah said, 'People are always looking, but don't see; they are always listening, but don't understand.' But those who really want to know will understand."

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Sower

¹¹"The meaning of the parable of the sower is this: The seed being sown is the word of God. ¹²The road represents the hearts of those people who listen, but the devil comes and takes from their hearts what they heard. ¹³The rocky places in the field are the hearts of those people who listen and love what they hear and instantly take hold of it. But then they don't take what they heard deep into their hearts, and when they're tempted or troubles come, they give up. ¹⁴The thorny places represent the hearts of those people who gladly listen and put down their roots, but soon their love for the truth is choked out by the cares of this life, its opportunities and pleasures."

So what was sown dies out. ¹⁵The good soil represents the hearts of those who gladly listen, who sink their roots deep into the word and hold on to it. These people endure and produce a large harvest of spiritual fruit.

Light Under a Basket

¹⁶“You see, nobody who lights a candle covers it up or hides it under a bed, but he puts it on a candlestick so that others, too, can see their way. ¹⁷Nothing you do is done in secret. Your heavenly Father knows everything, and whatever you do will be made known and will be brought out into the open. ¹⁸So be careful how you listen. Whoever shares with others what he’s heard will be entrusted with more, but the person who doesn’t share what he’s heard will actually lose what he has because it will be taken from him.”

Jesus’ Mother and Brothers

¹⁹About this time Jesus’ mother and stepbrothers arrived, but they couldn’t get near the house where Jesus was because of the crowd. ²⁰Finally, someone passed word to Jesus that His mother and stepbrothers were there and wanted to see Him. ²¹Jesus turned to the man who gave Him the message and spoke so others could hear, “My relatives are those who listen to God’s word and do it. They are the ones who make up my family and are my mother and my brothers.”

Jesus Calms the Storm

²²One day Jesus got into a fishing boat and asked His disciples to take Him to the other shore. So they started off. ²³After they had rowed a little way, they set the sail and Jesus lay down in the back of the boat and fell asleep. Suddenly a gale-force wind swept down from the mountains and their boat was caught up in the middle of a storm. The waves crashed against the sides of the boat and it began filling with water. It looked like the end for all of them. ²⁴The disciples couldn’t believe that Jesus continued to

sleep through all of this. Finally, they shook Him awake and said, “Master! Master! Don’t you care what happens to us? How can you keep on sleeping?” Jesus stood up, steadied Himself in the boat and commanded the wind and the waves to be still. Instantly, it was as calm as if nothing had happened. ²⁵He turned to them and said, “Where is your faith? Don’t you trust God?” They were afraid and whispered to each other, “Is He human? This is incredible! He tells the wind and the waves to stop, and they listen to Him!”

Two Demon-possessed Men Healed

²⁶After this miraculous escape, they finally reached the other shore, the area called Gadara or Gerasenes, just across the lake from Galilee. ²⁷As they stepped out of the boat, one of the madmen who had once lived in the nearby town came rushing toward them. For some time now the demons had possessed him and he had been living naked in the tombs dug out in the nearby hills. ²⁸The man came running down the hill straight at Jesus when he suddenly stopped, fell on his knees and cried out loudly, “What do we have to do with each other? You’re Jesus, the Son of the Most High God! I beg you not to torture me!” ²⁹Jesus commanded the man to stop shouting and for the evil spirit to come out of him. Up until now, the demons had made people in the whole area afraid of the man. When the authorities would catch him and tie him with chains, he would go into a rage, break the chains and run back to the tombs. ³⁰Jesus stood there fearlessly and asked the demon, “What is your name?” The spokesman for the demons answered, “Legion,” meaning Many. ³¹Then he asked Jesus not to send them back where they came from. ³²He begged Jesus to let them go into a nearby herd of swine feeding on the mountainside. Jesus agreed and gave them permission. ³³So the demons came out of the man and rushed into the pigs. Suddenly the pigs began running madly

down the hill, straight into the lake where they all drowned.

³⁴When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they ran back to town to tell their masters. And on the way, they told everyone they met what had taken place. ³⁵Then the owners came out to see for themselves what had happened. When they got there, the madman was dressed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, free of demons, and once more in his right mind. Seeing this, they were afraid of what Jesus might do next. ³⁶The herdsmen had told everyone they met how the man was healed and who had done it. ³⁷Then it seemed that every person in that area came out to see Jesus. But the people were so frightened that they asked Jesus to leave. So Jesus and His disciples started down the hill toward their boat to cross the lake. ³⁸As they were leaving, the man who had been healed begged Jesus to take him along. But Jesus said to him, ³⁹“Go back to your family and friends and tell them what wonderful things God has done for you.” The man obeyed and shared the good news, not only with his family, but throughout the province, telling everyone he met what wonderful things Jesus had done for him.

Jesus Heals a Woman and Raises a Girl to Life

⁴⁰After Jesus returned to the other shore, crowds of people were waiting to see Him and gladly welcomed Him back. ⁴¹Now a man named Jairus, who was a leader in the local synagogue, pushed his way through the crowd, knelt down in front of Jesus and begged Him to come to his house. ⁴²This man had an only daughter about twelve years old and she was dying. Jesus started toward Jairus' house, but the crowd pressed in on Him and made it almost impossible for Him to move.

⁴³In the crowd was a woman who had been menstruating almost continuously for twelve years. She had spent all her

money on doctors, but no one was able to help her. ⁴⁴She squeezed through the crowd, getting closer and closer to Jesus. Finally, as she came up behind Him, she reached out and touched the edge of His robe. Instantly her bleeding stopped. At that moment she knew she was healed because she sensed it in her body. ⁴⁵Jesus stopped, looked around and said, “Who touched me?” Everyone nearby denied having touched Him. Then Peter said, “Master, everyone is pushing and shoving to get close to you. How can you ask, ‘Who touched me?’” ⁴⁶Jesus said, “Somebody touched me to be healed. I felt power go out from me.” ⁴⁷When the woman realized that she couldn't hide what she had done, she squeezed through the crowd, and shaking with fright, fell on her knees in front of Jesus, confessing that she was the one who had touched Him. She also told Him why she had done it and that she knew she was healed. ⁴⁸Jesus said, “Don't be afraid. It was your touch of faith that made you whole. Go in peace, and may the blessing of God be with you.”

⁴⁹While He was still talking to this woman, a messenger from Jairus' house pressed through the crowd and whispered in his master's ear, “The family doesn't want you to bother Jesus any more because your daughter is dead.” ⁵⁰But Jesus knew what had happened, so He turned to the father and said, “Don't give up hope. Just keep on believing and she'll be made well.” ⁵¹When they finally arrived at the house, Jesus allowed no one to go inside with Him except Peter, James, John and the child's parents. ⁵²Everyone was crying and mourning for the child. Then Jesus said, “Don't cry. The little girl isn't dead—she's just sleeping.” ⁵³They all laughed at Him because they knew she was dead. ⁵⁴So He asked them to leave and wait outside. Then He went to the room where the little girl's body was, took her by the hand and said, “My child, it's time to get up.” ⁵⁵Immediately, life returned to her body.

She opened her eyes, sat up and looked around. Then Jesus asked the parents to give her something to eat. ⁵⁶But they just stood there for a moment, astounded and speechless. Jesus asked them not to broadcast what had just happened because it could detract from His ministry.

The Mission of the Twelve

9 Then He called together the twelve disciples and gave them power to heal all kinds of diseases, including authority over demons. ²Then He sent them out to preach the good news of the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. ³Before they left, He said to them, “Don’t take anything with you—no food, no bag, no money, and no extra robe. If you need a staff you may get one later. ⁴When people invite you to stay with them, accept their invitation. When your work is done, thank them and leave town. ⁵If no one welcomes you, leave, and when you reach the city limits, shake the dust off your sandals as a sign to them that they’ve had a chance to hear the gospel but refused to listen. Then go on to the next town.” ⁶So the disciples left and visited all the towns in that area, preaching the gospel and healing people of all kinds of diseases.

John the Baptist Beheaded

⁷When Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, heard the reports about Jesus and what He had done, he was troubled. Some people had told him that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead, ⁸others told him that Jesus was Elijah come back to earth, and still others told him that Jesus was one of the ancient prophets come to life. ⁹Herod tried to reassure himself by saying, “I beheaded John the Baptist, so this man can’t possibly be John.” Yet Herod kept hearing reports about what Jesus was doing, making Herod all the more eager to see Him.

Feeding the Five Thousand

¹⁰After the disciples came back, they told Jesus all the things they had done

by the authority of His name. Then Jesus led them to a quiet place in the desert, not far from the town of Bethsaida, to be alone. ¹¹But the people followed them and found Jesus and His disciples. He welcomed them, taught them things about the kingdom of God and healed as many as needed to be healed. ¹²Finally, late in the afternoon, the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Master, these people are hungry. You need to send them on their way so they can get to a nearby town to buy some food before it gets dark, because it’s a long way back.” ¹³Jesus looked at His disciples and said, “If the people are hungry, why don’t you feed them?” They said to Him, “We have only five small loaves of bread and two small fish. Do you expect us to go to town to buy enough food to feed all these people?” ¹⁴There were about five thousand men there that day, not counting women and children. Then Jesus said to the disciples, “Tell the people to sit down in groups of fifty.” ¹⁵They did what Jesus requested, and soon all the people were seated. ¹⁶Then Jesus took the five loaves of bread and the two small fish, looked up to heaven, asked the blessing and started passing bread and fish to the disciples who, in turn, passed them out to the people. ¹⁷After everyone had all they wanted to eat, the disciples went around to pick up what was left and filled twelve baskets with bread and fish. The people then returned to their homes.

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Son of God

¹⁸Some time later when Jesus and the disciples were alone to rest and pray, He asked them, “Who do people think I am?” ¹⁹They said, “Some think you’re John the Baptist, others think you’re Elijah and still others think you’re one of the ancient prophets risen from the dead.” ²⁰He asked them, “But who do you think I am?” Peter answered, “We believe that you’re the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection

²¹When they all agreed with Peter, Jesus told them not to broadcast who they thought He was because it would anger the Jewish leaders all the more. ²²Then He tried to prepare His disciples for what was to come, saying, "The Messiah will have to suffer many things. His own people will reject Him, the leading priests and teachers will be against Him, and the Romans will execute Him. But three days later He will rise from the dead."

The Cost of Following Jesus

²³He also said to them, "If anyone wants to be my disciple, he must forget about himself, take up his cross, and be willing to die for me. ²⁴For whoever tries to save his own life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵What advantage is there if a man gains the whole world and loses his own soul? ²⁶If anyone is ashamed of me and what I teach, I will be ashamed of him. When I return, I will come back with the glory I had before and with the glory of the Father and the holy angels. ²⁷Before long, some of you sitting here will have a preview of that glory and will be able to catch for yourselves a glimpse of the kingdom of God."

Jesus' Transfiguration

²⁸About eight days later, He took Peter, John and James with Him up to one of the nearby mountains to be alone and to pray. ²⁹While they were there, His face suddenly began to change and His robe became dazzling white. ³⁰Two men appeared next to Jesus and started talking with Him about His upcoming trial and crucifixion. One was Moses and the other, Elijah. ³¹They both radiated the glory of heaven and encouraged Jesus to go on to Jerusalem, because through His death many people would be saved. ³²Peter and the other two disciples had been asleep, but now they were wide

awake and saw Jesus' glory and heard both men talking to Him. ³³As Moses and Elijah started to leave, and the whole scene began to fade, Peter finally found his voice and said, "Master, this is fantastic! This is holy ground and a good place for us to stay! Why don't we pitch three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah?" Peter was so excited that he didn't know what he was saying. ³⁴While he was still babbling away, suddenly a huge cloud engulfed them, and they became afraid. ³⁵Then a voice came from the middle of the cloud and said, "This is my very own Son whom I dearly love. Listen to what He has to say." ³⁶Just as quickly as the cloud came, it disappeared, and the disciples found themselves alone with Jesus again. They didn't tell anyone what had happened until years later, as Jesus instructed them.

Jesus Heals a Demon-possessed Boy

³⁷The next day Jesus and the three disciples headed back down the mountain, and crowds of people were waiting for them. ³⁸A man from the crowd cried out, "Teacher, I beg you! Have pity on my son! He's my only boy, and he's possessed by a demon!" ³⁹As Jesus came closer, the man said, "The demon makes him scream. It throws him to the ground and makes him foam at the mouth and act like a wild animal. Sometimes he goes into convulsions and has such long seizures that we wonder whether he'll come out of them alive. ⁴⁰I asked your disciples to heal him, but they couldn't. Can you do anything for him?" ⁴¹Jesus quietly said, "What a faithless, obstinate generation! How much longer must I be with you before you understand?" Then He turned to the father and said, "Your son's condition isn't hopeless. Bring him here." ⁴²As the father was bringing the boy to Jesus, the demon threw the child down and immediately the boy went into convulsions. Then Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy and asked the father to take him home.

Jesus Predicts His Death a Second Time

⁴³The crowd stood there amazed at the mighty power of God. While everyone was trying to comprehend what Jesus had just done, He turned to His disciples and said, ⁴⁴“Don’t forget what you just saw. Think about it, because the Son of Man will soon be arrested and will not use His power to free Himself.” ⁴⁵But they still didn’t understand what He was talking about when He said that He would be arrested. Besides, they were so awestruck by His power that they were too afraid to ask Him about anything just then.

Who Is the Greatest?

⁴⁶Soon after this the disciples began arguing among themselves about how to measure success and which one of them was the greatest. ⁴⁷Jesus knew what was happening, so He took a little child from the crowd and with His arm around the little one’s shoulders ⁴⁸said to His disciples, “Anyone who ministers to a little child ministers to me. And whoever loves me, loves God also and is great in the sight of heaven, even though he may be the least here on earth.”

Jesus Forbids Exclusiveness

⁴⁹Then John asked, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons and exercising the power of God by using your name. We tried to stop him because he wasn’t one of us.” ⁵⁰Jesus answered, “You shouldn’t have done that, because if he’s not against you, he’s for you.”

A Samaritan Village Rejects Jesus

⁵¹Now the time had come for Jesus to finish His mission, so with a firm commitment He set out for Jerusalem. ⁵²On the way, He sent some of His disciples ahead of Him to a Samaritan village to let the people know He would be passing through. ⁵³But the townspeople didn’t want Him to stop because they knew He was a Jew going on to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴When

James and John saw their attitude, they went back to Jesus and said, “Lord, these people have no respect for you. Why don’t you let us call down fire from heaven as Elijah did on Mount Carmel and wipe these people off the map!” ⁵⁵But Jesus rebuked their anger, saying, “You don’t understand the kind of spirit you’re showing. ⁵⁶God has not sent me here to destroy people but to save them.” So they went on to the next village.

The Cost of Discipleship

⁵⁷On the way there, a man stopped Jesus and said to Him, “Lord, I love you and want to follow you wherever you go. I want to be your disciple more than anything else.” ⁵⁸Jesus answered, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to call His own. Are you sure you want to follow me?” ⁵⁹Then Jesus turned to a man standing nearby and said, “How would you like to be one of my disciples?” The man answered, “I’d be glad to, but first let me take care of the funeral arrangements for my father.” ⁶⁰Jesus said to him, “Let those who are spiritually dead take care of the arrangements, but as for you, you need first to decide to follow me.” ⁶¹Another man said, “Lord, I’ll be glad to follow you, but first let me go and say good-bye to my family and friends.” ⁶²Jesus said to him, “No one who wants to follow me but puts other things first is fit to be my disciple. A man who puts his hand to the plow and keeps looking back is not fit to be a member of my kingdom.”

The Mission of the Seventy

10 Then Jesus picked seventy other disciples from His followers and sent them out two by two to go ahead of Him into every city and town where He and His disciples planned to go. ²He said to them, “There are many people to be harvested for God’s kingdom, but there are so few workers. As you go, ask God to send more laborers into the field to help you. ³I’m sending you like innocent lambs

into a pack of hungry wolves,⁴ but don't worry. And don't take money, or sandals or a beggar's bag with you, because you'll be taken care of. And don't greet everyone in the marketplace just to pass the time of day. Your mission is urgent.⁵ If people invite you to stay with them, let them know that you are truly men of peace.⁶ If your host is a man of peace, you'll both be happy. But if your host is a troublemaker, then no matter how good your intentions are, you can't pass your peace on to him.⁷ So find a peaceful house and stay there as long as you need to finish your mission. Don't keep moving from place to place because that will give people the impression that you're hard to please.⁸ And do the same in other towns. Graciously accept the lodging, the food and the drink they offer you.⁹ In turn, heal their sick and share with them the good news of the kingdom, telling them what it has done for you.¹⁰ If you get to a city or a town where people don't want you to stay, then as you leave tell them why.¹¹ Speak kindly and say, 'We're leaving because we're not wanted here. We came to offer you the blessings of God's kingdom. Now we're shaking the dust off our feet to show that we're not responsible for what will follow.'¹² It will be more tolerable in the Day of Judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that city.

Impenitent Cities

¹³"I really feel for such cities and towns, especially Chorazin and Bethsaida. They've had the opportunity to know who I am because of the many miracles I worked there. If these same miracles had been done in Gentile cities like Tyre and Sidon, those people would have repented long ago and turned to God.¹⁴ In fact, people in Tyre and Sidon have a greater possibility of being saved than those who reject the good news of the kingdom.¹⁵ And many in Capernaum are even worse off. Their pride stands in their way, and they don't even care whether they're saved or not.¹⁶ Remember, if

people listen to you, they're listening to me; if they reject you, they're rejecting me; when they reject me, they're rejecting Him who sent me."

The Seventy Return With Joy

¹⁷When the seventy finished their mission, they came back rejoicing and said, "Lord, even the demons obeyed us when we rebuked them in your name."¹⁸ Jesus said, "I know, soon Satan will fall from the sympathy of heaven as quick as lightning when angels see what he will do to me.¹⁹ Demons are like snakes and scorpions—always ready to strike. But don't be afraid of them, because I have given you power to cast them out, and they will not hurt you.²⁰ Don't be tempted to focus on your new power or become overconfident because demons are subject to you, for that will certainly lead to your downfall. Instead, rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Jesus Thanks the Father

²¹Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, prayed, "Thank you, Father. Truly you are the Lord of heaven and earth. You don't reveal things about yourself to those who think they are wise and question your word, but to those who, like little children, believe what you say.²² Father, you have trusted me with a knowledge of yourself, because you know me as no one else does; and only those know you, who believe what I tell them."

²³Then He turned to His disciples and said, "How privileged you are to see the things you have seen."²⁴ There have been prophets and kings who wanted to see the things you've seen but didn't have that privilege. They longed to hear the things you've heard but didn't have that chance."

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

²⁵About that time a certain young lawyer stood up to test Jesus and said, "Teacher, what do I have to do to be saved?"²⁶ Jesus looked him in the eye and answered, "What do the Scriptures

say and how do you understand them?"
²⁷He said, "The Scriptures say, 'You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind and all your strength; then you should love your neighbor as you love yourself.'" ²⁸Jesus responded, "You've read the Scriptures correctly. Keep on doing this and you'll be given eternal life."

²⁹But the lawyer tried to justify his lack of love for some people. "Teacher," he said, "who is my neighbor?" ³⁰Jesus said, "I'll tell you a story. A certain man from Jerusalem left to go down into the valley toward Jericho. While traveling through a desolate area of the canyons, he was attacked by a gang of thieves who beat him up, took his money, stripped him of his clothes, then left him lying in the desert sun half dead. ³¹A priest happened to be traveling that same road on his way to Jerusalem. When he came to the place where the injured man was lying, he decided not to touch him, for he might be dead. This would make the priest ritually unclean and disqualify him for serving in the Temple. So he walked on the side of the road and kept going. ³²Later a Levite traveled along the same road. When he came to the man, he stopped and looked, but after seeing the man's condition and thinking he was dead, the Levite also decided not to defile himself. So he, too, went on his way. ³³Then a Samaritan came along. When he saw the man, he felt sorry for him and decided to help him, even though he could tell that he was a Jew. ³⁴He soothed his wounds with a salve made from oil and wine. Then he helped the man get up, mounted him on his donkey and took him to the nearest inn on the outskirts of Jericho where he cared for him all through the night. ³⁵The next morning before he left, he gave the manager of the place the equivalent of two days' wages and said, 'I'd like you to take care of this man until he's well enough to go on. If it costs more than this, I'll pay the difference when I stop here next time.'" ³⁶Then Jesus asked the

young lawyer, "Which of these three men do you think acted as a neighbor to the wounded man?" ³⁷The lawyer answered, "The one who cared about him." Jesus replied, "Anyone who needs help is your neighbor. Be ready to help him."

Mary and Martha

³⁸After this, Jesus went to Bethany to Martha's house. She had given Him a standing invitation to stop by any time He needed to get away and get some rest. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary who enjoyed sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to what He had to say. ⁴⁰On this occasion, Martha was extremely rushed, trying to get food together for all the hungry men. She finally went to Jesus to complain about her sister who just sat there listening. Martha said, "Lord, don't you care anything about how much work it takes to feed all of you? The least you can do is tell my sister to help me." ⁴¹Jesus looked at Martha with understanding and said, "Martha, Martha, you are helpful to everyone in need and you're going to great lengths to feed us and make us comfortable. ⁴²But there are more important things than food and comfort. Mary came to me because she recognizes her need. She has chosen the right thing. What I'm telling her will help her the rest of her life."

The Lord's Prayer

11 One day Jesus and His disciples went to a certain place to pray. When He had finished praying, one of them said, "Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples to pray." ²Jesus answered, "Let me give you an example. Pray something like this: Father in heaven, may your name be honored in all that we do. May your kingdom come. May your will be done by us as it is being done in heaven. ³Please give us the food we need. ⁴Forgive us our sins as you expect us to forgive others. Don't let us be tempted beyond what we can take, but deliver us from the evil one."

A Friend Comes at Midnight

⁵Then Jesus continued, "Let me explain to you what praying is like. Suppose you went to your friend's house about midnight, knocked on his door and said, 'Friend, do you have three loaves of bread I could borrow?' ⁶A friend of mine has come to see me unexpectedly, and I'm all out of food.' ⁷The friend inside will say, 'Do you realize what time of night it is? Why couldn't you wait until morning? My kids are sleeping, and if I get up and go looking for bread, I'll wake up the whole family.' ⁸Though your friend will hesitate to wake up his family, if you continue to ask, he'll get up and get the bread you asked for because he's your friend.

Asking, Seeking, Knocking

⁹"So don't be afraid to keep asking God for what you need. Keep looking for answers, and they will come; keep knocking, and heaven's door will open for you. ¹⁰Anyone who asks will receive, and he who seeks will find, and for those who knock, the door will open. ¹¹Which of you fathers, if your little boy asks you for a piece of bread, would give him a rock? If the boy asks for a piece of broiled fish, would you give him a snake? ¹²Or, if he asks for a cooked egg, would you give him a scorpion? ¹³If you who are born in a sinful world know how to give good things to your children, how much more willing your heavenly Father is to give you the Holy Spirit when you ask Him."

A Divided House Cannot Stand

¹⁴Later that day, Jesus healed a man who was mute and possessed by a demon. After the demon was cast out, the man could talk again. When the people saw this, they were amazed. ¹⁵Then some of them said, "He is using the power of Satan to do this." ¹⁶Others insisted that He must prove He had done it by the power of God before they would believe. ¹⁷Jesus knew what was in their hearts, so he said to them, "If a kingdom continues to be torn apart by civil war, it

simply won't last. If a family is divided, it won't last either. ¹⁸And if Satan fights against himself, how long do you think his kingdom would last? The reason I say this is that some of you think that I'm using the power of Satan to cast out demons. ¹⁹If I cast out demons by the power of Satan, then whose power do you think Moses and Aaron used against the demonic powers in Egypt? And whose power do you call on when you want to drive out demons? Ask those who claim to do that, and they'll tell you. ²⁰On the other hand, if I'm casting out demons by the power of God, then the kingdom of God is at work right before your eyes. ²¹When a strong man guards his own house, everything is safe. ²²But if someone stronger comes along during the night and attacks the man and takes the weapon he had to defend himself, nothing in the house is safe. Then the stronger man looks over the spoils and takes what he wants. ²³Those who are not for me are against me. If they're not gathering for me, they're scattering.

A Demonic Spirit Cast Out Can Return

²⁴"Those who know me but are not for me, are like a man who was freed from a demon. The demon became restless because he couldn't find another victim to control, so he said to himself, 'Let me go back to the man I once possessed to see if I can move back in.' ²⁵When he checked, he found the man's heart to be clean but empty of gratitude and a willingness to stand for me. ²⁶So the demon invited seven other demons even worse than he, to come and join him. All eight of them moved into this man's heart and made themselves at home. So now the man is worse off than before."

Blessings on Those Who Listen

²⁷It so happened as Jesus was talking, that a certain woman in the crowd called out to Him, "Blessings on the mother who carried you and nursed you." ²⁸Jesus responded, "More important, blessings be

on those who listen to the word of God and then practice it.”

People Looking for a Sign

²⁹As the people crowded around Him, Jesus said, “Many in this generation are hard to convince of anything. They’re always looking for some supernatural sign as evidence of whether they should believe in me or not. But the things they’re looking for won’t happen. The miracle that will happen will be similar to what happened to Jonah. ³⁰Just as Jonah’s resurrection from the sea was a sign to the Ninevites that he was sent by God, so my resurrection will be a sign to this generation that I am sent by God. ³¹On the Day of Judgment, the Queen of Sheba will stand as a witness against this generation because she traveled a long way to listen to what Solomon had to say, and now One is here who is greater than Solomon. ³²On the Day of Judgment, the people of Ninevah also will witness against this generation because when Jonah preached to them, they repented. Now One is here who is greater than Jonah.

What You Look for You See

³³“No one, after he lights a lamp, hides it under a basket, but he sets it on a lampstand in the center of the house so everyone who comes in can see. ³⁴Your eyes also are like candles that bring light. When you look for good, everything looks better. But when you look for evil, everything looks dark. ³⁵So be careful. If you continually look for evil, you’ll soon find your heart full of darkness. ³⁶If you look for good, you’ll see it all around you, and soon you’ll shine like a bright candle giving plenty of light.”

The Pharisees and Lawyers

³⁷About this time a certain Pharisee asked Jesus home for dinner. Jesus accepted the invitation. ³⁸When the Pharisee noticed that Jesus didn’t wash his hands the same way the Pharisees

did, he was disappointed but said nothing. ³⁹Then Jesus said to him, “I know how careful the Pharisees are about washing their hands as well as their cups and plates. But many of them care very little about how clean they are on the inside. ⁴⁰How foolish can they be? Didn’t the same God who created the outside of us also create the inside of us? ⁴¹Give from what you have to feed the poor. Then you will be clean on the inside.

⁴²“But woe to those Pharisees who tithe the smallest garden herbs such as mint, but forget all about loving God and being kind to others. You ought to tithe, but why be so meticulous about one and leave the other undone? ⁴³Woe to those Pharisees who love to sit in the most prominent seats in the synagogue and want everyone to notice them as they walk through the markets. ⁴⁴Woe to those Pharisees who are spiritually dead. They are like unmarked graves which men walk over without knowing it.”

⁴⁵Then one of the other guests, a young lawyer, said, “Teacher, when you talk about the Pharisees that way, you make church lawyers look bad too.”

⁴⁶Jesus said to him, “There are church lawyers who do the same thing. They load people down with so many civil and religious restrictions that people can hardly move, yet they won’t lift a finger to help them. They need to make things easier for people, not harder. ⁴⁷Woe to those Pharisees and lawyers who build beautiful memorials to honor the prophets whom their forefathers executed when their own spirit is no different. ⁴⁸By not changing their lives, they’re approving of what their forefathers did and are ready to do the same thing today. ⁴⁹God in His wisdom said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, and some they will execute and others they will persecute.’ ⁵⁰So the present generation will reap the consequences of what their forefathers did, ⁵¹starting with Abel, who was killed by his own brother, on down to the prophet Zechariah, who

was killed in the Temple between the altar and Holy Place. I tell you, there is no way this generation with its present attitude can be held guiltless. ⁵²Woe to teachers who take away the people's knowledge of how to enter the kingdom. They claim to be experts but don't understand the way to heaven themselves, and by their imposed traditions, they keep others from being saved."

⁵³When Jesus finished, He left the house and the young lawyer, the teachers and the Pharisees left with Him. Outside, they bitterly attacked Him with questions, hoping He would say something under pressure for which they could arrest Him. ⁵⁴From then on they acted more like informers than religious leaders, always spying on Him and waiting to collect any evidence they could find against Him.

Hypocrisy

12 Meanwhile, so many people had come to see Jesus that they were almost trampling on each other. So Jesus led them out of town to a place where they could spread out. While waiting for the people to settle down, He turned to His disciples and said, "Be careful of the yeast of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy. ²One day everything that is covered up will be uncovered and everything done in secret will be made known. ³There is nothing you can whisper to each other in the dark or say secretly that won't be known as if it had been shouted from the roof tops. You can't hide things from God.

God Cares About You

⁴I'm talking to you as my friends. Don't be afraid of what people will do to you. If you're arrested for my sake and they kill you, they've only killed your body but they can't do any more than that to you. ⁵The only One to stand in awe of is God, who can not only destroy your body but also has power to destroy you in the lake of fire, He is the One to fear. ⁶But don't

think of Him as being harsh and unkind. Look at how He cares for the sparrows. You can buy five of them for just pennies, yet your heavenly Father doesn't forget even one of them. ⁷In fact, He knows the number of hairs you have on your head. So don't be afraid. You're worth more than a thousand sparrows.

Don't Be Afraid of Me

⁸"I want to assure you that whoever is not ashamed to acknowledge me as his Savior and Lord, I will not be ashamed to claim as mine before all the angels of God, ⁹but if he denies knowing me, I have no choice but to disown him before the whole universe. ¹⁰If anyone says anything against me but repents, he'll be forgiven, but if he persists in fighting against the Holy Spirit, there is no other way to reach him so he can be forgiven. ¹¹When the time comes that they arrest you and bring you to trial, whether before rulers of a local synagogue, before a judge or before anyone else in authority, don't worry about what you're going to say or how you might answer their questions. ¹²The Holy Spirit will help you know what to say."

The Foolish Rich Man

¹³Someone in the crowd interrupted, "Teacher, please talk to my brother and tell him to equally divide the inheritance our parents left us." ¹⁴Jesus answered, "No one appointed me as judge to arbitrate an inheritance settlement between you and your brother." ¹⁵Then He said to everyone present, "Be careful not to focus too much on wealth and in the process become covetous and greedy, because life is more than possessions and wealth." ¹⁶Then He told them a parable: "A certain rich man owned much land, and year after year his farms produced large crops. ¹⁷Soon he didn't know where to store them all. He thought to himself, 'What am I going to do with all these crops? Where am I going to store them?' ¹⁸Then he said, 'I know what I'll do! I'll tear down the old

barns and build bigger ones; then I'll have plenty of room for my crops. ¹⁹After that I'll retire and take life easy and will have all I want to eat, drink and be happy.' ²⁰But after the man had made plans for his future retirement, God said, 'I'm sorry you were so foolish because tonight you will die. Now who's going to enjoy all the things you worked so hard for?' ²¹That's how it is for those who think only of this life and make no effort to know God and to prepare for the next life."

Don't Worry

²²Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "Don't worry so much about your body—what to eat or what to wear. ²³Life is more than food and clothes. ²⁴Look at the birds; they can't think ahead from one day to the next. They make no plans about when to sow, when to reap, or what barn to use for storage. Yet God provides for them. If He does that for them, can you imagine how much more He's ready to help you? ²⁵There's not one of you who by concentration can add even a few inches to your height. ²⁶If you can't do a simple thing like that, then why worry about the things beyond your control? ²⁷Look at the lilies growing here. They can't work or weave or choose their own shades of color, yet even Solomon in all his costly splendor, was not dressed so beautifully. ²⁸If God makes the wildflowers of the field so striking when they last only until someone mows them down and throws them into the fire, don't you think He will provide for your needs? Why do you have so little faith in Him? ²⁹Stop being so concerned about what to eat and drink. ³⁰That's what unbelievers worry about. You have a Father who loves you and knows what you need. ³¹Make His kingdom your first priority, and He will provide what you need.

³²"Don't worry because you're so few in number. One day it will be your Father's delight to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell what you don't need and use the money to help others. Buy yourselves

clothes that will last so that you don't have to keep wasting money. Then deposit what you've saved in the bank of heaven where it's safe, where thieves can't break in, and where moths don't destroy your clothes. ³⁴Where you put your money, that's where your heart will be.

Two Different Servants

³⁵"Always be ready for service and keep your lamps burning. ³⁶Be like servants eagerly waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet already begun at his father's house to pick up his bride. When he comes and knocks on the door, they'll be ready to open it for him. ³⁷How happy these servants will be when their master comes and invites them to sit down with him at his banquet table while he personally serves them. ³⁸So whenever he decides to pick up his bride, whether it is in the evening or late at night, he'll be delighted to find his servants waiting for him and they'll be happy to see him. ³⁹To watch and wait means to be as alert as a homeowner watching for the thief he was told would be coming. He stays awake to protect his house because he doesn't know when the thief will come. ⁴⁰So you, too, must watch and be ready because the heavenly Bridegroom will come back when His servants least expect Him."

⁴¹Then Peter said to Jesus, "Is this parable just for us or for everyone?" ⁴²Jesus answered, "Which servant does a master put in charge of things? Isn't it the one he trusts to see that his other servants are fed and taken care of at the right time? ⁴³When his master comes and finds his servant doing the work he was given to do, that servant will be very happy. ⁴⁴I tell you the truth. The master will put that servant in charge of everything he owns because he knows he can trust him, even when he's away. ⁴⁵On the other hand, if a servant says to himself, 'Who knows when my master will come back?' and starts to use his fellow servants to advance himself,

drinks on the job, mistreats those under him, and does what he pleases, ⁴⁶the master will come back when the man least expects him and at a time when he's acting irresponsibly. Then the master will have no choice but to cut him off and put his name on the list of those who can't be trusted. ⁴⁷You can be sure that the servant who knew what his master wanted but didn't do it will be held responsible and will be punished. ⁴⁸If a servant doesn't know what he's supposed to do and because of this doesn't do it, the master will not hold him responsible. Those who know what is right are expected to do it.

The Gospel Divides

⁴⁹"I have come to start a spiritual fire in this world, and it will soon be lit. ⁵⁰But the price for this is my baptism of suffering, and I'm terribly distressed over it until it's finished. ⁵¹Do you think I have come to usher in an era of peace? Well, you're mistaken. My coming brings inward serenity and peace, but often it will bring discord and division. ⁵²In a household of five—three will be for me and two against me or two for me and three against me. ⁵³You'll find fathers opposing their sons and sons opposing their fathers. Mothers will oppose their daughters and daughters their mothers. Mothers-in-law will turn against their daughters-in-law and daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law."

Understanding the Time

⁵⁴Jesus turned to the people and said, "When you see dark clouds coming out of the west, you say, 'We're going to have rain,' and it rains. ⁵⁵When you notice that the wind is coming out of the south, you say, 'It's going to get hot,' and it does. ⁵⁶How can you be so sure about the weather and so uncertain when it comes to interpreting the signs that point to me?

⁵⁷"Why don't you make up your mind about me and decide for yourself? Don't

let others keep influencing you. ⁵⁸When someone threatens to take you to court, don't you try to settle things quickly with the other party? Otherwise, you'll have to face the judge, and if he finds you guilty, he has no choice but to lock you up. ⁵⁹When that happens, you'll not be released from jail until you've done your time or paid your debts."

Change Your Ways of Thinking

13 About this time some people told Jesus about the Galilean pilgrims who had recently gone down to Jerusalem to the Temple to offer sacrifices. While they were there, a riot broke out and Pilate had sent his troops to stop it. The soldiers came into the Temple and slaughtered everyone in sight, including the Galilean pilgrims. ²Jesus said, "If you're telling me this because you think they did something bad for God to let this happen, you're wrong. Just because these pilgrims were caught in a riot and killed does not mean that they were bad people. ³However, there's one thing that's sure. If you don't change your ways and stop judging people's characters by what happens to them, then your chance of being given eternal life is as slim as their chance was of escaping the sword. ⁴What happened to them in the Temple is no different from what happened to the eighteen people who were killed when the tower they were building near the pool of Siloam collapsed and fell on them. Do you think that they were more wicked than anyone else in Jerusalem? ⁵Absolutely not. So unless you repent and change your way of thinking, you will lose your life forever."

Cut Down the Unfruitful Fig Tree

⁶Then Jesus told them about God's mercy, saying, "A certain landowner had a special fig tree planted in his orchard. After it took root and grew, he expected it to produce some fruit. But when he went to look, he didn't find any. ⁷After three years of waiting for the tree to produce some fruit,

the owner said to his gardener, 'We've waited long enough. Cut it down; it's only taking up space and wasting good soil.'⁸ Then the gardener said to the owner, 'Master, let's give it one more chance. Let me loosen up the soil a little bit and fertilize the tree, then let's see what happens.'⁹ If it still doesn't bear fruit, then let's cut it down.' And the landowner agreed."

Jesus Heals a Woman on the Sabbath

¹⁰One Sabbath while Jesus was teaching in a local synagogue, ¹¹a woman came in with severe curvature of the spine and couldn't even straighten up. She had been that way for eighteen years. In addition, she was harassed by a demon. ¹²Jesus called her to come over. Then He said, "Woman, you are now free from the demon and from your disability. Come, stand up straight."¹³ Then He touched her bent shoulders, and immediately she straightened up and started praising God. ¹⁴When the man in charge of the synagogue saw this, he became angry and spoke out against it because Jesus had healed someone on the Sabbath, which, according to Jewish tradition, was forbidden. The man said, "There are six days in the week during which we can practice medicine, but we are not to do it on the Sabbath."¹⁵ Then Jesus looked at the Pharisees and said, "You hypocrites! There's not a person here who would not loosen his donkey or his ox on the Sabbath and lead them to be watered. How is this any different? ¹⁶Shouldn't this woman, who is a daughter of Abraham and whom Satan has controlled for the past eighteen years, be set free from her imprisonment on the Sabbath?" ¹⁷By the time He had finished speaking, even those who hated Him were ashamed of their attitude, and soon the whole congregation was praising God for what Jesus had done.

Parable of the Mustard Seed

¹⁸Then He continued teaching them, saying, "What is the kingdom of God all about and what should we compare it to?

¹⁹Well, it's as tiny as a mustard seed. A man takes this tiny seed and plants it in his garden, and it springs up and becomes a twelve-foot plant, so big that the birds happily build their nests in it.

Parable of the Yeast

²⁰"What else can we compare the kingdom of God to? ²¹It's like yeast which women use when they bake bread. They mix it in with the dough and the whole batch quietly rises and becomes ready for baking."

Not All Enter Heaven

²²After this, Jesus made His way toward Jerusalem, stopping here and there at villages along the way, teaching the people as He went. ²³In one of the villages someone asked Him, "Lord, how many people will get to heaven, a lot or a few? Isn't heaven only for those who are righteous?" ²⁴Jesus said, "How many will be saved or who will be there shouldn't be your concern. You need to focus on your own life. Keep your eye on the narrow door that leads to heaven. Many are hoping and desiring to get in but they never will, because all they do is talk about it. ²⁵Once the Master of the house rises and shuts the door, some will find themselves outside. They'll knock and call out, 'Lord, please open the door.' The Master will answer, 'I can't open the door because I don't know who you are.'²⁶ Then they'll say, 'We ate and drank together while you were here on earth, and you taught in our villages. Surely you know who we are!' ²⁷But He'll answer them, 'I'm telling you the truth. I really don't know you or where you're from. Your self-righteousness condemns you. Go away.'²⁸ Then the truth of it will hit them and they will grind their teeth in anguish. It will be especially painful when they see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets inside the city and find themselves on the outside. ²⁹People will come from the east and the west, the north and the south, and will sit down

with Abraham and the prophets in the kingdom of God. ³⁰Some who were the least thought of but accepted the gospel will be inside. Others who thought they were first in line but did not accept the gospel will be on the outside."

Jerusalem Will Pay for Her Deeds

³¹Later that day, certain Pharisees came to Jesus and said, "You had better leave this area quickly because Herod wants to kill you." ³²Jesus looked at them and said, "Go back and tell that fox that no matter what he does, he'll not be able to kill me. I will heal and teach the people here for another two days. When I finish my work, then I'll leave. ³³I must heal the sick and cast out devils, then on the third day I'll leave for Jerusalem. For reasons Herod doesn't understand, I must be killed in Jerusalem as the other prophets were, and not by him here in Galilee.

³⁴"Jerusalem has killed many good prophets and stoned them to death when they brought the people a message from God. I would love to gather all the Israelites together and protect them as a mother hen gathers her little chicks under her wings, but they are not willing. ³⁵Soon your Temple will be empty of God's glory, and a few years later it will be totally destroyed. I'm telling you, you won't appreciate the salvation I've offered you until you see me coming in the clouds of heaven. By then it will be too late to say, 'Blessings on Him who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Jesus Heals a Sick Man on the Sabbath

14 Now it so happened that Jesus was invited to Sabbath dinner by one of the leading Pharisees. While He was there, some among the guests were asked to watch Him carefully to see if He did or said anything for which they could have Him arrested. ²There was a man among the guests who was suffering from swollen arms and legs caused by excessive body fluid. He asked Jesus to heal him. ³Jesus turned to the lawyers and Pharisees sit-

ting there and said, "Is it right to heal someone on the Sabbath?" ⁴Nobody answered. So Jesus healed him, and the man went away rejoicing. ⁵Then He turned to them and, noticing their distress, said, "Which one of you would leave your ox or donkey in a ditch on the Sabbath? Not one of you. You'd pull it out without a minute's hesitation." ⁶Still they didn't say anything or try to answer His question.

Sit in the Back and You'll Be Invited Up

⁷Then He told them a parable because He had noticed how quickly the Pharisees were to pick the best seats at the table. So He said, ⁸"When you go to a wedding, don't sit up front where the relatives sit and don't sit near the table of honor at the reception. Someone more important than you might come along and find you sitting where he's supposed to be. ⁹Then the host will have the unwelcome task of walking to the front and saying to you, 'Would you kindly move and give this man his seat?' Embarrassed, you'll have to get up and move to another seat near the back. ¹⁰When you're invited to any social function or to someone's house, choose to sit in an inconspicuous place. If there's a vacancy near the front, the host will say, 'Friend, why don't you come sit up here? Here's a chair just for you.' Then you will be honored in front of all the other guests. ¹¹Everyone who tries to appear great will one day be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will one day be honored."

¹²Jesus turned to the host and said, "When you plan to have guests, don't always invite your friends, your fellow synagogue members, your relatives or your well-to-do neighbors, because they'll return the favor and invite you to their house. ¹³You need to invite some poor people over to your house, as well as those who are blind or handicapped. ¹⁴Then you'll feel good in your heart. They can't invite you back, but you'll be repaid when the righteous are raised from the dead."

Parable of the Wedding Banquet

¹⁵When one of the guests who sat near Jesus heard this, he said, "Happy is the man who knows he will be at the great marriage supper in the kingdom of God."
¹⁶Then Jesus decided to help him understand what being at the great supper depended on. So He said, "One day a certain rich man made a great feast to which he invited his neighbors and friends.
¹⁷When things were ready, he sent his servants out to tell those who had been invited to come, because everything was ready for the celebration.
¹⁸But all those who had been invited started making excuses because they didn't want to stop what they were doing. One of them said, 'I just bought a piece of property and need to take another look at it. Please excuse me.'
¹⁹Another one said, 'I just bought five teams of oxen and I need to hitch them up and try them out. Please excuse me.'
²⁰And still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come. I'm sure you understand. Please excuse me.'
²¹So the servants came back and told their master what his neighbors and friends had said. The rich man was terribly disappointed. Then he told his servants, 'Quickly go out into the streets and alleys of the city and invite anyone you see, the poor, the handicapped, those who can't walk and those who can't see.'
²²Soon the servants returned and said, 'Master, we did what you said and there's still room.'
²³Then their master said, 'This time go outside the city into the country lanes and outlying communities and urge people to come so that my house can be full of guests.
²⁴I'm telling you, not one of those who rejected my invitation will be allowed in.'"

Count the Cost

²⁵Then Jesus left the Pharisee's house and a crowd followed Him. He turned to them and said, ²⁶"If any of you want to follow me but you care more about what your father and mother, your wife and children or your brothers and sisters

think about me, you can't possibly be my disciple.
²⁷If you're not willing to carry that kind of a cross for me, you're not really my disciple, no matter what you say.
²⁸You see, it's like this: When you plan to build a house, don't you first sit down and figure out what it will cost to see if you have enough money to finish it?
²⁹If you don't, you may find that you only have enough money to lay the foundation, and you'll be the talk of the neighborhood.
³⁰People will say, 'Look at that! He started to build a house and can't finish it!'
³¹Do you think a king would decide to go to war without first consulting his generals to see if with a force of ten thousand he could defeat his enemy who is coming with a force of twenty thousand?
³²He will do this when the other king is still a long way off. If he thinks he can't defeat him, he'll send messengers to him and ask for terms of peace.
³³In the same way, not one of you can be my disciple unless you are willing to give up anything that holds you back.

Worthless Salt

³⁴"Salt is good for seasoning if it retains its zesty taste, but if it loses its flavor, what good is it?
³⁵It's not even any good for the soil or suitable to mix with manure; its only use is to harden things. That's why people throw it on the roadway. Listen and think about what I've said before you decide to be my disciple."

The Lost Sheep

15 It seemed as if only those who were considered sinners were the ones following Jesus and interested in what He had to say.
²When the scribes and Pharisees saw this, they turned to the people and began to complain, saying, "Look! This man welcomes prostitutes and sinners and even eats with them. How can he be a prophet?"

³Jesus responded to their criticism by telling them the following parables: ⁴"If you owned a hundred sheep, wouldn't you be concerned if one of them were missing?"

Wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine peacefully grazing in someone else's care and go looking for that one lost sheep until you found it? ⁵When you found it, what would you do? You would lay it across your shoulders and come back singing. ⁶Then you would tell your friends and neighbors that you had found the lost sheep, and they would rejoice with you. ⁷That's the way things are in heaven. When one sinner sees that he's doing wrong, confesses his sins, and decides to change his life, the joy in heaven over this one person is something you can't imagine. The rejoicing is over the one who repents, not over the ninety-nine who are at home and don't need to repent.

The Lost Coin

⁸"What would a woman do if she had ten valuable coins and lost one of them? Wouldn't she light a candle and sweep every part of the house, looking in every corner to find that coin? ⁹When she found it, what would she do? She would go to her friends and neighbors and say, 'Guess what! You know that valuable coin I lost? Well, I just found it! I'm so happy, I couldn't help telling you!' ¹⁰That's how it is in heaven. The angels are jubilant over one person who is brought back to God through repentance."

The Lost Son

¹¹He continued: "A certain man had two sons. ¹²The younger of the two was restless and wanted to leave home. One day he said to his father, 'Father, I would like to have my inheritance while I'm still young and can enjoy it.' The father reluctantly divided the inheritance between his two boys and gave the younger his share of the money. ¹³After a few days, the younger son got his things together and left. He went to another country and there spent all his money in riotous living, throwing big parties and having a good time. ¹⁴When all his money was gone, a famine hit that country, and he began to be in need but couldn't find a

job anywhere. ¹⁵Finally, a man hired him to watch his pigs. In desperation the young man went to take care of them. ¹⁶He was so hungry that even what the pigs ate looked tempting to him. But no one offered to feed him. ¹⁷He finally came to his senses and said, 'What am I doing here? Just think how many people my father has working for him—all well paid and well fed. In fact, there's usually so much food left over that they have to throw some of it away! And here I sit among pigs! ¹⁸I'm going home! I'm going to say to my father, "Father, please forgive me for sinning against God and against you. ¹⁹I'm not fit to be called your son, but please give me a job as one of your hired workers."

²⁰"As weak as he was, he got up and made his way home. But while he was still a long way off, his father, who had been watching the distant road, spotted him. His heart went out to his son with great compassion and love. He got up and ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹When the boy regained control of his emotions, he said, 'Father, please forgive me. I've sinned against God and against you. I'm not fit to be called your son. . . .' ²²But before he could finish, his father turned to the servants who also had come running and said, 'Quick, run back to the house and bring my best robe for my son; bring my ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. ²³Then go out and find one of the best calves we have, slaughter it and prepare a feast! We're going to celebrate! ²⁴This is my son who was lost! I thought he was dead, but he's home!' The servants did what the father asked them to, and everyone began to celebrate.

²⁵"The older son had been working out in the field when all this happened. When he came near the house, he heard music and saw everyone dancing for joy. ²⁶So he called one of the servants and asked him what this was all about. ²⁷The servant said, 'Your brother has just come home! Your father asked us to slaughter one of the prize calves and prepare a

feast to celebrate his safe return!"
²⁸Then the older son became angry and refused to join in the celebration. So his father went looking for him. When he found him, he begged him to come see his brother and take part in the festivities. ²⁹But he said to his father, 'All these years while my brother was gone I've worked hard for you to build up the farm, and whatever you asked me to do, I did. Yet you never even offered to slaughter a goat for me and my friends so we could have a party like this. ³⁰But as soon as this son of yours comes home from wasting the family fortune on prostitutes and riotous living, you throw a party for him!' ³¹Then the father said, 'Son, the farm and everything I have belongs to you; but your brother has nothing but us. ³²So it's right to celebrate his homecoming and be glad he's back. You see, I really thought he was dead, but he's alive. Don't you think that's reason enough to celebrate?'"

The Shrewd Manager

16 Then Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "A certain wealthy man had a manager who was accused of fraud and waste. ²So the owner called the manager in and asked him, 'What's this I hear about you? We'd better call in the auditors to check the accounts. If it's true that you've defrauded the company, I'll have to let you go.' ³Then the manager said to himself, 'What am I going to do? When the auditors look at the books and discover what I did, I'll be fired. Then where will I go to find another job? I'm too old to dig ditches, I won't qualify for unemployment, and it's just too embarrassing to beg.' ⁴He thought a minute, then said, 'I know what I'll do! I'll obligate some people to me so that when I'm dismissed, they'll gladly be my friends and support me.' ⁵So he called everyone who owed the company money and said to the first one who came, 'How much do you owe the company?' ⁶He replied, 'Eight hun-

dred gallons of olive oil.' Then the manager said, 'Let me have your bill and I'll change it to read four hundred.' ⁷When the next person came, the manager said to him, 'How much do you owe the company?' He said, 'One thousand bushels of wheat.' The manager said, 'Here, let's see your bill. I'll change it to read eight hundred.' ⁸When the owner of the company heard about this, he called the manager in and complimented him on his forethought and his shrewdness in planning ahead, then he fired him. It's amazing how clever secular people are when it comes to planning for the future."

⁹Then Jesus turned back to the Pharisees and said, "You need to be God's friends and secure your future in heaven as this manager did in securing his future on earth. ¹⁰Whoever can be trusted with little can also be trusted with much, and the person who is dishonest in secular things will also be dishonest in spiritual things. ¹¹If you can't be trusted to handle someone else's money which has no eternal value, how can you be trusted to handle spiritual riches which last forever? ¹²If you can't manage the things that belong to one man, how can you expect someone else to hire you to manage things for him? ¹³You can't serve two masters and love them both; you'll have to decide for one or the other. You cannot serve God and money."

¹⁴This really bothered some of the Pharisees, especially those who loved being rich. So when Jesus finished talking to them, they made fun of Him because He was poor. ¹⁵"All you're doing," Jesus said, "is trying to justify yourselves in front of these people. But God knows your hearts, and that which is so important to you means nothing to Him."

The Law Will Not Pass Away

¹⁶"The law of Moses and the writings of the prophets were the only guide people had until John the Baptist came. but since then, the kingdom of God is being preached and people everywhere are re-

sponding and eager to get in. ¹⁷It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than it is for one stroke of a pen to be taken from the law of God.

¹⁸“The principles of the law are amplified in my teaching. One case in point is adultery. Any man who divorces his wife just so he can marry someone else is committing adultery, and he who supports divorce so he can wed another man’s wife is also committing adultery.”

The Rich Man and Lazarus

¹⁹Then He said to the Pharisees, “You keep telling people the story you put together about a rich man who dressed in fine clothes and lived luxuriously. ²⁰In your story, there is also a poor man called Lazarus who had open sores all over his body. Every day he sat outside the rich man’s gate begging. ²¹He was so hungry that he wished he could have some of the scraps that the rich man fed his dogs. In fact, these same dogs would go down to the gate and lick the poor man’s sores. ²²As you tell it, the day came when the poor man died and was carried by angels into glory to sit beside Abraham. Soon afterward, the rich man also died and he, too, was buried. ²³Then he looked up out of hell where he was being tormented and saw Lazarus sitting in glory next to Abraham. ²⁴So he cried out, ‘Father Abraham! Have mercy on me! Please send Lazarus down here so he can dip his finger in some water to cool my tongue, because the fires here are terrible!’

²⁵“But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember how you treated Lazarus when you were both still on earth? Remember what a luxurious life you lived while he suffered and didn’t have enough to eat? Now things are reversed. He’s in glory sitting next to me while you’re the one who’s suffering down there in hell. ²⁶Besides, there’s a great distance between heaven and hell, so no one from here can go down there nor can anyone from there come up here.’ ²⁷Then, according to your story, the rich man said, ‘I beg you,

Father Abraham, if no one can come down here to help me, then please send Lazarus to my father’s house. ²⁸Someone needs to talk to my five brothers so that they won’t do the same thing I did and end up suffering in this torturous place the way I am.’ ²⁹Abraham said, ‘Moses and the prophets are very clear as to what your brothers should do.’ ³⁰The rich man said, ‘They don’t listen to what is written. But if someone who died would go to them, I know they would listen to him and repent and give to the poor.’ ³¹Then your story ends by Abraham saying, ‘If your brothers are not willing to listen to Moses and the prophets, they won’t listen to anyone, even if he rose from the dead.’ So you see, you yourselves teach people that they should listen to the Scriptures and that what they do in this life will affect them in the next one.”

Forgiving Your Brother

17 Then Jesus turned to His disciples and said, “It’s impossible to stop temptations from coming, but what a terrible thing it is for one person to lead others into sin! ²It would be better for someone to have a large millstone tied to his neck and be thrown into the sea than to cause a little child or a new believer to stumble. ³So be careful how you relate to your brother. If he sins against you, point out his error, and if he says he’s sorry, forgive him. ⁴If he does you wrong seven times in one day and comes to you every time and says, ‘I’m really sorry, please forgive me,’ then forgive him.”

Faith and a Servant’s Duty

⁵One of His disciples said, “Lord, please give us more faith!” ⁶Jesus said, “Your faith might be as tiny as a mustard seed, but if you talk faith and live out your faith, God will make it grow. God can do anything. If you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Pull yourself up by the roots and plant yourself in the sea’—if God wanted it to happen that way, it would.

⁷“Suppose one of you had a servant whom you hired to work your fields and to feed and care for your cattle. When he finished his chores, would you wait on him and cook his dinner? ⁸No. The servant would come home and wash up, change his clothes and prepare supper. After the family has eaten, then he would eat. ⁹After your servant prepares supper, do you reward him as if he had done something wonderful? No. You expect him to do what he was hired to do. ¹⁰It should be the same with you. After you have done what you were asked to do, you need to say to yourselves, ‘We are undeserving servants. We have only done what our Master expected us to do.’”

Jesus Heals Ten Lepers

¹¹As Jesus went toward Jerusalem, He walked along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As He approached a certain village, ten lepers came to meet him, stopped some distance away ¹³and called out to Him, “Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴Jesus could see their leprosy and simply said, “Go show yourselves to the priest.” They left, and on the way they were healed. ¹⁵One of them, when he saw that he was healed, ran back to Jesus, praising God as loudly as he could. ¹⁶He fell on his knees, bowed to the ground and thanked Jesus for what He had done for him. And he was a Samaritan! ¹⁷Jesus asked, “Weren’t there ten of you healed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸Did no one from Israel come back to praise God?” ¹⁹Then He said, “Get up and be on your way; your faith in me made it possible for you to be healed.”

The Coming of the Son of Man

²⁰Some of the Pharisees asked Jesus, “When will the kingdom of God come?” He replied, “The kingdom of God will not come in the way you’re expecting it to come. ²¹You can’t say, ‘Look, here!’ or ‘Look, there!’ because the kingdom of God starts inside of you.”

²²Then Jesus said to His disciples, “The

time will soon come when you’ll look back to these days I’ve spent with you and wish they would come back, but they’ll be gone forever. ²³If people say to you, ‘We saw Him over here,’ or ‘We saw Him over there,’ don’t go running everywhere looking for me and don’t follow people who say they’ve seen me. ²⁴When I come back, my glory will light up the sky from one end to the other just like lightning does. ²⁵But before that happens, the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by His own people.

²⁶Just before the Son of Man returns in glory, this earth will be like it was in the days of Noah. ²⁷Back then, people were engrossed in eating, drinking, falling in love and marrying, up to the very day Noah went into the ark. Then the flood came and they were all drowned. ²⁸It was the same way in the days of Lot. People were all caught up in eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting and building houses. ²⁹All this was going on up to the very day that Lot left Sodom, then fire fell from heaven and destroyed them all. ³⁰That’s how it will be when the Son of Man comes back.

³¹“In the near future you’ll have to make some quick decisions just to save your lives. When that time comes, if you’re on the flat roof of your house, don’t come down to pack; or if you’re out on the farm, don’t come back home to get some things you might need. ³²Remember what happened to Lot’s wife who was so in love with her possessions she couldn’t let go. ³³In the near future when the Roman armies surround Jerusalem, anyone who tries to save what he has will lose his life, but anyone willing to lose everything he has will save his life. ³⁴In the last days there will be a lot of surprises. Two people might be sharing the same bed. One will be ready to meet the Son of Man and the other will not. ³⁵Two women might be working together at the same mill. One will be ready for my coming and the other will not. ³⁶Or two farmers might be working

near each other in the field. One will be ready to meet me and the other will not.”³⁷ The disciples asked, “When will all this take place?” Jesus answered, “When people see vultures sitting in the trees, they know that a life is about to end. And when God’s people see all these things happening around them, they will know that my coming is near.”

The Persistent Widow

18 Then Jesus told His disciples a story to encourage them to always take time to pray so they wouldn’t become discouraged.² He said, “In a certain town there was a judge who had no respect for God and didn’t care much about people.³ In that same town there was a widow who repeatedly went to see the judge and pleaded with him, ‘Please settle my case justly and don’t let my enemies take what rightfully belongs to me.’⁴ For a long time the judge refused to hear the case, but after a while he said to himself, ‘Even though I have no fear of God and don’t care much about other people’s problems,⁵ in order to get this woman off my back, next time she comes I will settle this case once and for all before she wears me out.’”⁶ Jesus asked them, “What do you think this godless judge did? He finally gave in and responded.⁷ Do you think that God is like this wicked judge? Do you think He won’t do anything for His people until they plead with Him so much that He has to do something just to stop them from bothering Him?⁸ I want to tell you that even though God sometimes seems to wait before He answers, He is eager to answer as quickly as possible. He will see that justice is done. But the real question is this: When God comes to set up His earthly kingdom, how many people will He find who still have faith in Him?”

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

⁹ Jesus told His disciples another story aimed at those religious leaders who prided themselves in doing everything just right and despised others who

didn’t.¹⁰ Jesus said, “Two men went to the synagogue to pray. One was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector.¹¹ The Pharisee stood up near the front and prayed to himself, saying, ‘Dear God, I want to thank you that I’m not like others, these money grabbers, liars, adulterers, or even this tax collector in the back of the synagogue who has sold out to the Romans.¹² I fast twice each week and pay an honest tithe on all my income.’¹³ Now the tax collector stood in the back of the synagogue, not feeling worthy to even come to the front or look up to God. But he bowed his head, quietly beat on his chest, and prayed, ‘O, God, forgive me. I’m a sinner who desperately needs your help.’”¹⁴ Jesus added, “I want to tell you that the tax collector went home forgiven, not the Pharisee. Those who think they’re righteous and are filled with pride don’t feel their need of help, but those who realize their need are humble and God will honor them.”

Jesus Blesses Little Children

¹⁵ As Jesus finished, some women pushed through the crowd to have Him bless their little ones. But when the disciples saw what was happening and how many children there were, they stopped the women and told them not to bother Jesus.¹⁶ When Jesus saw this, He said to His disciples, “Don’t stop them. Let them bring their little ones, because the kingdom of God belongs to those with childlike faith.¹⁷ To tell you the truth, unless you are open to the kingdom of God as these little children are, you’ll never enter it.”

The Rich Young Ruler

¹⁸ About this time a rich young man came to Jesus and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?”¹⁹ Jesus answered, “Why did you call me good? No one is good, except God. Are you calling me good because you believe I have come from God?”²⁰ To inherit eternal life, you need to love God and keep His commandments. You know

what they are: Don't commit adultery. Don't kill. Don't steal. Don't lie. Respect and care for your father and mother, and so on." ²¹The young man said, "I've kept the commandments ever since I can remember." ²²Then Jesus said to him, "That's good, but you still need to do one more thing. You need to overcome your love for money. So go and sell what you have, and use the money to help the poor, then come and follow me." ²³The young man became very sad at what he had heard, because he was very rich.

Can the Rich Be Saved?

²⁴When Jesus saw how sad he looked as he walked away, He turned to His disciples and said, "It's not easy for people who are rich and have all the conveniences of life to give up their comforts and take part in proclaiming the kingdom of God. ²⁵It's almost as hard to get rich people to give themselves fully to the kingdom of God as it is for a camel to force its way through the eye of a needle." ²⁶When the people standing near Jesus heard this, they said, "Who can make it to heaven if the rich people whom God has blessed can't make it?" ²⁷Jesus replied, "What seems impossible to you is not impossible for God." ²⁸Then Peter said, "Lord, we have done what you asked that young man to do. We've left everything and followed you all over Israel. What will you do for us?" ²⁹Jesus said, "Not one of you who has left his home, his parents, his brothers and sisters, or his wife and children to follow me will go unrewarded. ³⁰In this life, you'll experience a joy and satisfaction that no amount of money can buy, and in addition to this, you'll be given eternal life."

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection a Third Time

³¹Once Jesus was alone with the twelve, He said to them, "Listen, we're now going to Jerusalem, and everything that was written by the prophets about the Son of Man will happen. ³²He'll be ar-

rested by His own people and turned over to the Romans for execution. The Romans will mock Him, insult Him and spit in His face. Then they'll whip Him and sentence Him to death by crucifixion, ³³but three days later, He will rise from the grave." ³⁴The disciples didn't understand what He was talking about. To them it seemed as if He was talking about someone else.

Jesus Heals Two Blind Men

³⁵On their way to Jerusalem as they neared Jericho, they saw a blind man and his blind friend sitting by the roadside begging. ³⁶Hearing crowds of people passing by, the blind man asked what the noise was all about. ³⁷People told him that Jesus from Nazareth was coming and that He was surrounded by crowds of people. ³⁸Then the blind man cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, please have mercy on us!" ³⁹The people scolded him and told him to stop his shouting and be quiet, but he shouted all the louder, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" ⁴⁰When Jesus reached the place where the blind men sat, He stopped and asked the people to bring the blind men to Him. When they came, Jesus asked them, ⁴¹"What do you want me to do for you?" The man said, "Lord, my friend and I want to see again." ⁴²Jesus said, "Your faith in me has healed you both and given you your sight." ⁴³Instantly they could see. As the crowd moved on, they walked beside Jesus, thanking and praising Him for what He had done. When the people saw this, they also praised God.

Jesus Goes to Zacchaeus' House

19 Soon Jesus reached Jericho. As He was passing through the town, ²a man named Zacchaeus, who was the chief tax collector in the area and quite rich, ³came out to see what Jesus looked like. But because he was so small and crowds of people surrounded Jesus, he couldn't see a thing. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree, hoping

he could get a good look at Jesus who was heading in that direction. ⁵When Jesus came to Zacchaeus, He looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, come down; I would like to go to your house to visit you today." ⁶Zacchaeus scrambled down the tree as fast as he could and happily guided Jesus to his house. ⁷When the people saw the two of them walking together and Jesus actually going to the tax collector's house, they were terribly upset with Jesus for associating with a man who made a living collecting taxes from them to support the Romans. ⁸Jesus began to talk with Zacchaeus about the kingdom of God. After listening, Zacchaeus spoke up loud enough for people to hear, "Lord, I promise to give half of everything I own to the poor. And, if I've cheated anyone, I will pay that person back four times as much as I took." ⁹Then Jesus said to him, "I can see that you have tasted the firstfruits of salvation. You are a true son of Abraham. ¹⁰That's why the Son of Man came, to seek and to save all who are lost."

The Parable About Investing Money

¹¹As he continued his walk, Jesus told the crowd a parable because they were expecting Him to usher in God's kingdom as soon as He reached Jerusalem. ¹²So He said, "There was once a young man of royal birth who governed a certain part of the country. The time came when he had to go back home to be crowned king. ¹³Before leaving, he called ten of his servants together and gave each of them a sum of money to invest to make that area of the country more productive. ¹⁴But the people in that district hated the prince and sent a message to the palace which said, 'We don't want this man to be our king.' ¹⁵But the ceremonies went ahead as planned, and he was crowned the country's new king. Some time after the coronation and the celebrations, he came back and called together his servants, each of whom he had given a certain amount of money to invest. He wanted to

know what they had done and just how each man's enterprise was coming along.

¹⁶"The first one gave his report, saying, 'Lord, while you were gone, I was able to invest your money in such a way as to make a very large profit for you, ten times more than you gave me.' ¹⁷The new king said to him, 'Well done. You've been a good servant. Because you've been so faithful in advancing my interests, I'm going to put you in charge of ten cities.'

¹⁸"Then the second one gave his report, saying, 'Lord, I've invested the funds you entrusted me with and made a fairly good profit for you, five times more than you gave me.' ¹⁹The new king responded to this servant the same way and said, 'Because you've invested my money wisely, I'm going to put you in charge of five cities.'

²⁰"The third servant said, 'Lord, I'm returning to you all the money you gave me. While you were gone, I kept your money to make sure none of it would be lost. ²¹I knew you were a demanding person and would expect a big return. So I was afraid to invest your money and lose what you gave me. That's why I decided to hold on to it rather than risk your displeasure.' ²²The king responded, 'By your own statement, you've disqualified yourself to be my servant. If you thought that my expectations were unreasonable and that I was too hard a person to work for, ²³then the least you could have done was to have deposited my money in the bank so I could have had some kind of return when I came back.' ²⁴Then the king turned to the men standing nearby and said, 'Take back the money I gave him and give it to the one who increased it ten times.' ²⁵The men were surprised and said to the king, 'But, Lord, the first servant already has more than enough.'

²⁶"The king answered, 'It's my responsibility to see that I get the best returns from my investments. Those who make good use of what I give them will be given even more. And those who do nothing with what I give them will lose what

they have, and it will be given to those who know how to use it. ²⁷As for those who didn't want me to be their king, bring them in. The law of the land demands that they be put to death for their rebellion in the sight of the king."

The Triumphal Entry

²⁸When Jesus finished the parable, He left and headed for Jerusalem with His disciples. ²⁹When they came to the little towns of Bethphage and Bethany near the Mount of Olives, Jesus said to two of His disciples, ³⁰"Go into the nearest village. Just as you get there, you'll find a young donkey that's never been ridden standing next to its mother. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks, 'What are you doing? This isn't your donkey!' then quietly tell him, 'The Lord would like to borrow it for a little while. We promise to bring it back.'"

³²So the two disciples went into the nearest village and found a young donkey tied up just as Jesus had said. ³³As they were untying it, the owner came out of the house and said, "What are you doing?" ³⁴The disciples said, "The Lord would like to borrow your colt for a little while. We promise to bring it back." So the owner let them take it. ³⁵When they brought the colt to Jesus, they sensed that He might want to ride it into Jerusalem. So they took off their outer robes, spread them on the young animal, and helped Jesus get on. ³⁶Instantly the crowd was electrified. Throughout their history each new king had ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey as a declaration of his reign. Some of the people ran ahead and spread their robes on the ground for the donkey to walk on, and others who were watching began praising God as they made their way up the hill. ³⁷From the top of the Mount of Olives they could overlook Jerusalem. As Jesus started down the hill, the people began shouting and praising God for all the miracles that Jesus had done. ³⁸When they reached the valley and started up the other side

toward Jerusalem, they began chanting, "Blessed be the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory to God!" ³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd tried to stop them and shouted to Jesus, "Teacher, stop them! Can't you hear what they're saying?" ⁴⁰Jesus answered, "If I stopped them, God would cause the stones to shout it out."

Jesus' Love for Jerusalem

⁴¹As the procession came closer to Jerusalem, Jesus stopped, looked at the city and wept, saying, ⁴²"O, Jerusalem, if you only knew what peace you have rejected and that this is your last chance, but you're still so blind. Your hopes will never be realized. ⁴³The time will soon come when your enemies will surround you, build siege ramps against your walls and close in on you from all sides. ⁴⁴They won't give up until they conquer you and raze your Temple so that not one stone you see will be left on another. They'll have no mercy on anyone, not even the children. All of this will happen because you did not recognize what God tried to do for you."

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

⁴⁵Then He urged the donkey forward, and the procession moved on into the city with the people shouting and chanting until they reached the Temple. There Jesus stopped, got off the donkey and went inside. He ordered those who bought and sold animals at huge profits to get out. ⁴⁶He said to them, "It is written in the Scriptures, 'My house is a house of prayer, but you have turned it into a gathering place for thieves.'"

⁴⁷The next few days Jesus taught openly in the Temple, and the chief priests, the teachers and the leaders determined to have Him arrested and taken to Pilate to be executed. ⁴⁸But because the people were listening to every word He said and many of them were being healed, the leaders found it difficult to have Jesus arrested.

Jesus' Authority Questioned

20 One day during His last week in Jerusalem as Jesus was teaching in the Temple, sharing the good news of salvation with the people, the chief priests, the teachers and the elders came and said to Him, ²"We have a question. By what authority are you doing the things you're doing? And who gave you this authority?" ³Jesus answered, "Let me also ask you a question, then I'll give you my answer. ⁴Did God give John the Baptist the authority to do what he did or did he get his authority from someone else?" ⁵They went into a huddle and discussed among themselves what answer to give. Finally, they said to each other, "If we say that John got his authority from God, He'll say, 'Then why didn't you believe what he preached?' ⁶And if we say that he got his authority from someone else, we'll be in trouble with the people because they believe that John was a prophet." ⁷So they went back to Jesus and said, "We can't answer your question because we don't know who authorized him to do what he did." ⁸Jesus said, "If that's the case, I don't need to tell you by whose authority I do what I'm doing."

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

⁹Jesus then turned to the people and told them a parable. "A man owned a large vineyard. He decided to lease it out to some vineyard keepers to watch over and tend. Then he left for a distant country on business and was gone for some time. ¹⁰At the end of the season, he sent one of his servants in charge of finance to collect his share of the profits from the harvest. But the vineyard keepers beat up the servant and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹So the owner sent another servant in charge of his accounts to see them, and they also beat him up, mistreated him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹²The owner sent a third accountant to see the tenants and they did the same thing to him and threw him out of the vineyard, battered and

bruised. ¹³Then the vineyard owner said to himself, 'I know what I'll do! I'll send my only son whom I love very much, because when they meet him, they can't help but love and respect him.' ¹⁴But when the vineyard keepers saw the son coming, they said, 'This is the heir to the old man's property. Let's kill him. Then we can claim the vineyard as ours.'

¹⁵"So they grabbed him, took him outside the gate and killed him. What do you think the vineyard owner will do to those men? ¹⁶I'll tell you what he'll do. He'll come and destroy them and find some new vineyard keepers whom he can trust." When the chief priests, the teachers, and the elders heard this, they caught the meaning and said, "God forbid! This will never happen!" ¹⁷Jesus looked at them and said, "Tell me, what does the Scripture mean when it says, 'The stone that the builders rejected as worthless was the very one needed to hold up the Temple'?" ¹⁸That stone represents the Messiah. Whoever falls on this Stone will have his heart broken. But those who reject this Stone will someday see it coming, and it will fall on them and crush them."

¹⁹The chief priests, the teachers, and the elders knew that Jesus was talking about them and wished they could get their hands on Him, but they were afraid to do so in front of the people.

Paying Taxes to Caesar

²⁰So they watched every move Jesus made. They even sent some of their young men to pretend to be honest and to ask Him questions to trap Him in His own words. Then they could accuse Him of having said certain things against the government. This would give them the excuse they needed to have Him arrested. ²¹When they thought the timing was right, these young men asked Jesus, "Teacher, we know that what you teach is right. And we know that you don't say things just to please someone, no matter who he is. You teach God's truth whatever the consequences. ²²Now tell us, is it right for us to

pay taxes to the Romans or not?"

²³Jesus saw through their flattery and said, ²⁴"Do you have a Roman coin? Let me see it." When they gave Him one, Jesus said, "Whose image is on this?" They said, "Caesar's." ²⁵Jesus said, "Give to Caesar what is his and give to God what is His." ²⁶They were amazed at His answer and couldn't have Him arrested for what He had said.

Marriage and the Resurrection

²⁷After this, the Sadducees decided to come to Jesus to ask Him about the resurrection of the dead, in which they didn't believe. ²⁸They said, "Teacher, Moses told us that if a man's married brother died and left no children, then his unmarried brother should marry the widow so she can have children to maintain the family name and not lose the property. ²⁹Now we know of a case involving seven brothers. The oldest one married but soon died without having any children. ³⁰So the second brother married his dead brother's wife, but he died before he had fathered any children. ³¹Then the third brother married the young widow and so on until all seven brothers had married her without any of them having fathered any children. ³²Finally, the woman died too. ³³To whom will she belong in the resurrection? Whose wife will she be, since she was married to all seven of them?"

³⁴Jesus answered, "In this life people marry and are given in marriage, and because you can't imagine things being any different in heaven, you reject the resurrection. ³⁵In heaven and in the earth made new those who are resurrected will neither marry nor be given in marriage. ³⁶And in that life, people will never die, but will be like the angels who live forever. They're God's children because they've been saved and raised from the dead. ³⁷In the story of the burning bush, Moses called God the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, expecting them to live again and inherit the promise. ³⁸This tells

you that God is not a god of death, but the God of eternal life." ³⁹Certain teachers of the law who overheard the conversation said, "Master, you gave them the right answer." ⁴⁰After that, the Sadducees did not dare ask Jesus any more questions.

Whose Son Is the Messiah?

⁴¹Then Jesus asked them, "Why do people believe that the Messiah will be a descendant of King David? ⁴²In the Psalms, David wrote, 'The Lord Jehovah will say to my Lord: Come and sit next to me in the place of honor. ⁴³Someday all your enemies will acknowledge who you are.' ⁴⁴If David called the Messiah his Lord, how can He also be his descendant?" No one could answer the question.

Be Careful of False Teachers

⁴⁵So Jesus changed the subject, and in the hearing of the people, said to His disciples, ⁴⁶"Be careful of teachers of the law who like to walk around in long robes and be treated respectfully in the market, who expect to be given the choice seats in the synagogue and want the best place when they're invited to someone's house for dinner. ⁴⁷They exploit the elderly and take widows' houses by quick foreclosure, then turn around and make a show of commitment to the Lord. They offer long, beautiful prayers in the synagogue, but they will receive the greater condemnation."

The Widow's Two Small Coins

21 As Jesus looked around He noticed some rich men putting their money in the Temple's offering box with a lot of show. ²He also noticed a poor widow come up and quietly drop two small coins into the offering. ³Jesus said to His disciples, "That poor widow has given more than all those rich men put together. ⁴The rich men gave from their wealth, but she gave the last two coins she had."

The Destruction of the Temple

⁵Later, as they were leaving the Temple.

some of His disciples pointed out the beauty of the massive stones and the rich decorations of the Temple. ⁶Jesus said, "These things that you admire will soon be gone. In fact, the time is coming when not one stone of these buildings will be left in its place; every one will be thrown down."

Signs of the Times and the End of the World

⁷The disciples were stunned when they heard this and said, "Master, when will this happen? What sign should we look for to know when this will take place?"

⁸He answered, "You need to be careful so you're not deceived. Many false messiahs will come making all sorts of claims. Don't believe what they will tell you and don't go running after them. ⁹When there's an increase in military buildup, when you hear about skirmishes here and there, and when political upheavals shake the country, don't be terrified or get discouraged. These things have to happen, but that's not the end of the world.

¹⁰"Before the actual end comes, nations will be fighting nations, and countries will be making alliances to fight other countries. Peace treaties will be made and broken. ¹¹Nature itself will be in revolt. Earthquakes will become more numerous and will happen in unexpected places. Famines will affect whole continents and diseases will spread around the world and impact people everywhere. There will also be signs from heaven, and terrifying things will happen in the sky. ¹²However, before all this, the authorities will lay their hands on you, mistreat you and turn you over to kings and governors for trial and imprisonment, all because of me. ¹³This will be an opportunity for you to witness to them. ¹⁴But don't worry about what you're going to say when they arrest you or how you're going to answer all their questions. ¹⁵I'll be there beside you to put words in your mouth and to help you answer questions in such a way that they will not be able to refute you.

¹⁶"You need to understand that your parents, your brothers and sisters, your relatives and your friends may turn against you and betray you. They may even testify against you to get you sentenced to death. ¹⁷You'll be hated everywhere because of me. ¹⁸But don't forget that not one hair on your head can be pulled out without your heavenly Father's permission. ¹⁹Hold on to your faith, and you'll receive eternal life.

The Fall of Jerusalem

²⁰"So when you see Jerusalem surrounded by the Romans, then you'll know that its destruction is near. ²¹That's when you should flee to the mountains. Those in the city should get out, and those who are out in the country should not come back in. ²²This is the punishment that Moses prophesied would happen. ²³The siege of the city will be especially hard on pregnant women and nursing mothers. The whole country will be in turmoil because God's protection will be removed. ²⁴Many will be killed by the sword, and those who survive will be taken as prisoners and scattered among the nations. From that time on, Jerusalem will be trampled on by nations until the times allotted to the Gentiles are fulfilled.

The Coming of the Son of Man

²⁵"Before the end comes, strange things will happen. The sun will stop shining, the moon will turn as red as blood and there will be showers of falling stars. The nations of earth will be in turmoil, and their leaders will be perplexed. Nature itself will seem to be turned out of its course with unexpected disasters on land and sea. ²⁶When thoughtful men try to look into the future, their hearts will sink at what they see lying ahead for the human race. The heavens themselves will shake and the hearts of men will be filled with fear as they think about what's coming on the whole world. ²⁷Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming in all His power and glory. ²⁸When those

living near the end of time see all these things happening, they should look up, because He who redeemed them will soon come to take them home.”

Lesson From the Fig Tree

²⁹Then He told them a parable, saying, “Take a look at the trees, especially the fig trees. ³⁰You can tell that it’s spring-time when you see their leaves beginning to appear. ³¹In the same way, when those living at the end see all these things happening, they will know that the kingdom of God is about to come. ³²I’m telling you the truth, this present generation will not pass away before Jerusalem is destroyed. ³³Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The Importance of Watching

³⁴“So be careful not to be caught up in constant feasting and drinking and in the problems of life so that you don’t think about anything else. If you do, the end will sneak up on you like a thief. ³⁵People all over the world will be caught by surprise. ³⁶Everyone needs to stay alert and pray to be strong enough to escape the evils of the last days and to stand joyfully before the Son of Man.”

³⁷Throughout His final week, Jesus taught in the Temple every day. At night He would go out to the Mount of Olives to pray. ³⁸And early every morning the people would come back to the Temple to listen to Him.

The Plot to Kill Jesus

22 As the Passover with the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, ²the chief priests, the teachers and the elders tried to figure out a way to arrest Jesus and have Him convicted and executed without stirring up the people.

³That’s when Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, gave in to Satan’s idea to betray Jesus. ⁴So he went to talk with the chief priests and officers of the Temple guard and offered to help them have Jesus arrested. ⁵They were happy

with his suggestion and agreed to give him thirty pieces of silver for his services. ⁶Judas accepted and waited for the right time to turn Jesus over to them when the crowds were not present.

Jesus and His Disciples Celebrate the Passover

⁷The Passover began in the evening, and it was the Jewish custom to kill a lamb and prepare the Passover meal with its unleavened bread beforehand. ⁸So Jesus said to Peter and John, “Go prepare the Passover meal for us so we can all eat together.” ⁹They said, “Where do you want us to have it? We’re not from here, so we don’t know where to find a place large enough for all of us. Jerusalem is packed with people, and there’s probably no room anywhere.” ¹⁰Jesus said to them, “Go into the city and, as soon as you get inside the gates, you’ll see a man carrying a large clay waterpot on his head. Just follow him to where he’s going. ¹¹Then knock on the door he enters and say to the owner of the house, ‘Our Master sent us to request a room where He and His disciples can eat the Passover meal together.’ ¹²He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Look it over, then make all the necessary preparations.” ¹³The disciples did what Jesus asked and went into the city, saw everything He had told them and prepared for the evening meal.

The Lord’s Supper

¹⁴When mealtime came, Jesus and the other disciples arrived, went upstairs to the room and made themselves comfortable. All twelve of them were there. ¹⁵Jesus said to them, “I’ve been looking forward to eating this Passover meal with you, not only because it’s our custom, but also because I wanted to be alone with you before I die. ¹⁶This is the last Passover meal we’ll have together. I will not eat it again until it is held in the kingdom of God as a fulfillment of the end of sin.” ¹⁷Then He took the cup of unfermented wine, gave

thanks and turned to His disciples, saying, "Here, take this cup and pass it around. I want each of you to drink from it. ¹⁸I will not drink the fruit of the vine again until you are with me in the kingdom of God." ¹⁹Then He took one of the small loaves of bread, gave thanks, broke the bread and passed one half down each side of the table. He turned to His disciples and said, "This broken loaf of bread represents my body which I am willing to have broken for you. So, whenever you eat together like this, remember me."

²⁰He also took the cup after it had made the rounds and said, "This pure juice represents my blood which will be shed for you to fulfill God's covenant. ²¹The time has now come for me to die. I've already been betrayed into the hands of those who seek my life by a man who is sitting at this very table with me. ²²The Son of Man will be obedient and do His Father's will, but I feel sorry for the man who betrays me." ²³Then the disciples started asking each other which one of them it was who would do such a thing.

The Disciples Argue About Greatness

²⁴This renewed the argument they previously had among themselves about which one of them would be honored the most when Jesus set up His kingdom. ²⁵So Jesus said to them, "In the political world, kings and rulers exercise authority over people and then give themselves the fancy title of Benefactors. ²⁶But that's not the way it should be with you. If anyone wants to be the most honored in my kingdom, let him be a willing servant. If he wants to rule, let him learn to be humble." ²⁷He also said to them, "At a banquet, those most honored sit down to be served. That's how all of you have been acting. Who washed your feet when we came here this evening? I did, because I'm here to serve, not to be served.

²⁸"But I do want to thank you for staying by me throughout my ministry, and for your willingness to face all the problems you've had because of me. ²⁹So I'm

giving you a share in the kingdom that my Father has given me. ³⁰I want you to know that we will eat together in my kingdom, and that you will sit next to me and rule over the twelve divisions of my people making up spiritual Israel."

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

³¹Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Simon, Simon, Satan is determined to test your loyalty to me, and if possible, separate you from me like a farmer sifts his wheat to separate the kernels from the chaff. ³²But I'm praying for you that your faith does not falter. After you see your weakness and come back to me, you'll be able to inspire your brothers in the faith." ³³Peter said, "But I am loyal to you! I'm ready to follow you to prison and to death." ³⁴Jesus answered, "I want to tell you something, Peter. You are overconfident. That's your big problem. Before the rooster finishes crowing in the morning, you will deny knowing me three times."

Traveling Bag, Money, and Sword

³⁵Then He said to all the disciples, "When I sent you out without money, without a traveling bag, an extra robe or even an extra pair of sandals, did you lack anything?" "Not a thing," they answered. ³⁶"From now on," Jesus said, "you'll be facing times of crisis. So pack your traveling bag and if you have extra money, take it with you; if you have an extra pair of sandals, take them too. And if you don't have a small sword for butchering, you'll need to sell your cloak and buy one. ³⁷I'm telling you this because things will change. As Isaiah said, 'They will treat the Messiah like a criminal.' All these things that have been written about me must come to pass." ³⁸The disciples said, "Lord, we have two short swords among us already, and we're ready to fight for you!" Jesus said, "You still don't understand what I'm trying to tell you. Well, I've said all I can because it's time to go."

Prayer in Gethsemane

³⁹Jesus went downstairs and made His way toward the Mount of Olives where He had often gone to pray. And His disciples followed Him. ⁴⁰When He arrived at the garden called Gethsemane, He took three disciples into the garden with Him. He said to them, "You need to pray so you won't be overcome by temptation."

⁴¹He then walked about a stone's throw beyond them and knelt down on the ground and prayed. ⁴²"Father," He said, "if you see fit and are willing to release me from this part of my mission, please do so. Nevertheless, if that is not what you want, may your will for me be done." ⁴³When He had finished praying, an angel from heaven came and strengthened Him. ⁴⁴In agony He prayed again, and then again more earnestly, clutching the ground as perspiration, discolored by blood, dripped from His face. ⁴⁵Finally, He got up and walked back to His disciples, hoping to find them in prayer. Instead, He found them asleep, exhausted from worry. ⁴⁶He awakened them and said, "Why did you sleep when I needed your prayers? But now you'd better get up and pray that you can stand in this hour of crisis."

Jesus Arrested

⁴⁷Before He finished talking, Judas, one of the twelve, appeared in the garden, leading a mob straight toward Him. He walked up to Jesus and kissed Him on both cheeks. ⁴⁸Jesus looked at him and said, "Judas, why do you betray me with a kiss?" ⁴⁹By this time, the disciples had pressed around Jesus and said, "Lord, do you want us to fight for you? Just say the word." ⁵⁰In fact, Peter pulled his short sword from his belt and swung at the high priest's servant who was standing nearby. The man quickly moved his head, but the blade caught his ear and sliced it off. ⁵¹Jesus said to Peter, "Stop! No more of this!" Then He touched the servant's ear, and healed him. ⁵²He turned to the chief priests, the officers of

the Temple guard and the elders and said, "Why have you come out here in the middle of the night like you were planning to catch a thief or a robber? ⁵³Why didn't you arrest me when I was sitting in the Temple teaching the people? But I guess this is the time when the power of darkness has its hour."

Peter Denies Knowing Jesus

⁵⁴Then they led Him into the city to the palace of the high priest for a preliminary night trial. Peter followed the mob at a safe distance. ⁵⁵When they arrived, they took Jesus inside. Those who were not allowed in stayed in the courtyard where they built a fire and sat around it to keep warm. And Peter sat down with them. ⁵⁶As they sat there, one of the servant girls looked at him carefully, then said to the group, "This man is one of Jesus' disciples and was with Him in the garden." ⁵⁷Peter denied it and said, "Woman, I don't even know Him." ⁵⁸Later, another person recognized him and said, "You're one of Jesus' disciples, aren't you?" Peter answered, "Man, you're out of your mind! I am not!" ⁵⁹About an hour or so later, another person confidently said, "There's no doubt that this man is one of the disciples of Jesus! Just listen to his Galilean accent!" ⁶⁰Peter said, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about." Then he started cursing to prove that he wasn't Jesus' disciple. He had hardly finished when a nearby rooster crowed a second time.

⁶¹At that moment, just as Peter looked into the hall where Jesus was being tried, Jesus turned. Their eyes met, and Peter remembered what Jesus had told him earlier that evening: "Before the rooster finishes crowing in the morning, you will have denied knowing me three times." ⁶²Peter ran from the courtyard back to the garden where Jesus had prayed. There he fell to the ground and wept bitterly.

Soldiers Mistreat Jesus

⁶³Inside the assembly hall, the guards

holding Jesus started making fun of Him. ⁶⁴They blindfolded Him, slapped Him in the face and then said, "You're supposed to be a prophet, aren't you? Well, tell us who slapped you!" ⁶⁵There were many other cruel things they did to Him as they cursed Him.

Jesus Before the Sanhedrin

⁶⁶At the first glimmer of daylight, the leading elders of the synagogue, the chief priests and the important teachers came together to try Jesus. ⁶⁷They said to Him, "Are you really the Messiah? Tell us." Jesus answered, "If I told you as plainly as I could, you still wouldn't believe me. ⁶⁸Even if I were to discuss this question with you, you wouldn't answer because you're not interested in letting me go. ⁶⁹Let me say this much. After this, the Son of man will sit at the right hand of God the Father, entrusted with full power and authority." ⁷⁰They all asked, "Are you saying that you're the Son of God?" When they quieted down, Jesus said, "Yes, and you're right in saying so." ⁷¹When they heard this, they screamed, "That's it! We don't need any more witnesses! He's condemned Himself with His own mouth!"

Jesus Taken to Pilate

23 Then all the members of the court stood up, and the high priest in office ordered Jesus to be taken to Pilate, the Roman governor. ²There they accused Him, saying, "This Fellow is going around the country stirring up trouble by telling people not to pay taxes to Caesar and telling them that He's been anointed by God to be their new King." ³Pilate turned to Jesus and said, "Are these charges true? Do you really think that you're the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Yes, it is as you say." ⁴After questioning Jesus further, Pilate announced to the people: "I don't find this man guilty of treason. In fact, I don't find any reason to hold Him." ⁵Then the crowd became angry and shouted at

Pilate, saying, "He is a troublemaker. He started in Galilee and now He's doing the same thing in Jerusalem!"

Jesus Faces Herod

⁶As soon as Pilate heard them mention Galilee, he asked someone if Jesus was a Galilean. ⁷As soon as it was confirmed, Pilate realized that he was trying someone illegally and that Jesus should be tried by King Herod. Knowing that Herod Antipas had come to Jerusalem for the Passover, he sent Jesus over to him to be tried. ⁸When the priests, followed by the mob, arrived with Jesus at Herod's palace, Herod was glad to see Him. Ever since he had executed John, he had wanted to meet Jesus and see Him work a miracle. ⁹So Herod ordered Jesus to be untied and brought in some sick people for Him to heal, but Jesus simply stood there in silence. ¹⁰The chief priests and the teachers became angry at His silence and accused Him of the same things they had accused Him of in front of Pilate. ¹¹Then Herod denounced Jesus as an imposter and the soldiers started ridiculing Jesus and making fun of Him. Soon Herod himself joined in. After humiliating Him, they got an old royal robe, put it over Jesus' shoulders and sent Him back to Pilate. ¹²That same day Pilate and Herod, who had always been bitter enemies, became close friends.

Jesus Condemned and Barabbas Set Free

¹³When the priests and the mob got back to Pilate, he privately cross-examined Jesus. Then he came out to speak to the chief priests, the leaders and the people assembled there, and said to them, ¹⁴"You brought this Man to me as someone who stirs up the people and incites violence and rebellion. I've examined the Prisoner again and still don't find Him guilty as you have charged Him. ¹⁵When I sent Him to Herod, he also found Him innocent and sent Him back to me. There's nothing He has done for which I should

condemn Him to death. ¹⁶I'll have Him scourged for what you say He did and hope that satisfies you. Then I'll release Him." ¹⁷Pilate usually released one Jewish prisoner at the Passover festival as a goodwill gesture to the people.

¹⁸With one voice the crowd shouted, "Don't release Jesus! Release Barabbas!" ¹⁹Barabbas had been arrested and convicted of treason, murder and starting riots against the Romans in Jerusalem. ²⁰Pilate really preferred to release Jesus rather than Barabbas. So he spoke to the crowd, urging them to accept the release of Jesus. ²¹But the crowd shouted louder than ever, "Don't release Jesus! Kill Him! Crucify Him!" ²²Then for the third time, Pilate addressed the crowd. "Why are you so eager to have this Man killed? What crime has He committed to deserve death? I find no reason to have Him crucified. I'll have Him scourged. Then I'll definitely let Him go." ²³The scourging did not satisfy the mob and again they broke out in a chant demanding that Jesus be executed. Under the prodding of the chief priests, their persistent shouting eventually paid off. ²⁴Pilate finally gave in and handed down the death penalty. ²⁵He released Barabbas, a murderer and insurrectionist, as the people demanded and turned Jesus over to the execution squad for a second scourging and for crucifixion.

Jesus Is Crucified

²⁶Then the soldiers put the heavy cross on Jesus' bleeding shoulders and led Him away. But because of the double scourging, He was unable to carry it. So they took a man from the crowd named Simon from Cyrene in North Africa, who expressed sympathy for Jesus, and made him carry the cross. ²⁷A large crowd lined the streets as the procession made its way out of the city and up the hill to the place of execution. Many women whose children had been healed by Jesus were in the crowd, crying. ²⁸As weak as Jesus was from the lack of food and

sleep, as well as from the scourgings, He compassionately turned to the women along the procession route and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, don't cry for me; cry for your own children and your own people. ²⁹The time will soon come when women like you will say, 'How lucky are those who have no children, those who aren't pregnant and those who are not nursing little ones.' ³⁰Others will look up to the hills and mountains and say, 'We wish those hills and mountains would fall on us and bury us.' ³¹If the sins of the world bring this kind of suffering on me, an innocent evergreen tree, what will happen to unrepentant sinners who are dead trees?"

³²That day two other men were being led to be crucified with Jesus. They had been insurrectionists with Barabbas. ³³When the procession reached the place called Calvary just outside Jerusalem, they tied Jesus to the cross and nailed His hands and feet in place. So He was crucified with two criminals—one on His right and the other on His left. ³⁴While they were nailing Jesus to the wooden beams, He prayed, "Father, forgive these men. They don't really know what they're doing." When the soldiers had finished their job and the crosses were in place, they took Jesus' seamless robe and gambled for it because of its value. ³⁵Meanwhile, the crowd was standing nearby, watching and listening to everything that was going on. Then the chief priests and the leaders of the people started making fun of Jesus, saying, "He saved others. If He's the Messiah, the chosen One, let Him save Himself, then we'll accept Him."

³⁶The Roman soldiers also mocked Him. First they made fun of Him, then to ease His pain they offered Him a sip of drugged wine from a sponge on the end of a stick. ³⁷They shouted up at Him, saying, "If you're the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸Over Jesus' head, Pilate had them nail a sign which read, "This is the King of the Jews." It was written in Greek,

Latin and Hebrew so that as many people as possible could read it.

³⁹One of the traitors hanging on the cross also started mocking Jesus, saying, "If you're the Messiah as you say you are, why don't you save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰But the other traitor tried to silence him by saying, "Don't you have any fear of God in your soul? In a few hours, you and I will be dead. ⁴¹We're getting what we deserve, but this Man is being executed even though He's innocent! Didn't you hear what the soldiers said about the whole trial and how Pilate found no fault in Him?" ⁴²Then he turned to Jesus and said, "Lord, I believe in you! Please, remember me when you set up your kingdom." ⁴³Jesus turned His head toward him and said, "I promise you today, when I return with the glory of my Father, I will take you home with me to paradise."

Jesus Dies

⁴⁴By this time it was noon. Jesus had been hanging on the cross for about three hours. Then some dark clouds appeared and soon Jerusalem and the entire surrounding area was covered with a dense, eerie darkness which lasted until three o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁵It was so dark that the sun itself seemed to be blotted out. About this time, the priests in the Temple were preparing for the evening sacrifice when suddenly the heavy drape covering the entrance to the Most Holy Place ripped in two, beginning from the top all the way to the bottom. ⁴⁶At that same moment, Jesus, with His last ounce of strength, cried out, "Father, I give my spirit into your hands!" Having said that, He bowed His head and died. ⁴⁷When the Roman captain in charge of the execution heard this last cry and thought of all the things that had happened that day, he praised God and said, "Surely, this was a righteous Man!" ⁴⁸Many of the people who came out to watch the crucifixion and to see all the things that were happening began beating their chests and groping

their way back to the city. ⁴⁹The only people left were those who had been close friends of Jesus, including the women who had followed Him from Galilee. They stood some distance from the cross, watching these things.

Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb

⁵⁰There was a man among the followers of Jesus whose name was Joseph. He was a member of the Jewish court and was a good man. ⁵¹He lived in the nearby city of Arimathea and was one of those honorable Jews who was waiting for the kingdom of God to come. He had voted against putting Jesus to death. ⁵²Now he went to see Pilate and begged him to let him have the body of Jesus so he could give it an honorable burial and keep it from being mutilated still more. ⁵³Pilate turned the body over to him, so Joseph returned to the crucifixion site and took the body of Jesus down with the help of John and Nicodemus. They wrapped it in a linen burial sheet and laid it in Joseph's tomb which had been newly carved out of the rock.

⁵⁴That was Friday afternoon, the day the Jews call the Preparation Day. The Sabbath was soon to begin. ⁵⁵The women who were still there, the ones who had followed Jesus all the way from Galilee, stayed by and saw the men lay Jesus' body on the stone slab inside the tomb and roll a huge stone in front of it. ⁵⁶Then they all went home and prepared some burial spices and ointments to use on Jesus' body early Sunday morning. When the sun went down and the Sabbath began, they rested according to the commandment.

He Is Risen

24 After the Sabbath, very early Sunday morning, the women came back to the tomb carrying with them the burial spices and ointments which they had prepared. ²When they got to the tomb, they found that the huge stone covering the entrance had been rolled away.

³They cautiously went inside the tomb and found that the body of Jesus was gone. The tomb was empty! ⁴As they stood there confused and stunned, two men in shining robes suddenly appeared. ⁵The women were frightened, fell to their knees and bowed their heads to the ground, not knowing what this was all about. Then one of the men said, "Why are you looking in a tomb for someone who's alive? ⁶The One you're looking for is not here. He's risen! Don't you remember what Jesus told you when you were with Him in Galilee? ⁷He said, 'The Son of God will be arrested by angry and sinful men, will be sentenced and executed, but on the third day He will rise again.'"

⁸As the women listened, they remembered what Jesus had said. ⁹So they left the tomb and raced back to Jerusalem where the eleven disciples were staying and told them the good news. ¹⁰The women who brought the news of the resurrection to the disciples were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of the younger James and Joseph, and a couple of other women who had been with them. ¹¹The disciples didn't believe what the women told them. To them the whole thing was nonsense. But the women insisted that it was true. ¹²Finally, Peter decided to check it out for himself and ran to the tomb. As he entered it, he saw the linen burial sheets neatly folded and laid to one side, but no body. Astounded at what he saw, he made his way back to the city, wondering what had happened.

The Road to Emmaus

¹³That afternoon, two followers of Jesus left Jerusalem and headed for a little village called Emmaus, over seven miles away. ¹⁴As they walked along, they talked about all the things that had happened the last few days in Jerusalem. ¹⁵While they were talking together trying to figure things out, Jesus suddenly appeared on the road behind them. When they realized that someone was there,

they invited this Stranger to walk along with them. ¹⁶But He kept them from recognizing Him. ¹⁷He joined in their conversation by saying, "You seem very sad. Would you mind telling me what you were talking about that made you feel this way?" ¹⁸Cleopas answered, "You haven't heard? You must be a stranger in these parts. People everywhere are talking about the things that have happened in Jerusalem these last few days."

¹⁹Jesus asked, "What things?" They answered, "Haven't you heard about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a mighty prophet of God? He worked great miracles and fearlessly preached the good news wherever He went. ²⁰But the chief priests and the city fathers had Him arrested, tried and turned over to the Romans who crucified Him. ²¹We had put all our hopes in Him as the Messiah. We fully believed that He would be the One to redeem Israel's shame, deliver us from the Romans and set up His kingdom. This is the third day since all this happened. ²²To make things worse, some of our women went to His tomb early this morning and what they saw shocked all of us. ²³They found the tomb empty and His body gone. They ran all the way back to Jerusalem and said that two angels had talked to them and told them Jesus had risen from the dead and was alive. ²⁴But we didn't believe them. So some of our group went to the tomb to check it out for themselves and found that what the women had said was true—the tomb was empty! There was no sign of Jesus' body anywhere."

²⁵Jesus said to them, "I'm sorry you are so sad, but there's really no reason for it. You need to believe what the prophets predicted. ²⁶The Messiah had to suffer and die and then receive His glory." ²⁷So beginning with Moses and continuing through the writings of all the prophets, He explained to them the meaning of the predictions which spoke about Himself. He knew that their faith needed to be rooted in Scripture and not just in the excitement of seeing Him.

²⁸By this time, they were approaching the little village of Emmaus, and it looked to the two men as if this Stranger was going to continue. ²⁹They urged Him strongly, saying, "Look, it will be dark pretty soon and it's dangerous out there, so why don't you stay overnight with us? Then in the morning you can go on." He agreed and went in to stay with them. ³⁰While they were waiting for the evening meal, He continued explaining the Scriptures to them. When they were ready to eat, they asked Him to offer the blessing. So He took one of the small loaves of bread in His hands, blessed it, and broke the loaf, passing the pieces to them.

³¹As soon as He did that, their eyes were opened and they recognized Him. But He disappeared from their sight. ³²They looked at each other and said, "No wonder our hearts burned within us when He talked to us along the way and explained the prophecies to us! He's the Lord! He's risen! He's alive!" ³³They jumped up from the table and took off for Jerusalem, running and stumbling along in haste. When they finally got to the place where the eleven disciples and some of the others were, they also found them excited, saying to each other, ³⁴"The Lord is alive! He is risen from the dead! He appeared to Peter!" ³⁵Then the two followers shared their testimony and told the group what had happened to them. They told them how Jesus had walked with them all the way to Emmaus, how He had explained the prophecies to them and how they had finally recognized Him by the way He asked the blessing and broke the bread.

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

³⁶While they were still telling their story, suddenly Jesus stood there in the room and said, "Peace to all of you." ³⁷But everyone was frightened because the door was locked. They thought they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸Jesus said, "Why are you so afraid? Why are all these thoughts racing through your minds?"

³⁹Look at my hands and feet. I am Jesus. Come and feel me. A ghost doesn't have flesh and bones as I have." ⁴⁰He showed them His hands and feet which were scarred but healed. ⁴¹When they still hesitated and thought that His resurrection was too good to be true, He said to them, "Do you have anything to eat?" ⁴²They handed Him some bread and a piece of broiled fish. ⁴³So He sat down and ate with them.

He Opened to Them the Scriptures

⁴⁴Then He said to them, "This is what I've been trying to tell you all along. Everything written about me in the Scriptures, beginning with Moses, continuing with the prophets and the Psalms, had to be fulfilled." ⁴⁵He also gave them insight into the meaning of the Scriptures to help them understand His mission. ⁴⁶He said, "According to what is written, the Messiah had to suffer and die but would rise from the dead on the third day. ⁴⁷And repentance and forgiveness will be preached in every country of the world, starting right here in Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You have been with me from the beginning and have witnessed my death and resurrection. ⁴⁹When I get back to the Father, I'll send you what He has promised to give you to help you carry out your mission. So stay right here in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit descends from heaven and empowers you to preach the gospel more fully."

His Ascension

⁵⁰After some days, He led the group a little way out of Jerusalem toward Bethany. When they got to the top of the Mount of Olives, He raised His hands and blessed them. ⁵¹As He was blessing them, He began to rise up from the earth and was carried up into heaven. ⁵²The disciples and the others who were there worshiped Him as He went up. Then they returned to Jerusalem, thrilled and full of joy. ⁵³After this, they took every opportunity to go to the Temple to give thanks to God for what He had done.

JOHN

The Word

1 From the beginning, the Word of God was there. The Word stood by the side of God, and the Word was fully God. ²There never was a time when the Word of God was not with God. ³All things were made by Him, and nothing that was made was made without Him. ⁴He is the Source of life, and His life here on earth was the Light that brought hope to all mankind. ⁵This Light shone into our moral darkness, but the dark minds of men did not understand it. The darkness tried to extinguish the Light, but could not overcome it.

John's Witness

⁶A man appeared, sent by God, whose name was John. ⁷He came to tell people about this Light so they would have a chance to believe. ⁸He was not the Light, but was sent to point to it.

⁹The true Light that gives light to everyone was soon to come. ¹⁰Finally, Jesus came. He came to our world, this very world He created, but the people did not know who He was. ¹¹He came to His own chosen people, yet they didn't even recognize Him. ¹²But to those who did receive Him and believed in Him, He extended the privilege of becoming the children of God. ¹³They were born again, not from ancestors nor through man's will, but totally through the power of God.

The Word Becomes Flesh

¹⁴So the Word of God became a man and lived among us. We saw that Light with our own eyes and knew He was from God. Jesus was gracious, kind and full of light and truth. ¹⁵John witnessed about Him, saying, "This is the One I've been telling you about when I said, 'He who comes after me is greater than I am because He existed from all eternity.' Listen to Him." ¹⁶Because of His abundant grace, we've all been blessed. ¹⁷As important as Moses was, he could only give us the law, but grace and truth have come

to us through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God face to face except the Son of God, who came to us directly from the Father, and He came to show us what the Father is like.

John: A Voice in the Wilderness

¹⁹This is in harmony with the witness John bore when the priests and Levites from Jerusalem came to the Jordan River where he was preaching and asked him, "Who are you?" ²⁰John was never ashamed to confess his faith. He responded, "You think I'm the Messiah. I am not." ²¹They said, "Well, who are you? Are you Elijah come back from heaven?" He said, "No." "Are you the great prophet that Moses said would come to guide us, the one everybody is waiting for?" He said, "No, I'm not." ²²Again they asked, "Who are you then? We need an answer for those who sent us out here to ask you. What do you have to say about yourself?" ²³He answered, "I am a voice in the wilderness giving a message, as Isaiah said, 'Smooth out the road for the Lord. The King is coming!'"

²⁴The ones asking John these questions had been sent by the Pharisees. ²⁵They continued asking him: "Why are you baptizing people if you're not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor that great prophet whom Moses spoke about? Who gave you authority to do this?" ²⁶John said, "I'm only baptizing people with water, which has no power to transform lives, but there is One among you whom you don't know ²⁷who has power to change people's lives. He is much more important than I am. In fact, I'm not even worthy to loosen His sandals." ²⁸All these things happened near Bethany on the other side of the Jordan River where John was preaching and baptizing.

The Lamb of God

²⁹The next day when John saw Jesus pressing through the crowd, coming to

be baptized, he pointed to Him and called out for everyone to hear, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who will take away the sins of the world!" Then Jesus, like the others, was baptized, and from there He went into the wilderness to fast and pray. ³⁰John kept on telling the people, "He is the One I told you about when I said, 'After me, Someone will come who ranks much higher than I, because even though He's younger, He existed before I was born.' ³¹I also told you, though I had never met the Messiah, that when He came to me to be baptized, I would point Him out to you so you could know Him. ³²After baptizing Him, I saw heaven open and the light of the Holy Spirit coming down in the form of a dove hovering over His head. ³³Before then, I had no idea what the Messiah would look like, but God, who commissioned me to preach, had said to me, 'He over whom the Holy Spirit will hover after you baptize Him is the Messiah. You baptize people with water, but when He begins His ministry, He will baptize them with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴I'm telling you what I heard and saw. The One I pointed out to you is the Messiah, the Son of God."

The First Disciples

³⁵The day after Jesus returned from His experience in the wilderness, John had been standing with two of his disciples. ³⁶He spotted Jesus walking through the crowd, pointed to Him and called out, "Look! There He is! The Lamb of God!" ³⁷When two of his disciples heard this, they decided to follow Jesus. ³⁸As they caught up with Him, He turned and asked, "Why are you following me?" They answered, "Rabbi (meaning Teacher), where are you staying? We would like to talk to you." ³⁹Jesus said, "Come along and see." So they followed Him to where He was staying and talked with Him that whole day until about four o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰John's two disciples who followed Jesus home that day were Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, and me.

⁴¹The first thing Andrew did after leaving the place where Jesus was staying was to find his brother. When he found him, he said, "We've found the Messiah! He's here! Come, let me take you to Him." ⁴²So Andrew led Simon Peter to Jesus. When Jesus saw him, He said, "Simon, I'm happy to meet you. From now on you'll be called Peter" (meaning a small stone).

Philip and Nathaniel

⁴³The next day, Jesus went north into Galilee. On the way He saw Philip and called to him, "Philip, come! Follow me!" And he did. ⁴⁴Philip was from Bethsaida, the same town that Andrew and Peter were from. ⁴⁵Then he went to find his friend, Nathaniel. When he found him, he said, "Nathaniel, we've found the One about whom Moses and the prophets wrote! His name is Jesus and He's from Nazareth. He's the son of Joseph, the carpenter." ⁴⁶Nathaniel said, "Don't get so excited. How can the Messiah come from a place with a reputation like Nazareth?" Philip answered, "Come and see for yourself." ⁴⁷So Nathaniel followed Philip. When Jesus saw Nathaniel, He said, "Here's a true Israelite. There is nothing dishonest about him. Come and join us."

⁴⁸Nathaniel said, "You talk like you know me!" Jesus answered, "Before Philip even found where you were, I saw you resting under a fig tree, meditating and praying." ⁴⁹Nathaniel was shocked and said, "Teacher, you must be the Son of God to have seen me there. You must be the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰Jesus answered, "Because I said that I saw you sitting under a fig tree meditating and praying, is that why you believe who I am? Soon you'll see much greater things on which to hang your faith. ⁵¹When you see them, you'll know that heaven has opened its doors and that angels are going back and forth from the Father helping me carry out my mission."

The Wedding in Cana

2 On the third day Jesus went to a wedding in Cana of Galilee in which His mother Mary had a part. ²That's why Jesus and the five men who were now His disciples were invited. ³While He was at the wedding, the family ran out of fresh wine. His mother, Mary, came to Him and said, "Jesus, they're all out of drink. Can you do something to help?" ⁴Jesus answered, "Mother, I love you, but why are you asking me to help them? I can't work a miracle unless my Father tells me it is time to do it." ⁵Mary understood His hesitation but turned to the waiters and said, "Whatever my Son tells you to do, do it."

⁶There were six large jars nearby, each holding about thirty gallons of pure water. ⁷Jesus knew that the lack of drink would soon embarrass the bride and groom, so He turned to the waiters and said, "Fill these water jars to the rim." And they did. ⁸Then He said, "Take a cup of this to the master of ceremonies and set it down in front of Him." When they poured out what they thought was water, it looked like wine. ⁹When the master of ceremonies tasted it, he was so delighted that he didn't even ask where it came from, though the servants knew, but he immediately went over to see the bridegroom and said, ¹⁰"Everyone knows that at a wedding you serve the best drink first, and when people are happy and enjoying themselves, then you start serving the less expensive drink. But just taste this! It's the best unfermented wine I've ever tasted. It's wonderful! You've kept the best till last!" ¹¹This was the beginning of Jesus' life of miracles, which started in Cana of Galilee. What those five disciples saw convinced them that Jesus was the Messiah, and they put their faith in Him.

¹²After the wedding, Jesus and His disciples went with His mother and His stepbrothers down to Capernaum by the Lake of Galilee, where He rested for a few days.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

¹³The Jews were soon to celebrate the Passover, so Jesus, like many others, went to Jerusalem. ¹⁴When He arrived, He found the entrance to the Temple filled with people buying and selling animals to be sacrificed. Some were selling cattle, others sheep and still others, doves to those who couldn't afford to buy the larger animals. Money exchangers were also on hand because the Temple tax had to be paid with a special shekel. ¹⁵Jesus was moved with indignation by what He saw. So He picked up some discarded pieces of rope, made them into a whip and told the sellers and money changers to get out. When they hesitated, He took hold of the corner of their tables and tipped them over, money and all. ¹⁶As he strode through the Temple courtyard, He ordered those selling animals and doves, "Take these things out of here! Don't turn my Father's house into a marketplace!"

¹⁷His disciples recalled what the Scriptures said about the Messiah, "The zeal for your house has eaten me up!" ¹⁸When the noise and confusion had subsided, the Jewish leaders asked Jesus, "Who are you? And what right do you have to do this? Show us a miracle as a sign of your authority as Moses did." ¹⁹Jesus answered, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will rebuild it. Then you will know who I am and who gave me the authority to do this." ²⁰They said, "Forty-six years were spent building this Temple and you think you can rebuild it in three days?" ²¹Jesus was talking about His body temple, but they thought He was talking about the Temple itself. ²²After Jesus rose from the dead, His disciples remembered what he had said that day to the Jewish leaders. Then their faith in the prophecies and in what Jesus had taught them became even stronger.

Jesus Knew Not to Put Confidence in People

²³This happened at the beginning of

Jesus' ministry and many in Jerusalem began to believe Him to be the Messiah because of the miracles He did. ²⁴But Jesus did not put His confidence in people, because He knew what human nature was like and how unpredictable it was, ²⁵nor did He need anyone to tell Him what people were thinking about Him, because He knew what they thought.

The New Birth

3 There was a leader among the Jews named Nicodemus who was a highly respected Pharisee. ²He wanted to see Jesus, but he went to talk to Him at night. Nicodemus said, "Teacher, we know that God has sent you because no one can work miracles like you do unless God is with him." ³Jesus answered, "Miracles alone are not enough evidence to believe in the kingdom of God. Unless a person is born again, he cannot belong to God's kingdom." ⁴Nicodemus asked, "But how can a man enter into his mother's womb a second time and be born again? How can a man who is already old start life all over again? That's impossible."

⁵Jesus answered, "You're right. But I'm not speaking of physical birth. I'm speaking of spiritual birth. Unless a man's spiritual nature is born again through the Holy Spirit and he is willing to be baptized, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is physical is one thing, and that which is spiritual is another. ⁷So don't be shocked when I tell you that you must be born from above to belong to God's kingdom. ⁸How this happens is beyond human understanding. It's like the wind blowing the trees. You can see the effects of it, but you can't see the wind itself, the place where it came from or where it's going. That's how it is with the person who is born spiritually; he can't point to something people can see and say, 'This is what did it.'" ⁹Nicodemus sat there stunned. He asked, "How can such a thing be?"

¹⁰Jesus said to him, "You're one of the leading minds in Israel, and you don't know what I'm talking about? ¹¹I'm telling

you what I know and what I've seen happen in the lives of others, and you still hesitate to believe me. ¹²Now if I'm explaining it to you with things you're familiar with, like the effects of the wind, and you still can't understand it, how could you possibly understand it if I explained it to you with heavenly things you haven't seen? ¹³No one has lived in heaven and then come here to live except the Son of Man. He lived there before He was born, and He has come to make spiritual things simple. ¹⁴The miracle of the new birth was taught by Moses when he put a brass serpent on a makeshift cross and held it up for people to look at. All those bitten by snakes who looked at it in faith were healed. That power didn't come from the cross Moses made, but from the Son of God who would come and die on a cross. He will soon be lifted up between heaven and earth, ¹⁵and those who look to Him for help will be healed of the snakebite of sin and live.

God's Great Love

¹⁶"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son to come here and die, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have eternal life. ¹⁷God didn't send His Son to condemn the world, but to save the world. ¹⁸Those who believe in Him are no longer under condemnation, but those who do not believe in the Son of God cannot be healed and are condemned already because they don't believe. ¹⁹What condemns people is not the fact that they're in darkness but that they don't accept the light. ²⁰People don't want to be told that their natures are evil, so they don't come to the light, because they're more comfortable with darkness than with light. ²¹But the ones who love the truth will come to the light to be changed, and it will be obvious that it is done by the power of God."

Jesus and John the Baptist

²²After the interview with Nicodemus, Jesus decided to stay in Judea and let His

disciples preach and baptize as John was doing. ²³In fact, John was not far away from where they were. He was preaching and baptizing people near Salim because the water was somewhat deeper there. ²⁴This was before John was arrested and thrown into prison.

²⁵Some of John's disciples had been arguing with certain Jews about the importance of purification by water. ²⁶When they heard that Jesus was allowing His disciples to baptize, they came to see for themselves and then went back to John. They said, "Teacher, the One you baptized in the Jordan, the One you said was the Messiah, is allowing His disciples to baptize not far from here, and everyone is going over there." ²⁷John answered, "The success I've had was a gift to me from heaven. ²⁸You yourselves are witnesses that I told everyone I was not the Messiah, but only a messenger sent ahead of Him to prepare the way. ²⁹This arrangement is like what happens at a wedding. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. His friend makes all the arrangements and then eagerly waits for the bridegroom to come. When he hears the bridegroom's voice, he is overjoyed. That joy is mine. ³⁰He must increase, but I must decrease.

³¹"He's the One who came down from above, so He's above all of us. I'm of this world and can only speak of human experience, but He is the Promised One who came here from heaven. ³²He can tell us about things He knows firsthand, and yet how few believe what He's saying, and even fewer accept Him for who He is! ³³But those who follow Him are witnesses that what I said about Him is true. ³⁴He speaks with certainty because God sent Him and has given Him the Holy Spirit without measure. ³⁵The Father loves Him and has given Him authority over all things. ³⁶That's why obeying God's Son is so important. Those who keep on believing in Him will have eternal life, but those who do not believe and obey will perish in their sins."

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

4 When Jesus heard about the jealousy of John's disciples and the concern the Pharisees had over His rising popularity because He was baptizing more people than John, ²although Jesus Himself baptized no one, ³He left Judea and headed north into Galilee. ⁴On His way, He decided to travel through the province of Samaria. ⁵On one especially hot day, He stopped at a well near the little town of Sychar, which was located on the land originally owned by Jacob who gave it to his son Joseph. ⁶To this day the well is still known as Jacob's well. Around noon, Jesus was tired and sat down to rest on the little stone wall around the well.

⁷As He sat there, a Samaritan woman came to the well to get some water. Jesus said to her, "Would you let me have a drink after you draw your water? I have no container to draw from the well." ⁸He was alone when this happened because His disciples had gone into town to buy some food. ⁹The woman said, "Why do you, a Jew, ask me for a drink of water when the Jews would rather die of thirst than accept a drink from a Samaritan? And you're asking a woman, no less!"

¹⁰Jesus answered, "If you knew who was asking you for a drink of water, you would be asking Him for a drink of life-giving water." ¹¹The woman said, "You just told me that you had no way to get water because this well is too deep, so from which well around here are you going to get this special water? ¹²Are you greater than our patriarch Jacob who gave us this well? It not only has good water, but it also has a special meaning for us because he, his family and his cattle drank from it." ¹³Jesus answered, "The water from this well may be good water, but it's like all other water—after you drink it, you'll get thirsty again. ¹⁴The water that I can give you is special. Once you drink it, you'll never be thirsty again. It will constantly bubble up inside of you like a fresh mountain spring, furnishing eternal life." ¹⁵The woman said,

"Sir, let me have some of that water so that I don't ever have to come back to this well to draw water again."

¹⁶Jesus became more pointed in His conversation and said, "Go call your husband so I can offer this special water to both of you." ¹⁷The woman replied, "I'm not married." Jesus said, "I know you're not. ¹⁸You've been married five times, and the man you're living with now is not your husband. So what you said is true." ¹⁹The woman gasped, "How do you know all this? You must be a prophet!" ²⁰If you think you're going to win me to Judaism, forget it. Our fathers have been worshipping God on top of this nearby mountain for centuries, but you Jews always say you have the true religion and that Jerusalem is the center of everything." ²¹Jesus said, "Believe me, the time is rapidly coming when you won't be able to worship God either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. ²²People living here think that this is the only place to worship God. But salvation will come from where the Jews live. ²³And the time is coming, and in one sense is already here, when people can worship God anywhere, because true worship is a matter of the heart. This is the kind of worship that God is looking for. ²⁴God is very much concerned about our spiritual lives and how honest and sincere we are, not about where we worship Him." ²⁵The woman said, "I don't understand everything you say, but I know that someday the Messiah will come and He'll tell us what's right." ²⁶Jesus said, "I am the Messiah."

The Spiritual Harvest Is Ripe

²⁷Just then His disciples returned from town and were shocked to see Him talking alone with a woman, especially a Samaritan woman. Yet not one of them said anything, nor did they ask Him why He had talked to her. ²⁸The woman could tell by the look on their faces that she wasn't welcome. Yet, thrilled because of her conversation with Jesus, she left her water jar and ran back to town, telling

everyone, ²⁹"Come and see a stranger who talks like a prophet. He told me everything I ever did. I think He's the Messiah!" ³⁰Their curiosity was aroused by what the woman told them, and a large crowd came out to see Him.

³¹While the woman was inviting people to come and see, the disciples were urging Jesus to eat, saying, "Master, we know you're hungry. Please have something to eat." ³²He said to them, "I've been eating while you were gone, and you have no idea how good it tasted." ³³The disciples said to each other, "Do you think that someone brought Him something to eat while we were gone?" ³⁴Jesus, overhearing their conversation, said, "The food I'm talking about is the happiness that comes from doing what God sent me to do and seeing this woman open her heart to truth. ³⁵When you talk about God's work, never say, 'Four months from now it will be harvest time.' The spiritual harvest is always ripe. Look at the crowds that continue to come. ³⁶Those who bring others to me will be filled with heavenly joy and will receive the gift of eternal life. In the end, the sowers and the reapers will rejoice together over the great spiritual harvest. ³⁷The saying is true, 'Some do the sowing and some do the reaping.' ³⁸I've sent you out to reap what others have sown, and you've already experienced the joy of reaping from the seed that John sowed and are benefiting from his labor."

He Is the Messiah

³⁹When the Samaritan woman told the townspeople about Jesus, many of them were eager to see the Man who, as she said, "Told me everything I had ever done." ⁴⁰It seemed like the whole town came out to see Him and to talk with Him. They begged Him to stay with them. So He remained with them almost two days. ⁴¹Because of what He said, many believed that He was the Messiah. ⁴²Then the townspeople said to the Samaritan woman, "We believe He's the Messiah, not because of what you said

about Him, but because we've heard Him ourselves. We now know why you were so excited. Without a doubt, He is the Savior of the world!"

Jesus Returns to Nazareth

⁴³After His stay in Samaria, Jesus continued north to Galilee, heading for Nazareth, ⁴⁴even though He knew that a prophet receives more respect elsewhere than in his own hometown. ⁴⁵When He crossed the border into Galilee, people were glad to see Him, because many of them had seen the miracles He had done in Jerusalem at the previous Passover.

Jesus Heals a Nobleman's Son

⁴⁶Then Jesus and His disciples decided to visit Cana where He had turned water into freshly squeezed wine. Word spread to nearby Capernaum that He was in Cana. A nobleman, whose son was very sick, heard about it. ⁴⁷He decided to go to see Jesus. When he got there, he begged Jesus to come to his house to heal his son who was dying. ⁴⁸Jesus said to the nobleman, "You're asking me to come to your house to heal your son, and you've decided that if I do, then you'll believe that I'm the Son of God." ⁴⁹The nobleman answered, "Sir, how could you read my mind? Please forgive my doubting and heal my son! He's dying and needs you!" ⁵⁰Jesus said, "Go; your son is healed." The man believed Jesus and started for home. ⁵¹In full assurance that his son was healed, he purposely delayed arriving home until the next morning. As he neared the house, his servants saw him and came running to tell him that his son was well. ⁵²He asked them what time the boy started feeling better. They said, "Yesterday at about one o'clock in the afternoon."

⁵³The man knew that this was the exact time when Jesus had told him that his son was healed. This convinced him beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was the Messiah. Then he told his family about

Jesus and they all believed. ⁵⁴This was the second major miracle which Jesus had performed in Cana of Galilee since He began His ministry.

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

5 Some time after this, Jesus made His way to Jerusalem for the next Passover, as did many others.

²Near the Sheep Gate leading into the city was the pool of Bethesda. It was surrounded by five roof-covered porches with columns and arches. ³Here many sick and handicapped people waited for the sudden and mysterious moving of the otherwise quiet water. ⁴People believed that periodically an angel came down from heaven and disturbed the water, and the first person in after the movement of the water would be healed. ⁵One of those who waited was a man who had been partially paralyzed for thirty-eight years. ⁶As Jesus walked beside the columns of the porches around the pool, He saw this man lying on a mat. Jesus knew by looking at him that he had been sick for a long time. So He stopped and said to him, "Would you like to be healed?"

⁷The sick man barely looked up, but straining his voice to talk, said, "Sir, there is no one here to help me into the water at the right time. When I try to make it to the pool by myself, the others push and shove and always get in before I do. So there's no use. I'm ready to give up." ⁸Jesus looked at him and said, "I'm not here to help you into the water. I'm here to tell you to stand up on your feet. Then roll up your mat and go on home." ⁹The man didn't even question Jesus. He just willed to do what Jesus said, put forth the effort to stand, and as he did, he found that he was healed. He reached down, rolled up his mat and turned to thank Jesus. But Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. So the man tucked his mat under his arm and left for home. This was on the Sabbath day.

¹⁰When the Jewish leaders saw the man carrying his mat, they stopped him

and said, "Don't you know that today is the Sabbath and that it's against the law to be carrying your bed?" ¹¹The man answered, "The One who healed me told me to roll up my mat, pick it up and go home." ¹²They said to him, "Who asked you to do that?" ¹³The man couldn't answer, because he really didn't know who had healed him. He seemed to have vanished in the crowd.

¹⁴Later that day, Jesus saw the man in the Temple thanking God for healing him. He walked up to him and said, "It's good to see you well. But be careful. Don't return to your old life-style of sinning, or you might end up with something worse than what you had before." ¹⁵Then the man went to the Jewish leaders and told them that it was Jesus who had healed him and had told him to take up his mat and go home.

Jesus Equal With God

¹⁶When they heard this report, the Jewish leaders began to zealously pursue Jesus, looking for a chance to arrest Him and stone Him as a Sabbath breaker. ¹⁷Every time they confronted Him with the question of Sabbath keeping, He would say, "My Father does good on the Sabbath and so do I." ¹⁸This answer only enraged the Jews. They were more determined than ever to execute Him, not only as a Sabbath breaker, but also because He made Himself equal with God by claiming that God was His Father.

All Judgment Given to the Son

¹⁹On one occasion Jesus responded to the charge of Sabbath breaking by saying, "The Son does nothing on His own, but everything He does is according to the Father's will and only what the Father Himself would do." ²⁰The Father loves the Son and shows Him what to do. Soon He will show the Son even greater things to do. And you will be amazed. ²¹Whatever the Father can do, the Son can do, even raising the dead. ²²In fact, the Father judges no one, but has en-

trusted all judging to the Son. ²³The Father wants everyone to honor His Son, just as they honor Him. Those who do not honor and respect the Son are not honoring the Father who sent Him.

²⁴"Those who listen to what I'm saying and believe that the Father has sent me have eternal life. They will not be judged guilty because the seed of death in them has already been replaced by the seed of life. ²⁵I tell you, the time will come, and in one sense is already here, when the dead will respond to the Son's voice and live. ²⁶Just as the Father is the Source of all life, so He has allowed the Son to use His life-giving power. ²⁷The Father has turned over all judging to the Son because the Son is both human and divine. ²⁸So don't be surprised at what you see the Son do, for the time is coming when all who are dead will hear His voice and come to life. ²⁹Those who accept the Son and have done good will be resurrected and will have life forever. Those who reject the Son and have done evil will be found guilty and be condemned to die. ³⁰If I were only human, I couldn't judge people except by what I hear them say or see them do. But my judgment is true because I judge by what my Father tells me, and He knows what's in everyone's heart. So I do what pleases the Father who is the One who sent me.

A Fourfold Testimony

³¹"If I were the only one who testified about myself, my testimony would not be accepted. ³²But there is Another who testifies about me and His testimony about me is true. ³³John the Baptist also told you the truth about me. ³⁴I'm not talking only about human testimony, but about the testimony that came from heaven. I tell you these things, not to boast, but so that you may be saved. ³⁵John the Baptist was like a burning lamp. You were happy about his mission and were willing, for a while, to rejoice in his light.

³⁶"I have an even greater mission than John. I am doing what my Father has told

me to do. My works and miracles are evidence that the Father has sent me. ³⁷This is how the Father shows approval of what I do. It's hard to understand how, with all the evidence you have in front of you, that you can't hear Him speaking through me, nor see Him in what I do. ³⁸You really don't have His word in your heart, because you don't believe the One He sent. ³⁹You're constantly studying the Scriptures, and you think that by doing so you have eternal life, but these same Scriptures talk about me. ⁴⁰You refuse to believe who I am, so there's no chance that you will ever receive eternal life. ⁴¹I don't do things just to be praised by men.

⁴²"I know you, and I know that the love of God isn't in you. ⁴³I come in my Father's name, backed by His credentials, but you don't accept me. If others came and claimed to speak for God and continued under your direction, you would accept them. ⁴⁴You're eager for praise from one another, but make no effort to receive praise from God. ⁴⁵Don't think that I'm against you or that I'm accusing you. The one who is accusing you is Moses, in whose writings you place your hope of eternal life. ⁴⁶If you really believed everything Moses said, you would believe what I'm saying, because all through his writings Moses talked about me. ⁴⁷But if you don't believe what Moses said, how are you going to believe what I say?"

Feeding the Five Thousand

6 Jesus went north to Capernaum, then crossed over the northern tip of the Lake of Galilee (also called the Sea of Tiberias). ²Soon crowds were following Him everywhere because of the miracles He did to heal the sick. ³After days of healing and teaching, Jesus and His disciples looked for a secluded place to get away from the crowd. They went up into the hills and made themselves comfortable. ⁴Jesus had not gone to the last Passover because of the Pharisees. This year's Passover was only several months away. ⁵When people found out where

Jesus was, they came to see Him, and soon a very large crowd had gathered.

Jesus turned to Philip and said, "These people have come a long way and will soon be hungry. Where can we get some food to feed them?" ⁶Jesus asked Philip this question to test his faith. He already knew how He was going to feed the people. ⁷Philip said, "I don't think that two hundred days' wages could buy enough bread to feed all these people, even if we gave only a little to each person." ⁸Then Peter's brother Andrew, overhearing the conversation, said, ⁹"There's a boy here who has five little loaves of bread and two small fish, but how can that feed all these people?" ¹⁰Jesus said, "Go tell the people to sit down and get comfortable." There were about five thousand men in the crowd, many of them with families. ¹¹Then Jesus asked for the boy's five loaves and two fish, offered a prayer of thanksgiving to His heavenly Father and started passing out bread and fish to His disciples to give to the people. They passed out the food as fast as they could. ¹²There was so much food that everyone had plenty to eat. When the meal was finished, Jesus said to His disciples, "Pick up the food that's left over so none of it is wasted." ¹³After picking up the leftover bread and fish, the disciples had twelve baskets full of food which the people couldn't eat. ¹⁴Because of this miracle, the men in the crowd said, "There's no doubt that this Man is the Prophet we've been waiting for." Then they agreed to force Jesus to be their king in place of Herod.

Jesus Walks on Water

¹⁵He knew what they were planning, so He dismissed the people and told them to go home. He spoke to them with such authority that everyone obeyed. Then He climbed a nearby hill to be alone and pray.

¹⁶After the crowd had gone, the disciples went down to the shore ¹⁷and got into a boat, determined to sail back to Capernaum instead of to Bethsaida as Jesus had instructed them. They got a

late start because they were arguing and blaming each other for their failure to make Jesus king. They pushed off just as it was getting dark, but Jesus wasn't with them.¹⁸ They hadn't traveled far when a storm arose. The waves quickly grew rough and threatened to sink their boat.¹⁹ They strained at the oars, trying to get to shore, but after hours of rowing they had covered only about three miles. Suddenly, in the middle of the violent storm, they saw someone walking on the water, coming straight toward them. Thinking it was an omen of death, they began shaking with fright.²⁰ But it was the Master, and He called out to them, "Don't be afraid. I am Jesus."²¹ With glad hearts, they welcomed Him on board. As soon as He touched the boat, the wind stopped, and He got in. The next thing they knew, they were on the shore south of Capernaum by the plain of Gennesaret.

Jesus, the Manna From Heaven

²²When morning came, some of the people who had been with Jesus on the other side of the lake realized that He was gone. They wondered how He had gotten away, for they had seen the disciples leave without Him.²³ Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where Jesus had fed the large crowd the day before, after having thanked the Father.²⁴ When they realized that Jesus and the disciples were gone and were not coming back, they got into their boats and went over to Capernaum looking for Him.

²⁵Soon they found Him and said, "Teacher, how did you get across the lake?"²⁶ Jesus said, "Why were you so eager to find me? You seem more interested in being fed than in what yesterday's miracle told you about the kingdom of God."²⁷ Don't spend your lives working only for food that spoils, but work for food that lasts and gives eternal life. Only the Son of God can give you this food because the Father has put His seal of approval on Him."²⁸ They

asked, "What should we do to have a part in God's kingdom?"²⁹ Jesus said, "The first thing to do is to believe in the One whom God has sent."³⁰ They said, "What sign can you give us so that we can know that you are the One God has sent? We need to see a miracle so we can believe you."³¹ Our forefathers were given a sign in the wilderness. As the Scriptures say, "He provided them bread from heaven so they wouldn't go hungry."³² Jesus said, "You need to remember that it wasn't Moses who gave your forefathers food from heaven, but my Father, who also gave them spiritual manna."³³ Now God's manna has come down from heaven and is made visible in the One whom the Father has sent."³⁴ They said, "Lord, if you are the One who has this life-giving manna, give it to us and we'll eat it."

³⁵Jesus said, "I am God's bread from heaven that gives life. Those who come to me will not go spiritually hungry, and those who believe in me will not be spiritually thirsty."³⁶ Yesterday you saw me provide for your physical needs, but you still don't believe who I am or let me provide for your spiritual needs.³⁷ All those who respond to the Father's call will come to me, and I will feed them with heavenly manna and will never drive them away.³⁸ I came down from heaven, not to exert my authority, but to carry out the will of the One who sent me.³⁹ And this is my Father's will that I shall not lose one of those who believe in me, but that I shall resurrect them at the last day.⁴⁰ This is what my Father wants, that everyone who believes in His Son shall have eternal life, and when the end comes, I will raise them up."

Jesus, the Bread of Life

⁴¹The Jewish leaders expressed doubts about what Jesus was saying because He claimed to be sent from heaven.⁴² They said to each other, "Isn't this Man the son of Joseph? We know His parents, where He was born and where He grew up. How can He say He came down from heaven?"

⁴³Jesus said to the Jewish leaders, "You need to stop grumbling to each other about me. ⁴⁴I'm not here to force you to follow me. No one can really follow me unless he first responds to my Father who is drawing him to me. And I will resurrect him at the end of time. ⁴⁵As Isaiah the prophet said, 'God will teach everyone who is willing to be taught.' Everyone who listens to the Father will accept me. ⁴⁶I've come directly from the Father. I've seen Him and talked with Him. ⁴⁷Therefore, anyone who believes in me has already tasted eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹The manna which your forefathers ate did not give them eternal life. They died in the wilderness and never entered Canaan. ⁵⁰The food from heaven that really matters is the spiritual manna that feeds your soul and gives you eternal life. ⁵¹Believe me, I am God's manna which came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my body which I will give for all the people of the world that they might have life."

⁵²But the Jewish leaders continued to express doubts and said, "How can this Man feed the whole world, and how can people eat His flesh?" ⁵³Then Jesus said, "I want to tell you in all sincerity, unless you feed on the Son of Man, you can't be given eternal life. ⁵⁴But the man who believes in me and eats and drinks the spiritual food that I provide already has eternal life, and I will resurrect him. ⁵⁵My life and death are food and drink to your soul. ⁵⁶He who feeds on me is part of me, and I'm part of him. ⁵⁷Just as the Father sent me, and I feed on Him and on His love for me, so the man who feeds on me and on my love for him will live because of me. ⁵⁸I am the bread from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and still died, but that's not the kind of manna I'm talking about. The manna I'm talking about will give a person eternal life." ⁵⁹This conversation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders took place in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Many Followers Leave Him

⁶⁰Many who claimed to be His disciples, when they heard all this, said to themselves, "This is too hard to understand; it doesn't make sense." ⁶¹Jesus knew what they were thinking and said, "Are you also offended by what I have said? ⁶²If you're offended because I said I came down from heaven, you'd really be surprised if you saw me go up to heaven. ⁶³What I'm talking about is a man's soul and what it feeds on, not physical nourishment. The words I speak to you are spiritual and will nourish your soul and the Holy Spirit will give you life. ⁶⁴Some of you still don't believe what I'm saying." Jesus knew that some of them would never believe in Him. He also knew that one of the twelve would betray Him. ⁶⁵He continued, "No one can believe in me unless he first responds to the love of my Father, who will then enable him."

⁶⁶Then the word spread that He was not the Messiah and many of those who claimed to be his followers decided to leave Him. ⁶⁷Jesus turned to the twelve and said, "Are you going to leave me too?" ⁶⁸Peter answered, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We believe that you are the Messiah, the Holy One sent by God." ⁷⁰Jesus said, "That's why I have chosen you to be my disciples, although one of you has a spirit that comes from the devil." ⁷¹He was referring to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, because he was the one who would eventually betray Jesus, even though he was among the twelve.

Jesus' Brothers Don't Believe

7 After healing people and saying that He was God's bread from heaven, Jesus didn't go back to Judea, because the leaders there were making plans to have Him arrested and killed. Even in Galilee, He had to keep on the move. ²When the time came for the Feast of Tabernacles, ³it looked as if Jesus still had no intention of going to Jerusalem,

but His step-brothers urged Him, saying, "Why don't you go and work some miracles there like you did here in Galilee? This would be a great encouragement to your followers everywhere. ⁴Nobody makes the kinds of claims for himself that you do and then acts as if he's being chased by the law. Men who make such claims do so openly and without fear. You need to perform your miracles in Jerusalem." ⁵His brothers said this because they wanted their family to be respected, not because they believed that Jesus was the Son of God. ⁶Jesus turned to them and said, "When my Father tells me to go to Jerusalem, then I'll go, but not before. You can go any time. ⁷The world and the Jewish leaders don't hate you, but they hate me because my presence keeps reminding them that their lives are evil. ⁸You go on to the feast if you want to, but I'm not going, at least not right now, because the timing of what I do is very important." ⁹So His brothers left for Jerusalem while Jesus stayed in Galilee.

Jesus Confronts Religious Leaders

¹⁰A short time after they left, Jesus decided to go too, not by using the heavily traveled main road as they had, but by using the less traveled side roads. ¹¹Meanwhile, the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem were looking for Jesus, asking themselves, "Where is He? He should be here by now." ¹²The people were also looking for Him. Some said, "He's a good Man." Others said, "No, He's not. He's an imposter going around deceiving people." Public opinion was divided. ¹³All this was taking place quietly because the people were afraid to publicly say things one way or the other about Jesus for fear of the Jewish leaders.

¹⁴In the middle of the week-long feast, Jesus arrived in Jerusalem and went straight to the Temple and started teaching. ¹⁵The Jewish leaders were right there listening to everything He said and were amazed at what they heard. They

asked each other, "Where does this man get all this learning, having never gone to school?" ¹⁶Jesus overheard their whispering and said, "My teachings are not something I've just thought up, but were given to me by the One who sent me. ¹⁷Anyone can learn these same things if he decides to do God's will. Then he'll know whether my teachings are my own or not. ¹⁸If someone always talks about himself and his accomplishments, he's only interested in his own glory, but the one who wants to honor the person who taught him will not live a lie but will speak the truth. ¹⁹Look at your own behavior. Why don't you keep the law as Moses says? Do you think it's right to try to kill me?" ²⁰Someone in the crowd cried out, "You're crazy! Who's trying to kill you?"

²¹Jesus answered, "I healed a man on the Sabbath and you were offended. ²²Yet, you circumcise on the Sabbath. Moses didn't originate the idea of circumcision; he simply passed on to you what he got from his forefathers. ²³If circumcision is so important to you that you do it on the Sabbath so as not to disobey Moses, why are you angry with me because I obeyed God and made a man well on the Sabbath? Isn't relieving pain more important than circumcising someone? ²⁴Don't be so legalistic, but look for the reason for doing things and then decide what's right."

Is Jesus the Messiah?

²⁵A little later some of the people asked, "Isn't this the Man they want killed? ²⁶Here He is in public speaking openly, and they don't even arrest Him. Maybe the rulers have changed their minds and really think He is the Messiah. ²⁷But this Man can't be the Messiah, because we know where He is from. When the Messiah comes, nobody will know what family He's from." ²⁸Then Jesus stopped teaching, looked around and said, "Of course you all know me and where I'm from, but I didn't choose to come here without permission. The One

who agreed for me to come is truthful and would not deceive anyone. You don't know Him as I do. ²⁹But I know Him, because I've lived with Him and He is the One who sent me."

³⁰After He said this, they wanted to get their hands on Him, yet they didn't dare touch Him, because it wasn't the right time for Him to die. ³¹But many believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and they spoke up for Him, saying, "When the Messiah comes, do you think He'll be able to perform greater miracles than this Man?"

Temple Guards Summoned

³²When the Pharisees who were standing nearby heard this, they decided to send for the Temple guards. They knew that the longer they waited, the more people would believe that Jesus was the Messiah and the less they would listen to them. ³³So, while the guards were being requested, Jesus said to the Pharisees, "I'm going to be here just a little while longer, then I'm going back to the One who sent me. ³⁴That's when you'll look for me but won't be able to find me, because where I go, you can't follow." ³⁵The Jewish leaders asked each other, "Where do you think He's going that we can't find Him or follow Him? Do you think He's planning to go and teach our people somewhere else in the Roman Empire—in Greece, maybe?" ³⁶What does He mean when He says, 'You'll look for me and not be able to find me, and where I go you can't follow?' So they decided to wait to see what His plans were before arresting Him.

Jesus Speaks About the Holy Spirit

³⁷On the last day of the week-long feast, Jesus, standing at one end of the Temple courtyard, called out, "If anyone is thirsty, come over here to me and I will satisfy your thirst. ³⁸If anyone believes who I am, from your own soul shall flow out rivers of life-giving water, just as the Scriptures say." ³⁹By this, He meant that the power of the Holy Spirit would flow

into a person's soul and flow out in blessings to others. When He said this, the Holy Spirit had not yet fully empowered His followers as they were empowered at Pentecost after His resurrection.

People Argue About Jesus

⁴⁰When the people heard Jesus call out to everyone as He did, some said, "There's no doubt that this Man is the Prophet we've been looking for!" ⁴¹Others said, "He's the Messiah!" But still others said, "The Messiah won't come to us from Galilee." ⁴²The Scriptures say the Messiah will be a descendant of David and will come from Bethlehem where David was born." ⁴³The result of this was open confusion over who Jesus really was. ⁴⁴Some wanted to have the guards lay their hands on Him right then, but nobody was able to touch Him.

The Pharisees Reject Him

⁴⁵Then the Temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees without Him, and the priests asked, "Where is He? Didn't you arrest Him?" ⁴⁶The officer in charge said, "We've never heard anyone speak like this Man. We couldn't arrest Him without causing a riot." ⁴⁷When the Pharisees heard this, they were very upset and said to the officer, "You mean He has deceived you too?" ⁴⁸Do any of the rulers or Pharisees believe that He's the Messiah? ⁴⁹The people are ignorant and can't read the Scriptures as we can. Poor people are under God's curse, so you can't rely on who they think is the Messiah." ⁵⁰Then Nicodemus, who was one of the Pharisees and who had had a night interview with Jesus, said, ⁵¹"Doesn't our law protect the rights of people and forbid us to condemn anyone before we question him personally to see what he has to say?" ⁵²They all turned to Nicodemus and said, "Don't tell us that you're a follower of this Galilean! Read the Scriptures; you will not find one reference to the Messiah coming out of Galilee." ⁵³Then they adjourned and everyone went home.

The Woman Caught in Adultery

8 Toward the end of the day Jesus left the Temple and went out of the city to the top of a hill called the Mount of Olives to spend some time in prayer. ²The following morning, He went back to the Temple and sat down in the courtyard to teach, even though the week-long feast was over. Soon a crowd gathered around Him to listen to what He had to say. ³While He was teaching, the Scribes and Pharisees dragged in a prostitute whom they had tricked into adultery so they could use her to confront Jesus. They pushed her toward Him and said, ⁴“Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of committing adultery. What should we do with her?” ⁵Moses told us that such a person should be stoned to death. What do you say?” ⁶They did this to trap Him in His own words so they could arrest Him without causing a riot.

But Jesus ignored their question. He bent down and, with His finger, started writing on the ground. ⁷They kept asking what He thought they should do with the woman. Finally He straightened up, looked at them and said, “Any one of you who has never sinned, let him throw the first stone.” ⁸Then He bent down and started writing again. This time the leaders looked at what He was doing and saw traced before them their own secret sins and their part in trapping the woman. ⁹Convicted of their own sins, they quietly left, beginning with the older ones, until they were all gone. Only Jesus and the woman were left. ¹⁰Then Jesus straightened up and said to the woman who was still trembling in fear of hearing her death sentence, “Where are all those who were accusing you? It looks like they’ve all gone. There’s no one here to condemn you.” ¹¹She looked up and said, “You’re right, Lord. There’s not a one.” Jesus responded, “Neither will I condemn you. I’ve forgiven you. So you may go, but leave your life of sin.”

Jesus the Light of the World

¹²Then He turned to the crowd which

had been watching and said, “I am the Light of the world, and the person who follows me will no longer have to feel his way through the darkness, but will be able to walk into the future with certainty because he will have the Light that gives life.”

¹³Some other Pharisees had joined the crowd by now and said, “You keep telling us who you are and that we should believe in you. Surely you don’t expect us to believe what you say about yourself.”

¹⁴Jesus answered, “Even though I speak about myself, what I say is true. I know where I came from and what my mission is. But you don’t want to know about where I came from or where I’m going, so you can’t understand what I’m saying.”

¹⁵You judge things by outward appearance. I pass judgment on no one. ¹⁶But if I do judge, my decisions are valid because I don’t decide things on my own. You see, my Father and I do things together, and in that sense we are one.

¹⁷As it is written in the Scriptures, ‘The testimony of two witnesses who agree should be accepted as true.’ ¹⁸I’m giving you my testimony, and the Father is giving you His testimony through me. From this you should know who I am.” ¹⁹So they asked Him, “Where is your father? We would like to meet him.” Jesus answered, “You don’t even recognize who I am. How then would you expect to recognize my Father? If you knew me, you would know who my Father is.” ²⁰This was only part of the conversation Jesus had with the Pharisees in the Temple that morning. Though He was sitting near the treasury where a number of guards were, no one tried to lay hands on Him because the time for Him to be arrested had not yet come.

Jesus Is Misunderstood

²¹Later that day, Jesus had another conversation with some of the Pharisees. He said, “Soon I’ll be on my way, and though you look for me, you won’t be able to find me, nor will you be able to come to where I’m going. Then you’ll die in your sins for

having rejected me.”²² The Jews said to each other, “Do you think He’s planning to kill himself? What else do you think He means when He says, ‘Where I go, you can’t come?’”²³ Jesus overheard their conversation and said, “Your questions show me that you have no concept of spiritual things. I don’t see things the way you do, because I look beyond this present world.”

²⁴That’s why I’ve told you to look at things differently, or you’ll die in your sins. If you refuse to believe I am the Messiah, you won’t be able to stop the consequences of having rejected me.”²⁵ They asked Him again, “Who are you anyway?”

Jesus said, “I told you who I am at the beginning of our conversation.”²⁶ There are many other things I could tell you about myself, but what my Father has said about me is true. What I’m telling everyone is what my Father has told me.”²⁷ They still didn’t understand that Jesus was talking about His heavenly Father, not His earthly father.²⁸ Then Jesus said, “After you succeed in having the Son of God killed, then you’ll realize that I was sent by God. I do nothing on my own, but speak only what my Father has taught me.”²⁹ The One who sent me is with me. When I came here, my Father didn’t leave me. I always do what He asks me to do because I love Him and want to please Him.”

True Freedom

³⁰Many who were listening began to believe in Him.³¹ Then Jesus said to them, “If you continue to believe in me and in what I’m saying, then you are really my disciples.”³² Soon you will hear more truth about me and this truth will set you free.”³³ Others in the crowd said, “We are a free people. We are the descendants of Abraham and our spirit has never been enslaved by any man. So what do you mean when you say, ‘The truth will set you free?’”

³⁴Jesus answered, “I’m talking about being free from the slavery of sin, because anyone who sins is enslaved.”³⁵ A slave might feel as if he’s free when he

carries out his duties and is treated well, but he’s not really free. It’s only the children of his master who are really free. They are under no one’s control and can go and come as they please.”³⁶ I’m the Son of the Father, so if I set you free, then you’re really free.

Abraham’s Seed

³⁷“I know that you are descendants of Abraham, but some of you are plotting my death, which shows that you don’t really belong to Abraham because you don’t believe in me.”³⁸ I’m telling you what I know and have been told by my Father. You’re being inspired by a different father than Abraham, because he listened to God and you don’t.”

³⁹Some of them said, “Abraham is our father. We have no other father.” Jesus answered, “If you were children of Abraham, you would act like Abraham.”⁴⁰ You’re plotting to kill me because I’m telling you what is true as I heard it from God. That isn’t what Abraham would do.”⁴¹ Your spirit doesn’t come from Abraham, but from another kind of father.” They said, “You don’t even know who your earthly father is. Your mother was an adulteress. How then can you say that God is your heavenly Father? But we know who our heavenly Father is. He is God, and He is one God.”⁴² Jesus said, “If God were your heavenly Father, you would respect me, because I came from Him. I didn’t come on my own. He is the One who sent me.”⁴³ Why is it that you don’t understand what I’m saying? Because you don’t want to believe what I’m telling you.”⁴⁴ Your spirit is coming from your father, the devil. He has had murder in his heart from the beginning, and you’ve had murder in your hearts since you’ve known me. He indulged his pride until he went beyond forgiveness and there was no truth left in him. He’s the father of lies and of everything evil.”⁴⁵ Why do you hate me? Is it because I tell you the truth? ⁴⁶Can you prove that I have lied or that I’m a sinner? If not, then

why don't you believe that what I'm telling you about myself is true? ⁴⁷If God is your Father, then you should be able to understand what God is trying to tell you. The reason you can't is that you haven't really accepted the Father."

⁴⁸Then the Jewish leaders said, "What you just said about us confirms what we've been telling the people about you, that you're a deceiver and as crafty as a Samaritan. You're the one being influenced by the devil."

⁴⁹Jesus answered, "I'm not influenced by the devil. I respect my Father and honor Him, but you don't give me the respect that you give to a stranger. ⁵⁰I'm not here to seek honor for myself, but there is Someone else who is very much concerned about how you receive me, and He'll decide if what you're doing is right or not. ⁵¹I want to tell you that whoever believes what I'm saying and obeys my teaching will not taste the final power of death." ⁵²Then those who hated Jesus said, "We've known for some time that you have a demon in you, and now we know you're controlled by one. Abraham died, didn't he? And so did the prophets. How then can you say that whoever believes what you say will not taste death? ⁵³Are you greater than Abraham or the prophets? None of them had life in themselves, much less could they give it to others. So who do you think you are?"

⁵⁴Jesus answered, "If I honored myself, my honor would mean nothing. It is my Father who honors me. The same God you claim as your God is the One who honors me. ⁵⁵You don't really know Him, but I know Him. If I said I didn't know Him, I would be lying and would show that I have the same spirit you have. But I do know Him, and I do what He asks me to do. ⁵⁶Abraham looked forward to the time when I would come; in vision he saw my day and was glad." ⁵⁷Then the Jews said, "You're not even fifty years old yet. How then can you say that our ancestor Abraham saw your day?" ⁵⁸Jesus answered, "Because I existed before

Abraham was born." ⁵⁹Then they went to get stones to stone Him, but when they came back, they couldn't find Him, for He was hidden in the crowd and passed by them as He left the Temple.

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

9 As Jesus and His disciples were leaving Jerusalem to go back to Galilee, they saw a man whom they knew had been born blind. ²So they asked Jesus, "Rabbi, was this man born blind because of his sins or the sins of his parents?" ³Jesus said, "He was not born blind because of his sins or the sins of his parents. However, his condition will provide God with an opportunity to show you His love and power. ⁴This is why I was sent here. I must do God's work while I can, because soon my time will be up. The night is coming when no one can work. ⁵But while I'm in this world, I'm the Light of the world and must do my Father's work."

⁶Then He asked the disciples to bring the blind man to Him. When the man came, Jesus used some saliva to make a tiny bit of mud, then put the mud on the closed eyelids of the blind man. ⁷As He did this, He said, "Now go to the nearby pool of Siloam and wash the mud off your eyes." The blind man did as he was told, and when he looked, he could see. Then he ran home, praising God for his healing. ⁸His friends and neighbors said, "Isn't this the man who was born blind? Isn't he the one who always sat and begged?" ⁹Other neighbors said, "Yes, that's him!" But still others said, "No, he's not the one. He just looks like him." Then he said, "Yes, I'm the one!" ¹⁰So they asked him, "What happened? How is it that you can suddenly see?" ¹¹He said, "A Man called Jesus came by, made a tiny bit of mud, put it on my eyes and then told me to go to the pool of Siloam to wash it off. When I did, I could see!" ¹²They asked him, "Who is this Man? Where did He go?" The blind man said, "I don't know."

The Pharisees Question the Healed Man

¹³So they took him to the Pharisees

¹⁴because Jesus had healed him on the Sabbath, and the man had publicly washed his face in the pool of Siloam.

¹⁵The Pharisees asked him the same questions his friends and neighbors had. They said, "How were you healed, and who did it?" He answered, "A Man put a little mud on my eyes, and when I washed it off, I could see." ¹⁶The Pharisees said, "Whoever did this is not from God because He did it on the Sabbath. So He broke God's law." Then some of the people said, "If He broke the Sabbath and sinned, how could He have done what He did?" Before long the people were divided. ¹⁷The Pharisees then asked, "What else can you tell us about the One who healed you?" The man answered, "I believe He's a prophet."

¹⁸But the Pharisees were not willing to believe that the man was miraculously healed, so they decided to call in his parents to see what they had to say. ¹⁹When the man's parents came, the Pharisees asked them, "Is this your son? Was he born blind? And if so, what happened to him that he can suddenly see?" ²⁰The parents said, "Yes, this is our son and he was born blind. ²¹Why it is that he can suddenly see, we don't know. He's old enough to speak for himself. Ask him."

²²The man's parents answered this way because they were afraid of the Pharisees who had publicly announced that anyone who believed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³That's why they said to the Pharisees, "Ask him how it happened, because he is of age and can speak for himself."

²⁴The Pharisees turned to the man and said, "Now tell us again what happened, and give God the glory, not the Man who healed you, because we know that He's a sinner." ²⁵The man said, "Whether this Man's a sinner or not, I can't say. But one thing I know: Once I was blind, but now I can see!" ²⁶The Pharisees questioned, "What actually happened to make you see? What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" ²⁷The man answered,

"I've already told you, but you weren't listening. Do you want to become His disciples? Is that why you want to hear it again?" ²⁸They glared at him and said, "You may be His disciple, but we are not. We're Moses' disciples. ²⁹We know that God worked through Moses, but of this Fellow we know very little. We don't even know who His father was."

³⁰The man responded by saying, "Now that's something! You say that you don't know much about this Man and have no evidence that God is working through Him, yet you have living evidence standing right in front of you that He has power to open the eyes of people born blind. ³¹We know that only God can do something like this. He doesn't give that kind of power to sinners but only to those who do His will. ³²Never in all of history has there been a reported case of an ordinary person healing someone who was born blind. ³³If the Man who healed me hadn't been given this power by God, He couldn't have healed me. That shouldn't be hard to understand." ³⁴The Pharisees turned on him and said, "Remember, you're a sinner yourself. Your parents are sinners, and that's why you were born blind. Are you trying to teach us?" Then they told him to get out.

Spiritual Blindness

³⁵Now when the news about all of this reached Jesus, He went looking for the man, and when He found him, He said, "Would you like to meet the Son of Man and be His disciple?" ³⁶The man said, "Yes, of course! Where is He? I want to see Him and meet Him." ³⁷Jesus said, "You're looking at Him and talking with Him." ³⁸The man said, "Lord, you sound like the One who healed me! Yes, I believe! You are the Son of God!" Then he fell on his knees and worshiped Him. ³⁹Jesus said to those nearby, "My presence in this world makes people decide either for me or against me. Those who are blind see, and those who see become blind." ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees standing

there heard this and said, "Are you saying that we're blind?" ⁴¹Jesus said, "If you couldn't see the truth of what I'm saying, you wouldn't be guilty. But when you claim to see and understand things and still refuse the truth, then you're guilty."

The Shepherd and His Sheep

10 Jesus continued, "I want to tell you what you already know. If a man doesn't use the gate to go into the sheep pen, but climbs in some other way, everyone knows that he's a thief and not the shepherd. ²But the man who uses the gate to go into the sheep pen is the shepherd. ³If there's a guard at the sheep gate, he will let the shepherd in, and the sheep will recognize the shepherd's voice as he calls them by name and leads them out to pasture. ⁴As they go to pasture, the shepherd goes ahead of them, and they follow him because they know him. ⁵They won't follow a stranger; they'll run from him because they know that he's not the shepherd." ⁶When Jesus finished, the Pharisees still didn't understand what He was talking about.

Jesus the Good Shepherd

⁷Then in plain words He said, "I am the door into God's sheep pen. ⁸Those who preceded me, claiming to be the Messiah, were nothing but thieves and robbers, and God's sheep didn't listen to them. ⁹I am the door into God's sheep pen. If anyone comes into the pen through me, he'll be safe and will find plenty of pasture from which to eat. ¹⁰Thieves, on the other hand, are not interested in feeding the sheep, but rather in feeding on them. They want to steal them and then kill them. I'm interested in saving the sheep and giving them a whole new life.

¹¹"I'm also the Good Shepherd and am ready to give my life for the sheep. ¹²But those who are interested in themselves have no real interest in the sheep. As soon as they see the wolves coming and realize that their own safety is at stake,

they leave the sheep and let the wolves come in and tear the sheep apart. ¹³The reason these false shepherds run away when danger comes is that they are concerned about themselves and not about the sheep. ¹⁴But I am the Good Shepherd and know my sheep, and they know me. ¹⁵The Father knows that I'm ready to give my life for my sheep. ¹⁶There are other sheep that are not from this pen. I must bring them also. They too will recognize my voice and obey, and there will be one fold and one Shepherd. ¹⁷This is why my Father loves me, because I'm willing to die for the sheep. I will die, but I will also live again. ¹⁸Those wanting to kill me can't do so unless I give up life of my own accord. I have the right to give up my life and the right to take it back. After I die, I will resurrect myself. This is what the Father has told me to do."

¹⁹After Jesus made these claims about Himself, the people and the leaders ended up being as divided as before. ²⁰Some of them said, "He's possessed by the devil! He's mad! Why even listen to a fellow like that?" ²¹Others said, "He doesn't talk like someone who's devil possessed. How can someone who's devil possessed heal someone born blind?"

Sheep Know Their Shepherd

²²The next confrontation with the Jewish leaders occurred at the Festival of Lights (or Hanukkah) held in Jerusalem. It was a wet and stormy winter day. ²³As Jesus walked under the colonnade called Solomon's Porch, which was attached to the Temple, ²⁴the Jewish leaders surrounded Him and demanded, "How much longer are you going to keep us in suspense? If you're the Messiah, tell us." ²⁵Jesus answered, "I've already told you, but you don't believe me. The works that I do in my Father's name confirm that what I've told you is true. ²⁶But you still don't believe me because you're not my sheep, and you don't recognize my voice and listen to me. ²⁷My sheep recognize my voice, and I know them, and they fol-

low me without hesitation. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will not perish, nor will anyone be able to take them away from me. ²⁹The Father who put the sheep under my care is greater than anyone; no one can take them out of His hand. ³⁰You see, my Father and I are so close, we're one."

Leaders Ready to Stone Jesus

³¹Then the Jewish leaders left Solomon's Porch and went looking for stones to kill Him, as they had done before. ³²When they came back, Jesus faced them and said, "I have done nothing but good to people, and I did all this under the direction of my Father. For which of these good works are you going to stone me?" ³³They said, "We're not going to stone you because of the good you've done, but for blasphemy. You're only a human being, yet you keep calling yourself the Son of God."

³⁴Jesus said, "Don't the Scriptures say that we are the sons of God? ³⁵If the word of God says that we are His sons, and the Scriptures are always true, ³⁶then how can you reject the One whom the Father has sent and accuse me of blasphemy because I say I'm God's Son? ³⁷If you don't think I'm doing the Father's works, then you don't have to believe what I say. ³⁸But if I am doing the Father's works, even though you don't want to believe in me, at least admit that the works I do are from God. If you admitted that much, you would soon see that He's working in me and that I am in Him. We work together as one." ³⁹What Jesus said to them did no good; they still hated Him. When He finished, they rushed at Him to grab Him and drag Him away from the Temple to stone Him. But through a miracle, he slipped out of their hands.

Many Believed Jesus to Be the Messiah

⁴⁰Later that day He left Jerusalem, followed by a large number of people, and went to a place near the Jordan River where John the Baptist first preached

and baptized. He stayed there for some time. ⁴¹The people who went with Him talked among themselves, saying, "John never worked any miracles himself, but everything he said that this Man would do for us, He has done." ⁴²Many of them believed that Jesus was the Messiah.

The Death of Lazarus

11 About this time, Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha and a close friend of Jesus, became very sick. They lived in a village called Bethany. ²His sister Mary was the one who had been caught in adultery, whom the Pharisees wanted to stone but whom Jesus forgave. She was also the one who later anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume and wiped His feet with her hair shortly before His death. ³When Lazarus got sick, the sisters sent a special message to Jesus, who was ministering in the province of Peraea, saying, "Lord, the one whom you care so much about is very sick." ⁴When Jesus heard it, He said to the messenger, "Tell the two sisters not to worry; Lazarus won't die. His sickness will bring glory to God and to His Son."

⁵Jesus loved these sisters and their brother very much. ⁶It hurt Him to see them suffering, yet He stayed there for two more days. ⁷On the third day He said to His disciples, "Let's go back to Judea." ⁸His disciples said, "Master, you were just there, and the Jews wanted to stone you. You want to go back there again?" ⁹Jesus said, "There are about twelve hours of daylight in a day, and that's when a man can see what he's doing and where he's going. ¹⁰But if he goes anywhere at night, he stumbles, because he has no light. It's the same with my ministry. I don't have much time, so I must work quickly to give people the light they need." ¹¹His disciples tried to change His mind, but Jesus said to them, "Let's go. Our friend Lazarus is sleeping, and I want to wake him up." ¹²The disciples said, "Lord, if he's sleeping, he's getting better, so why go?" ¹³But Jesus was

talking about death, while the disciples thought He was talking about literal sleep. ¹⁴When Jesus saw that they misunderstood what He said, He made it plain by saying, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵For the sake of your faith, I'm glad I wasn't there. You'll see what I mean. Let's be on our way." ¹⁶Then Thomas, the twin, said to the rest of the disciples, "Come, let's go. If the Jewish leaders are going to kill Him, then let's die along with Him."

I Am the Resurrection and the Life

¹⁷So they left Peraea and headed for Judea. By the time they got there, Lazarus had already been dead for four days. ¹⁸The village of Bethany where the sisters lived was less than two miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁹Some among the Jewish leaders from the city went there to comfort Martha and Mary. In addition to relatives and friends, the sisters had hired professional mourners to go through the loud groaning ritual, which was the custom. ²⁰While this was going on, someone whispered to Martha that Jesus was on the outskirts of town. She quietly slipped out of the house and went to meet Him. But Mary didn't know and stayed with the mourners. ²¹Martha came to Jesus and said, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. ²²I know that whatever you ask God to do, He does it."

²³Jesus said to her, "Don't worry, Martha, your brother will be resurrected." ²⁴Martha said, "I know that he'll be resurrected in the last days." ²⁵Jesus looked at her and said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. Anyone who believes in me, even though he dies, he will live. ²⁶And whoever lives and believes in me will not die forever. Do you believe this?" ²⁷Martha answered, "Yes, Lord, I believe anything you say because you are the Messiah. You are the Son of the living God whom we have been expecting."

²⁸Then she turned and ran back home to get Mary. She slipped into the house

and whispered to Mary, "The Master is here and is asking for you." ²⁹Quickly but quietly, Mary left the house with Martha to see Jesus. ³⁰Jesus had stayed on the outskirts of town waiting for Mary to come. ³¹When the mourners and those who had stopped by to comfort the sisters saw them both leave, they said to one another, "They're probably going to the gravesite to mourn. Let's go too."

³²But the sisters had gone to see Jesus, and when Mary saw Him, she fell on her knees and said, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³When Jesus saw Mary and all the others crying, He was deeply moved and felt their pain. ³⁴Sighing, He asked, "Where is he buried?" They said, "Come and see." ³⁵Then Jesus also wept. ³⁶Some of the people said, "Look, He's crying. He really must have loved Lazarus." ³⁷Others said, "If He loved him so much, then why wasn't He here to heal him? He's the One who healed the man born blind. Certainly He could have healed Lazarus if He had really wanted to."

Lazarus Raised From the Dead

³⁸Their doubting hurt Jesus because He loved His friend Lazarus. When they reached the cave where Lazarus was buried, they found the opening had been closed with a large stone. ³⁹With tears in His voice, Jesus said, "Roll away the stone." Martha said, "Lord, don't go in! He's been dead four days, and the smell will be bad." ⁴⁰Jesus replied, "Didn't I tell you that if you would have faith in me, you would see the power of God?" ⁴¹So the men rolled away the stone from the mouth of the cave as He asked them to. Jesus looked up to heaven and said in a voice that was loud enough for everyone to hear, "Father, thank you for hearing me. ⁴²I know you always hear me, but I'm saying it this way for the sake of the people here, so they will know that you are the One who sent me and that I am your Son." ⁴³Then He focused His eyes on the entrance to the cave and called out in a

loud voice, "Lazarus! Come out!" ⁴⁴For a moment, all was still. Then Lazarus appeared at the entrance of the cave, wrapped in his burial clothes. Jesus quietly said to the men who had rolled the stone away, "Go and unwrap him."

The Plot to Kill Jesus

⁴⁵Many who were at the gravesite, including some of the Jewish leaders who had come from Jerusalem, when they saw this, believed that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁴⁶Some others immediately rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the Pharisees what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷So the Pharisees and the chief priests called a council meeting and said to those present, "What are we going to do? This Galilean called Jesus is performing some real miracles. ⁴⁸If we leave Him alone, soon everyone will be following Him. The Romans will see this as a potential insurrection. This could give them the excuse that they've been looking for to dissolve our share in governing Judea and take total charge of the government." ⁴⁹Caiaphas, the high priest, spoke to the council and said, "You're so scared that you're missing the solution to the whole problem. ⁵⁰Isn't it better for one man to die than for us to lose the whole nation to the Romans?"

⁵¹What Caiaphas said was more than a political opinion. Without knowing it, he voiced the prediction of the Scriptures which said that the Messiah would have to die for the nation to be saved. ⁵²And He would die, not only to save Israel, but to save God's children around the world and make them one. ⁵³Following the suggestion of Caiaphas, the Jewish leaders were determined to find a way to arrest Jesus and have Him executed as quickly as possible.

⁵⁴So Jesus decided to make no further public appearances in Jerusalem or anywhere else in Judea. With His disciples He went to the village of Ephraim near the Judean desert.

⁵⁵When it was almost time for the

Jewish Passover to be celebrated, many people from all over the country made their way to Jerusalem. They wanted to get there early to ceremonially purify themselves before the religious festival began. ⁵⁶When they got there, some of them went to the Temple looking for Jesus. They asked one another, "Do you think He'll dare come to the festival?" ⁵⁷They asked this because the chief priests and Pharisees had passed the word around that if anyone saw Jesus or knew where He was, to report it, so they could arrest Him.

Mary Magdalene Anoints Jesus

12 Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived in Bethany to visit Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead, and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. ²They were glad to see Jesus. While He was in town, Simon, the Pharisee whom Jesus had healed of leprosy, invited Him and His disciples over to his house for dinner. Lazarus was to be the honored guest sitting next to Jesus, and Martha helped with the preparations. ³Mary, thinking of the danger to Jesus' life, bought a bottle of the most costly perfume she could find. Slipping into the room, she first poured some of it on Jesus' head, then knelt and poured it on His feet. Immediately the room was filled with rich fragrance. Mary wept while doing this, and some of her tears fell on His feet, so she wiped them off with her hair. ⁴Then Judas Iscariot, the disciple, who in a few days would betray Jesus to the chief priests and Pharisees for money, broke the silence. ⁵"This is very expensive perfume. It must have cost close to a whole year of a working man's wages. What a waste! We could have sold the perfume and given the money to the poor!" ⁶He said this, not because he wanted to help the poor, but because he was treasurer of the group and had been taking money out of the bag for his own use.

⁷Jesus, not wanting to embarrass

Judas, said quietly, "Let her alone. She saved her money to buy this perfume so she could anoint my body for burial.⁸ You will have plenty of opportunities to feed the poor, but I'm here only once. After what I've been through, it's refreshing to be appreciated."

The Plot to Kill Lazarus

⁹Many people had heard that Simon had invited Jesus and Lazarus to his house for dinner. So they came, hoping to get a glimpse of both of them, but especially of Lazarus. They wanted to see the man who had been dead and was now sitting next to Jesus enjoying himself.¹⁰In the meantime, the chief priests and Pharisees were laying plans, not only to kill Jesus, but Lazarus also.¹¹It was because of Lazarus that many Jews were accepting Jesus as the Messiah and putting their faith in Him.

The Triumphal Entry

¹²The day after the dinner at Simon's house, word spread in Jerusalem that Jesus was also coming to attend the Passover feast.¹³When the people heard this, many left Jerusalem for Bethany to meet Jesus. On the way, they tore branches from palm trees, and when they met Him, they shouted, "Praise God! Blessings on the One sent by the Lord! Blessings on the King of Israel."¹⁴Now Jesus had sent two of His disciples to find a young donkey, and when they brought it, He rode on its back toward Jerusalem. This was to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah which said,¹⁵"Rejoice, O daughter of Jerusalem, and do not be afraid. Your King is coming, riding on the back of a colt, bringing peace."¹⁶The disciples didn't fully understand the significance of everything that was happening until after Jesus ascended to heaven. Then they remembered that His ride into Jerusalem and His death later that week were all according to prophecy.¹⁷The people who had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the

dead, spread the word everywhere.¹⁸When the people in Jerusalem heard that Jesus and Lazarus were both coming, they almost emptied the city going to see the man who had been raised from the dead.¹⁹The Pharisees said to one another, "Our warning that Jesus is destroying our nation means absolutely nothing to the people. The whole world seems to be going after Him."

Men From Greece Come to See Jesus

²⁰Other people besides Jews were in Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Men from as far away as Greece had come to worship the true God.²¹After Jesus had gone into the Temple to teach, these Greeks came up to Philip, whom they recognized to be from Galilee, and said, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus."²²Philip went to Andrew and asked him what to do. They both decided to ask Jesus if He wanted to see these men.²³Now Jesus was in the courtyard which was reserved for Jews only, so He went out to the Gentile courtyard to talk with them. When He finished, He said to His disciples, "The time has come for the mission of the Son of Man to close.²⁴Unless a kernel of wheat is buried and dies, it produces nothing. It always will be just one kernel of wheat. But if it dies, it produces other kernels for a great harvest. So it is with me.²⁵If a person lives only for himself, he'll lose eternal life. But if he dies to self and lives for others, he'll produce a harvest of good things and receive life eternal.²⁶If anyone wants to follow me, let him model his life after mine. Then where I am, my servant will be also. And my Father will honor all those who love and serve me.

Jesus Predicts His Crucifixion

²⁷"But right now I am troubled over what's coming. What can I say? Should I ask my Father to change His mind to save me from what lies ahead? I can't do that, because that's the very reason I came—to do my Father's will."²⁸Then Jesus

looked up and prayed, "Father, for the sake of these people, please bring honor and glory to your name." A voice from heaven responded, "I have brought honor and glory to my name before, and I will do so again."²⁹ The people standing nearby heard something, but didn't know what it was. Some said, "It sounded like thunder." Others said, "It sounded like an angel spoke to Him."

³⁰ Jesus said, "The voice you heard was for your sakes, not mine."³¹ The world is about to be judged and the rule of its wicked prince thrown down. The angels will see what he's like, and any sympathy they still had for him will be gone.³² When I'm lifted up from the earth, I will draw people from everywhere to me."³³ By saying this, He let them know that He would soon be arrested and crucified.³⁴ They said to Him, "From the Scriptures we understand that when the Messiah comes, He will be with us forever. So how can you say that the Son of Man will be crucified? Who is this Son of Man?"³⁵ Jesus answered, "The light is with you just a few days longer. Follow that light while it's here; otherwise, you'll be enveloped in spiritual darkness and won't know where you're going."³⁶ While you have the light, trust that light and follow it so you may become the children of light." Then Jesus and His disciples mingled with the Temple worshipers and were lost in the crowd.

³⁷ Even though He had done many miracles in front of the Jewish leaders and people, many still did not believe that He was the Messiah.³⁸ This was also according to prophecy. Isaiah said, "Who has believed the Lord's report? And where are they who have responded to God's revelation?"³⁹ Jesus knew that everyone wouldn't accept Him, because Isaiah also said,⁴⁰ "God lets them close their eyes and hearts to truth because they don't want to see and understand. Therefore, they will not see or understand, nor will they be converted and healed."⁴¹ Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and mission in vision and

often spoke about Him.

⁴² However, many among the leaders and priests did believe that Jesus was the Messiah. But because they were afraid of the high priest and the Pharisees, they did not declare their allegiance to Jesus publicly, or they would have been put out of the synagogue.⁴³ They still loved the praise of men more than the honor and praise of God.

⁴⁴ From one end of the Temple, Jesus suddenly spoke with a loud voice, "Those who believe in me also believe in the One who sent me."⁴⁵ And those who see me, see the One who sent me.⁴⁶ I have come into the world as a spiritual light, and those who believe in me will be safely guided through this world of darkness.⁴⁷ If anyone hears what I'm saying and still doesn't believe, I will not condemn him, because I didn't come into the world to condemn, but to save.⁴⁸ He who rejects me and doesn't believe what I'm saying is condemning himself. What I have spoken will judge him in the last days.⁴⁹ I'm not just telling you this on my own, but the Father who sent me told me what to say and how to say it.⁵⁰ This is my Father's command, to offer you eternal life and to share with you what He has told me."

Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

13 It was Thursday, just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave this world and return to the Father. Having loved His people all the years He was here, He continued to love them to the very end.² It was near the end of the evening meal that Judas was prompted by the devil to go and tell the authorities where to find Jesus.³ Jesus knew that He was God's Son and that His Father had sent Him and given Him power over all things. He also knew that He would be crucified and then return to God.

⁴ Before the meal began, Jesus got up from the table and removed His outer robe. He then took a large towel, wrapped it around His waist and prepared to wash

His disciples' feet. ⁵No one else had offered to do it, so He poured water into a basin and washed each man's feet and then dried them with the towel. ⁶When He came to Peter, Peter said, "Lord, you're the Son of God! You're not going to lower yourself by washing my feet!" ⁷Jesus looked at him and said, "Right now you don't understand why I'm doing this, but after I'm gone, you will." ⁸Peter said, "I am not letting my God wash my feet!" Then Jesus said, "If you won't let me wash your feet, then you're too proud to be my disciple." ⁹Peter's response was, "Lord, then don't stop with my feet, but wash me all over!" ¹⁰Jesus said, "When a person has had a bath, he only needs to rinse the dust off his feet. If a man has been born again and baptized, he doesn't have to be baptized all over again each time he does something wrong. All of you are clean, except one." ¹¹Jesus said this because He knew which one of His disciples would betray Him.

What It Means to Serve

¹²So after He had washed all the disciples' feet, He put His robe back on, sat down at the table and said, "Now let me explain why I washed your feet. ¹³You call me Lord, and that's right, because I am your Lord. ¹⁴So, if I'm willing to do anything to serve you, even what you consider a menial task like washing dirty feet, you should be willing to do the same for one another. ¹⁵I've given you an example of what it means to serve. So you should do what I have done for you. ¹⁶You see, a disciple should not feel that he's above doing what his Master does; nor should he who is sent on a mission feel greater than the One who sends him. ¹⁷If you understand what I'm saying and do it, you'll be happy. ¹⁸I know why I chose all of you. However, one of you I did not choose, and yet the Scripture had to be fulfilled which says, 'The one who ate with me has turned against me.' ¹⁹I'm telling you what will happen ahead of time so when it's all over, you'll believe even more strongly

that I am who I am. ²⁰I'm telling you the truth that whoever accepts whom I send, accepts me. And whoever accepts me, accepts the One who sent me."

²¹Suddenly Jesus seemed to be troubled and said, "Let me tell you plainly that before this evening is over, one of you will betray me." ²²The disciples looked at each other, wondering which one He was talking about. ²³Then Peter motioned to the disciple sitting next to Jesus ²⁴to quietly ask Him which disciple He was talking about. ²⁵So this disciple leaned over to Jesus and whispered, "Lord, which one of us are you talking about?" ²⁶Jesus said quietly, "The one to whom I give a piece of bread after I dip it into the bowl." Then Jesus did so and offered it to Judas.

²⁷As soon as Judas took the bread that Jesus gave him, the devil took complete control of him. Sadly, Jesus looked at him and said, "You may go now. Whatever you feel you need to do, do it quickly." ²⁸None of the other disciples knew why Jesus told Judas to go. ²⁹They thought that Jesus had made plans for him to go and buy whatever was needed for the rest of the week to celebrate the Passover and to give an offering to the poor. Judas would be the logical one to do this because he handled all the money. ³⁰As soon as Judas had eaten the bread, he got up and walked out into the night.

Jesus Talks About His Death

³¹Jesus turned to the rest of the disciples and said, "The time has now come for me to vindicate my Father's name and show myself to be the Messiah. ³²And if the Son of Man glorifies God, God will quickly glorify Him. ³³My children, I won't be with you much longer. Just as I told the Jewish leaders, 'You can't follow me where I'm going.' ³⁴Before I go, I want to tell you to love one another. You must love each other as I have loved you. ³⁵People will know that you are my disciples by how much you love each other."

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

³⁶Then Peter said, "Lord, where are you planning to go?" Jesus said, "Don't worry, because where I'm going, you can't possibly follow now, but eventually you will." ³⁷Peter answered, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I'll go anywhere and do anything for you. I'll even die for you!" ³⁸Jesus looked at Peter and said, "You say you're willing to die for me? I'm telling you that before the rooster stops crowing in the morning, you will have denied knowing me three times."

Jesus Promises to Come Again

14 "Don't let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. ²In my Father's house there's plenty of room for everyone. If that weren't so, I would have told you. I'm going home to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go to prepare a place for you, you can be sure that I'll come back to take you home with me, so you can be with me forever. ⁴You know where I'm going and also how to get there." ⁵Thomas spoke up, "Lord, we have to be honest with you. We don't really know where you're going or how to get there." ⁶Jesus said, "I am the way you get to the Father and the truth about what He's like. No one can come to the Father except through me. ⁷If you really knew me, you would know the Father, because you would have seen Him in me. From now on, you can say that you know Him and have seen Him."

Philip Asks to See the Father

⁸Philip spoke up, "Lord, give us just one glimpse of the Father before you go and we'll be satisfied." ⁹Jesus, being somewhat disappointed with Philip's lack of faith, said, "You mean I've been with you all this time, Philip, and you still don't know me? When you're looking at me, you're looking at the Father. How then can you ask me to give you a glimpse of the Father? ¹⁰You must believe me when I tell you that I am the Father in action and that the Father is living out His life in

me. All the things I've taught you were not just my own, but the Father's. It's the Father living in me who's doing all this. ¹¹Believe me when I tell you that the Father would do everything I have done if He were here. If it's hard for you to believe that, then don't base your faith on what I'm saying, but on the miracles that you have seen me do."

Pray for What You Need

¹²Jesus turned to the rest of the disciples and said, "If you really believe that I am who I say I am, you will do the same things that I have done. In fact, you'll do these things in many more places than I have, because I'm going back to the Father. ¹³Whatever you ask me to do for you, I'll do it, as long as you ask for it in the same spirit that I would. Then your actions will glorify the Father just as mine have. ¹⁴So ask for what you need in order to accomplish my mission and I'll do it for you.

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

¹⁵"If you love me, you'll obey me. ¹⁶When I get back home, I'll ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit. Then He will be the One in charge of my mission and will stay with you while I'm gone. ¹⁷The world in general won't listen to the Holy Spirit because it doesn't see Him or know Him, but you know Him and you've already accepted Him. I know, because I've seen Him working in you, and He'll continue to work in all who believe until I return. ¹⁸So I'm not leaving you alone. Through the Holy Spirit, I'll still be by your side.

Those Who Obey Me Love Me

¹⁹"In just a few hours, I'll be leaving, and the world will wonder where I've gone. But you know where I'm going, and one day we'll be together again. Because I live, you will live also. ²⁰After I go back to my Father and the Holy Spirit comes, you'll understand things better. Then you'll know what it means for me to be

one with the Father and for you to be one with us. ²¹Those who know my commandments and do them are the ones who really love me. Those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and help them to know us even better.” ²²Judas Thaddaeus asked, “Lord, how can you be by our side and the world not see you?” ²³Jesus answered, “This means that if someone loves me and decides to do what I ask, my Father and I will come and make his heart our home. ²⁴If someone doesn’t love me and doesn’t want to listen to what I have to say, he’s not rejecting me, he’s rejecting the Father who’s speaking through me.

Inner Peace

²⁵“I want to make these things clear to you while I’m still here. ²⁶The Holy Spirit whom the Father will send to represent me, will help you understand these things more fully after I’m gone and will help you remember what I’ve said. ²⁷I want you to have the same inner peace that I have—not the kind of peace that the world gives, but that abiding peace with the Father that only I can give. Don’t be afraid of Him, because He loves you. ²⁸As I’ve already told you, I have to go away, but I’ll come back to be by your side. If you love me as you should, then you’ll be glad that I can go back home to my Father who is greater than I.

²⁹“I’m sharing all these things with you ahead of time so that when they happen, your faith in me will be made stronger. ³⁰After tonight, I’ll not be talking to you for awhile. The devil, who thinks he’s the prince of this world, has no power over me because he can’t find one sinful desire in me that responds to his temptations. ³¹The whole world needs to know that I love the Father more than anything else. So everything the Father tells me to do, I do. Come now, we need to be going.”

Jesus, the True Vine

15 On the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said, “I’m like a

grapevine planted in my Father’s vineyard, and He’s the gardener. ²You are the branches. If there is a branch on the vine that does not bear fruit, He will cut it off; those branches that do bear fruit He will keep trimming so they can bear more fruit. ³You’ve already experienced some pruning because I shared the word of God with you and you accepted it as such. ⁴Stay attached to me and my life will flow into yours. Just as branches can’t bear fruit on their own unless they’re connected to the vine, neither can you bear heavenly fruit unless you’re attached to me. ⁵I am the true vine and you are my branches. If you remain in me and I remain in you, you will bear much fruit. Without being connected to me, you can’t produce a thing. ⁶If you detach yourself from me, you’re like a branch that shrivels up and dies when it’s cut off from the vine. Then together with the other dead branches, it will be thrown on the brush pile and burned. ⁷If you stay attached to me and continue to feed on my words and obey them, then you may ask the Father to give you what you need to produce fruit and He’ll give it to you. ⁸The more fruit you produce, the more you will bring glory to my Father, and others will know that you are my disciples.

Love One Another

⁹“I have loved you just as deeply as the Father has loved me. Hold on to my love. ¹⁰If you do what I ask you to do, you will rest in my love just as I have done what my Father asked me to do and rest in His love. ¹¹I’m telling you these things so you can have as much joy obeying the Father as I have had. Then you’ll know what genuine happiness is all about.

¹²Whatever I ask you to do, remember this one thing: Love one another as I have loved you. ¹³There is no greater way to show love for a friend than to give your life for him. ¹⁴You say that you’re my friends. You need to demonstrate that friendship by doing what I ask you to do. ¹⁵I have never treated you like servants

and I never will. Servants aren't told everything their masters are planning to do. But you're my friends. Ever since I've known you, I've told you everything my Father has told me to tell you. ¹⁶You didn't choose to be my friends, but I have been your Friend even before you knew who I was. I called you and asked you to go and gather much fruit, the kind of fruit that will last. Whatever you ask of the Father to help carry out His mission, He will give to you. ¹⁷But I want to tell you again: Love one another.

The World Will Hate You

¹⁸"If the people of this world hate you for what you're doing, just remember that they hated me before they hated you. ¹⁹If you had the same spirit as the world has, people would love you. But because I'm asking you to be different from the world, the world will hate you. ²⁰Remember the things I've told you. Servants are not treated better than their masters, and since I have been mistreated, you can't expect to be treated any differently. But some have listened to me and obeyed my teaching, and some will listen to you and obey your teaching.

²¹"Those who mistreat you won't do it so much because of you, but because of me. And the reason they'll do it is because they don't know the Father, even though they think they do. ²²If I had not come and pointed out their sins, they would feel comfortable with me, but now they feel guilty because they can't excuse their sins anymore. ²³And their hatred for me extends to the Father also. ²⁴If I had not done anything differently from others, they would not be guilty. But they have seen the miracles I have done for them and yet they still hate both me and my Father. ²⁵This fulfills what is written in Scripture which says: 'They will hate me without a cause.'

Don't Lose Heart

²⁶"After I send the Holy Spirit from the Father, He will confirm the truth and will

testify about me. ²⁷And you will be my witnesses because you have seen me and been with me from the beginning of my ministry."

16 "I'm telling you these things so you won't lose heart and give up. ²You'll be thrown out of the synagogues, and the time will come when some will think that they're doing God a favor by killing you. ³They will do this because they really don't know me or the Father. They don't understand that my Father and I are for them, not against them, trying to help them, not hurt them. ⁴I'm telling you these things so that when this happens to you, you'll remember that I warned you ahead of time. I didn't tell you all this before because it wasn't time for me to go.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

⁵"Now I have to go back to the One who sent me, but not one of you has been persistent enough to find out where I'm going. ⁶Is it because I've told you I'm leaving that you're so sad? ⁷I tell you the truth. It is better for you that I go away. If I don't, the Holy Spirit can't come to take my place. But when I go, I will ask Him to come and take over. ⁸And when He comes, He will convict people of their sins, urge them to accept the righteousness that is from above and tell them of judgment to come. ⁹He'll convict people of sin because they don't believe in me. ¹⁰He'll lead them in the way of righteousness, because I'm going back to the Father, and you will no longer be able to see me. ¹¹And He'll show them that there is deliverance from judgment because Satan has already been judged and condemned for what he has done.

¹²"There are a lot of other things I could tell you, but you've heard enough and are not really ready for any more. ¹³When the Holy Spirit comes, He'll begin teaching where I left off and will share with you more and more truth. He won't

speak on His own initiative nor talk about Himself, but He will say whatever He hears me say, including things yet to come. ¹⁴He will bring glory to me because He'll carry on my mission and help you to see things more clearly.

¹⁵"Everything the Father wanted me to do, I have done, and that's why I said that the Holy Spirit must now come to continue what I started.

Jesus Talks About His Death

¹⁶"My time is really getting short now. Soon I'll have to leave you, but you'll see me again for a little while and then I'll go home to my Father." ¹⁷Some of the disciples began whispering to each other, "What does He mean when He says, 'I will have to leave you, but in a little while I'll see you again, and then I'll go home'?" ¹⁸What does this 'little while and I'll see you again' mean? We don't understand what He's talking about."

¹⁹Jesus knew what was bothering them, so He said, "Do you want to know what I meant when I said, 'I'll have to leave you, but I'll see you again for a little while'?" ²⁰In just a few hours you'll be shocked by what you see, and you'll weep while others rejoice. You will grieve, but your sorrow will turn into joy, ²¹like a woman in labor. She knows what she has to go through to deliver her baby because there's no other way for it to be born. But afterwards, the pain becomes a small thing, because she's given birth to her child. ²²Soon you'll be hurting when you see what's happening, but we'll see each other again, and then you'll be happier than you've ever been, and no one will be able to take that happiness away from you. ²³When that happens, the questions you now have will be answered. Then you'll realize that you can go directly to the Father to ask for anything you need, and according to His wisdom, He'll give it to you. ²⁴Until now, you've never really asked the Father for anything, not even in my name. You can go to Him directly and ask Him for any-

thing you need so that your joy will be complete.

²⁵"I know that I'm still not answering your questions as plainly as I might, but I'll be talking to you again, and then I'll tell you more about my Father and myself. ²⁶Then you'll feel more comfortable in going to the Father and in my name asking Him for anything you need. I'm saying that I won't need to ask Him for things for you as I do now. ²⁷You see, the Father Himself has always loved you. But He's especially happy because you have loved me and believed that I came from God. ²⁸I came to this world directly from the Father, and when I leave this world, I'll go straight back to Him."

²⁹His disciples said to Him, "Now you're making things a little clearer, and we're beginning to understand. ³⁰We can see from what you've said that you know all things. We have no more questions. This helps us believe even more that you have come to us from God." ³¹Jesus said, "Are you sure you believe everything I've told you?" ³²A few hours from now, you'll all leave me and go home, and I'll be left to face the future alone. Yet, I won't really be alone because my Father will be with me. ³³I'm telling you this so that in me you can have peace. As long as you're in this world, you'll have trouble. But take heart! I have defeated the evil one and have overcome the world."

Jesus Prays to Be Reunited With the Father

17 Then Jesus stopped, looked up to heaven and prayed, "Father, the hour has now come for you to honor me as your Son so that I may honor you as my Father. ²You have given me power over the whole human race so that I might give eternal life to those who respond to your love. ³And this is eternal life, to know you, the only true God, and to accept Jesus Christ as the One you have sent. ⁴I have honored you while I've lived here, and I've finished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵Father, let us be one

again with the glory I had with you before this world was created.

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

⁶“I’ve lived out your life and showed these men what you are like. You called them to be my disciples, and they obeyed your word and belong to you. ⁷They know that whatever authority and power I have or whatever I’ve said has come from you. ⁸I’ve told them everything you told me to tell them. They’ve accepted it and know that I came directly from you and that you are the One who sent me. ⁹Father, I especially pray for them right now, not for the whole world. These are the men that you have chosen to be my disciples, so they are yours too. ¹⁰All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. Anyone who follows me belongs to you. But these are the men who have given credibility to my mission and will continue to do so. ¹¹In just a little while, I’ll be leaving this world, but they’ll still be here. Soon I’ll be seeing you, but they’ll be left alone. Holy Father, please protect these men whom you’ve given to me, so that they may honor you by being one, just as you and I are one. ¹²All the time I’ve been here, I’ve protected them and held them together for your sake. I haven’t lost one of them, except Judas who chose to betray me, as the Scriptures said he would. ¹³So now I’m ready to come home again. While I was here, I told these men about you so they would have the same joyous relationship with you that I have.

¹⁴“I’ve sent them out to tell others the good news about you. They have felt the hatred of the world just as I have, because they don’t belong to the world any more than I do. ¹⁵I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil that’s in the world. ¹⁶They don’t really belong in this world any more than I do. ¹⁷Set them apart through the truth, the truth that is found in Scripture. ¹⁸I’m sending them into the world, just as you sent me into the world.

¹⁹I have set myself apart for you and given them an example, so they too will set themselves apart for you.

Jesus Prays for His Followers

²⁰“Father, I’m not praying just for these men, but for all those who will become my disciples through what these men will teach them. ²¹That’s why it’s so important that they be one, just as I am in you and you are in me. May they be one in us, so the world can see why you sent me. ²²The glory and honor you have given me, I have shared with them so they can be one as we are one. ²³I will be in them and you will be in me. May they have this same kind of oneness so that the world will know that you have sent me and that you love them as you love me.

²⁴“Father, I would like these men whom you have chosen to some day be with me to see the glory I had with you before this world was created. ²⁵Oh, my righteous Father, the world doesn’t know you. But I know you, and these men now know that you’ve sent me. ²⁶I have told them about you, and through the Holy Spirit I will continue telling them about you, so that the same love I have for you and you have for me will be in them.”

Jesus Arrested

18 When Jesus had finished praying, He and His disciples crossed the Kidron Valley and went to a little garden on the side of the Mount of Olives. ²Judas knew this place because Jesus often came here with His disciples to pray. ³Not long after they got there, Judas arrived with some Roman soldiers, Temple guards and Pharisees looking for Jesus. They had lanterns, torches and swords and were followed by a mob of ruffians. ⁴Jesus, who was praying, knew everything that was going to happen to Him. He got up from His knees and went to meet them. He said, “Are you looking for someone?”

⁵They said, “We’re looking for Jesus, the man from Nazareth.” Jesus replied, “I

am He." Judas was also there to identify Him. ⁶When Jesus said, "I am He," they took a step backwards, stumbled and fell to the ground. ⁷After they had scrambled back to their feet, Jesus asked again, "For whom are you looking?" They answered, "Jesus, the Man from Nazareth." ⁸Jesus said, "I've told you that I am He. If you're looking for me, let these other men go." ⁹This made His earlier words to His Father come true: "I have not lost one of them you gave me." ¹⁰When it dawned on Peter that these people had come to actually arrest Jesus, he pulled out his short sword, charged the group and swung at the man closest to him. The high priest's servant, Malchus, saw the sword coming and moved his head to one side, but Peter's sword caught his ear and sliced it off.

Jesus Before the Sanhedrin

¹¹Before the situation could turn into a battle, Jesus took charge and said to Peter, "Put away your sword. Shouldn't I drink the cup of suffering my Father wants me to drink?" ¹²Then the captain ordered his men to arrest Jesus. They grabbed Him, tied His hands behind His back and led Him away. ¹³First they took Jesus to Annas, who was the retired high priest and the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest in office. ¹⁴Caiaphas was the one who earlier had told the ruling council that it would be better for them to execute one man than to let things get out of hand and have the Romans take complete control of the country.

Peter Denies Knowing Jesus

¹⁵Two of the disciples, Peter and John, followed the mob at a distance to the courtyard of the high priest's residence, where Jesus would undergo a preliminary trial conducted by Annas. The girl keeping the gate knew John, so she let him in, but left Peter standing outside. ¹⁶When John turned around and saw Peter standing outside, he went back and spoke to the girl, so she let him in too. ¹⁷A

little later, as Peter was standing in the courtyard by the fire to warm himself, this same girl looked at him and said, "Aren't you one of Jesus' disciples?" Peter answered, "No, I am not!" ¹⁸Soon more servants and guards pushed in around the fire because they were cold. Peter stayed near the fire with them.

Jesus Questioned by the High Priest

¹⁹Meanwhile, inside the palace, Annas the retired high priest, was questioning Jesus about His disciples and about what He had been teaching. ²⁰Jesus answered, "Everything I taught, I taught openly, whether in the Temple, the synagogue or in people's houses. Anyone could come and hear what I had to say. There was nothing secret or sinister about my mission. ²¹So if you want to know what I taught, all you have to do is ask those who followed me. They'll tell you what I said. Or, you can ask anyone else who heard me; they'll know what I taught." ²²Then one of the Temple guards who stood close to Jesus slapped Him across the mouth and said, "Is that the way you talk to the high priest?" ²³Jesus answered, "If I said anything untrue, tell me. Or, if I spoke disrespectfully, tell me how I should have said it." ²⁴By this time, the council members who were against Jesus had been called to come to the nation's courtroom for a secret trial. So Annas sent Jesus, with His hands still tied, to Caiaphas who was ready to chair the council to try Jesus.

²⁵Outside in the courtyard, Peter was standing by the fire warming himself. Again someone recognized him and said, "Aren't you one of Jesus' disciples?" Peter denied it, saying, "I certainly am not!" ²⁶Then one of the high priest's servants, related to Malchus, who had come with the mob to arrest Jesus, said, "I'm sure I saw you with Jesus in the Garden when we went there to arrest Him." ²⁷For the third time, Peter denied knowing Jesus. As soon as he did, a nearby rooster crowed a second time.

Jesus Taken to Pilate

²⁸By now it was nearly dawn, and they took Jesus from the courtroom where Caiaphas had presided, over to Pilate to get his consent for the execution. But the Jews didn't go into the Roman judgment hall because they didn't want to disqualify themselves from taking part in the Passover meal.

²⁹Pilate came out on the balcony and said, "What are you accusing this Man of, and what's so urgent about all this?"

³⁰They said, "If we didn't think this Man was a criminal, we wouldn't have brought Him to you." ³¹Pilate said, "If you've already tried Him and found Him guilty, then sentence Him according to your own laws. Rome has permitted you to do this." The Jewish leaders responded, "That's true, but Rome does not allow us to carry out the death sentence without the consent of the governor." ³²This was the beginning of the battle between Pilate and the Jewish leaders as to whether or not Jesus should be executed. By morning, the Jewish leaders had gotten their way, and Jesus was executed by crucifixion, which was what He had predicted.

³³At one point during the trial, Pilate ordered Jesus to be taken inside so he could talk to Him privately. He said to Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews as they say you are?" ³⁴Jesus answered, "Are you asking me because you really want to know or because someone told you to ask me?" ³⁵Pilate asked, "Am I a Jew? Why should I be interested in whether or not you claim to be their King? It's your own people and their priests who have brought you here for trial. You must have done something to deserve the death sentence. So tell me, what did you do?" ³⁶Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would fight to keep me from being arrested. My kingdom is not a political kingdom; it's a spiritual one."

³⁷Pilate said, "So you are a king?" Jesus

answered, "What you just said is true. I am King and have said so publicly. I was born to be King. I came to share this truth with all who will listen. Everyone who wants to know the truth will listen to what I have to say." ³⁸Pilate burst out laughing and said, "Truth? What's that? All religious teachers claim to know what truth is." Then he went back outside and said to the Jews, "I can't find anything that this Man has done to deserve the death penalty."

Jesus Condemned and Barabbas Set Free

³⁹"But I'll tell you what I'll do for you. You have a custom which Rome has allowed that once a year at your Passover Festival you may ask for a prisoner to be freed. Whom do you want me to release this year? Why don't you let me release Jesus? That way there will be no perversion of Roman justice, and no one will be accused of causing this disturbance." ⁴⁰But the Jewish leaders said, "Absolutely not! We want Barabbas released, not Jesus!" Then the crowd started chanting for Barabbas, even though they knew he was a murderer and an insurrectionist.

Soldiers Mock and Scourge Jesus

19 Pilate determined to do what he could to free Jesus. Though He was innocent, he decided to have Him scourged to appeal to the sympathy of the crowd. ²Then the soldiers took Jesus to the courtyard below to have some fun with Him. One of them got a thorn branch, twisted it to look like a crown of laurels such as the Caesars wore, and forced it down on Jesus' head. Another brought an old purple robe and threw it over His shoulders. ³They all saluted and shouted, "Hail to the King of the Jews!" Each one stepped forward and slapped Jesus. When they finished mocking Him, they scourged Him as Pilate had ordered until His back was shredded. ⁴Finally Pilate called for the guards to bring Jesus back. He then said to the Jewish leaders, "In a minute I'll let you

see what I've done to Him. I want you to reconsider and let Him go."

Pilate Tries to Set Jesus Free

⁵Then he called for Jesus, who was brought out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said, "Look at the Man! He's covered with blood! What more do you want?" ⁶When the chief priests and Temple officers saw Jesus, they said, "We want Him crucified!" Then the mob started shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Their lack of sympathy for an innocent man really upset Pilate. Finally he said, "If you want this Man crucified, then go ahead and crucify Him. But I find Him 'Not guilty!'" ⁷The Jewish leaders said, "According to our law, He ought to die because He claims to be the Son of God." ⁸When Pilate heard that, he was afraid. ⁹So he took Jesus back inside and said to Him, "Where did you originally come from?" Jesus stood without answering. ¹⁰Pilate looked at Jesus and said, "Aren't you going to answer me? Don't you know that I have power to have you crucified or to let you go?" ¹¹Jesus answered, "Actually, you couldn't do a thing to me unless heaven allowed it. But those who brought me to you will have the greater guilt."

¹²After this, Pilate tried even harder to release Jesus, but the Jewish leaders kept reminding him that such an act would put him in opposition to Caesar by letting someone go who claimed to be the King of Judea. Pilate immediately sensed the seriousness of the situation. ¹³He knew that the Jews would not hesitate to accuse him of protecting a rival king before the emperor. So he had Jesus brought out again and took his seat as Roman judge on the platform called Gabbatha, meaning The High Stone Pavement. ¹⁴By this time it was about six o'clock in the morning on the preparation day before the weekly Sabbath, which that year was also the Sabbath of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After Pilate took his

seat, he said to the Jewish leaders, "Here's your King! Look at Him!" ¹⁵The mob shouted back, "Take Him away! Crucify Him!" Pilate cried out again, "You mean I should crucify your King?" The crowd, encouraged by the Jewish leaders, shouted louder than ever, "We have no king but Caesar!" ¹⁶Then Pilate pronounced the sentence and turned Jesus over to the soldiers for crucifixion. And they led Him away.

Jesus Is Crucified

¹⁷They took Jesus to the courtyard below and placed on His shoulders the heavy crossbeam to carry to a place outside the city called Golgotha, meaning The Place of the Skull. ¹⁸There they crucified Jesus between two of Barabbas' men, one on His right and the other on His left. ¹⁹Over His head they nailed a sign that Pilate had ordered which said, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." ²⁰This attracted people's attention and brought many visitors who were in Jerusalem for the Passover out to the crucifixion site. The sign was written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, so that as many as possible could read it. ²¹The chief priests went to Pilate and said, "The sign shouldn't read, 'Jesus, the King of the Jews,' but, 'He Claimed to Be King of the Jews.'" ²²Pilate replied, "What I have written stays written!"

²³Meanwhile, at the crucifixion site, the soldiers took what Jesus had worn and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier, but when they looked at His warm outer robe, they noticed that it was seamless, woven from top to bottom. ²⁴So they said, "This is too nice a robe to tear and divide. Let's gamble for it." This is what David had prophesied centuries before. So the Scripture was fulfilled which said, "They will divide my clothes and gamble for my robe." And this is what the soldiers did.

Mary Entrusted to John

²⁵Standing near the cross crying were Mary the mother of Jesus, her sister

Salome, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene the sister of Lazarus. ²⁶When Jesus saw His mother in tears and John the disciple trying to comfort her, He said, "Mother, don't cry. Take John to be your son in my place. He'll take care of you." ²⁷Then He said to John, "John, take care of my mother for me and consider yourself to be her son." From that moment on, John took care of Mary and took her home to live with him.

It Is Finished

²⁸Jesus knew that as soon as He died, His redemptive act would be complete, but His sufferings were intense. Being thirsty, He asked for a drink of water as the Scriptures had said He would. ²⁹Nearby was a jar of fermented wine mixed with a drug to help deaden pain. When the soldiers heard Jesus asking for water, they thought He wanted some painkiller. So one of them took a stick, put a sponge on the end, dipped it in the mixture and held it up to Jesus' mouth for Him to drink. ³⁰When Jesus tasted it, He knew what it was and spit it out. Then He raised His head and cried out with an unexpectedly strong voice, "It is finished!" With that, He bowed His head and died.

A Spear Is Thrust Into Jesus' Heart

³¹Meanwhile, the Jewish leaders had gone to Pilate, asking him to order his soldiers to break the legs of those who were crucified so they could no longer raise themselves up to breathe and would die more quickly. The Jews wanted the bodies taken down and not left hanging there over the Sabbath. ³²The soldiers carried out Pilate's order and broke the legs of the first criminal, then the other one. ³³But when they came to Jesus, He was already dead, so they decided not to break His legs. ³⁴However, the Roman captain wanted to make sure that Jesus was dead, so he placed a spear near Jesus' heart and thrust it in. Blood and water gushed out, showing that Jesus was dead. ³⁵The one writing this gospel was at the crucifixion

and saw this happen. What he's telling you is the truth. This is an accurate account of all that took place so you can believe. ³⁶What the soldiers did was in harmony with what David had predicted in the Psalms when he wrote, "Not one of His bones will be broken." ³⁷And Zechariah said, "They will stand and stare at the One whose heart they have pierced."

Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb

³⁸Now Joseph of Arimathea, who was a member of the national Jewish council and secretly a disciple of Jesus, went to see Pilate to ask him if he could have the body of Jesus and take it down and bury it. Pilate gave him permission, so Joseph returned to take down the body. ³⁹Nicodemus was there also, the rabbi who had requested a meeting with Jesus at night for fear of the Jews. He had brought burial supplies, including linen grave sheets, special ointments and about seventy-five pounds of mixed spices. ⁴⁰They carefully took down the body of Jesus, straightened His limbs and folded His hands. Then they rubbed the body down with ointments and spices and wrapped it in linen burial sheets.

⁴¹Near the place of crucifixion was a little garden which contained a privately owned burial place belonging to Joseph. In it was a small tomb, newly dug out of the rock. ⁴²That's where they laid Jesus because the sun was already beginning to set, signaling the end of the preparation day and the beginning of the Sabbath.

He Is Risen

20 Jesus' body rested in the tomb over the Sabbath. Then, just as it began to dawn early Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and noticed that the huge stone the men had rolled in front of the opening had been rolled away. ²When she saw that, she turned around and ran back into the city to where the disciples were staying. When Peter and John opened the door

for her, she said to them between breaths, "Someone has taken the Lord's body! I went to the tomb this morning, and someone had rolled away the stone! I'm sure they stole His body. O, how I wish I knew what they've done with it!"

³Peter and John ran to the burial site, ⁴but John ran faster than Peter and got to the tomb first. ⁵John didn't go in, but he looked inside and saw the folded burial sheets neatly lying there, but no body. ⁶When Peter reached the tomb, he went right inside. He saw the folded grave sheets ⁷but also noticed that the headcloth was not with the linen sheets as would be expected. It was neatly folded and lying by itself where Jesus' head had been. This would have been strange for thieves to do, but Peter was still skeptical.

⁸Then John went inside, and just as Peter had, he noticed that the neatly folded headcloth was lying by itself. He believed that something special had happened. ⁹But it still didn't dawn on them that this was in harmony with the Scriptures which said that Jesus would rise from the dead. ¹⁰After Peter and John had looked at everything, they slowly and sadly walked back to town.

Mary Magdalene Sees Jesus

¹¹Meanwhile, Mary returned to the tomb and stood there crying. Finally, she decided to take one last look inside before going back home. ¹²When she did, she saw two angels dressed in white sitting on the stone slab, one at the head and one at the foot, where Jesus' body had been. ¹³They said to her, "Why are you crying?" Mary answered, "Because someone stole the body of my Lord, and I don't know where they have taken it." ¹⁴She turned and started to go back outside, not realizing that she had been talking to angels. As she bent low to go out through the opening, she noticed someone standing outside near the tomb, but she didn't look up to see who it was. Totally overcome with grief, she had no

idea that it was Jesus standing there.

¹⁵He said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? Are you looking for someone?" Mary thought He was the caretaker, and with tear-filled eyes, said, "Yes, I'm looking for the body of my Lord. Sir, if you know where it is, please tell me. Or if you've moved it, and it's not supposed to be in this tomb, please let me know and I'll gladly have someone come and get it."

¹⁶So Jesus, in His familiar and loving tone of voice, simply called her by name, saying, "Mary." Immediately she recognized His voice, and looking up in disbelief, she said, "My Lord, is that you?" ¹⁷Jesus answered, "Yes, but I don't have time to stay and talk because I have an appointment with my Father. Don't cling to me. Just go tell the disciples that I've gone up to my Father and their Father, to my God and their God." ¹⁸Then Mary ran all the way back to town and told the disciples that Jesus was alive and that she had seen Him and talked with Him. She also told them what Jesus had said to her.

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

¹⁹That same day toward evening, the disciples decided to lock the doors of the upper room where they were staying. They were afraid because it was being rumored that they had stolen the body of Jesus, and Jewish authorities could come looking for them. Suddenly Jesus appeared in the room and proclaimed, "Peace to all of you." ²⁰He showed them the scars in His hands and the one by His heart. Then they realized that what Mary had said was true. Jesus was alive! He had risen from the dead! Their hearts were filled with joy. ²¹Again Jesus greeted them, saying, "Peace to all of you. As my Father sent me on my mission, so I'm sending you." ²²As He looked at them, His heart filled with compassion. Then He took a deep breath, and breathing toward them, said, "Receive the Holy Spirit until He comes upon you in His fullness. ²³If you tell people that God has for-

given their sins, make sure they have turned away from them. If they have not turned away from them, they have not been forgiven.”

Doubting Thomas Believes

²⁴Thomas, who was one of the twelve and sometimes called Didymus, had not been present to see Jesus for himself. ²⁵When he returned, the disciples were eager to tell him what had happened. They said “The Lord is alive! He’s risen from the dead! We’ve seen Him and talked with Him!” Thomas said, “That’s impossible! Unless I can personally see the scars in His hands and touch them to make sure they’re real, and unless I can do the same to the scar by His heart, I refuse to believe what you’re saying.”

²⁶One week later, Thomas had the chance to do just that. The disciples were in that same room, still keeping the door locked for fear that the Jews would come looking for them. Suddenly, Jesus stood in the middle of the room and said, “Peace to all of you.” ²⁷He said to Thomas, “Thomas, come here. Look closely at the scars in my hands and feel them, then look at the scar by my heart and feel it. This will help you to believe that I’m no longer dead.” ²⁸Thomas stood there speechless. Then he fell to his knees and said, “Lord, you’re alive! They were right! I believe! You are my Lord and my God!” ²⁹Jesus said, “Thomas, because you’ve seen me in person, you believe what your brothers told you. Many won’t have the same privilege of seeing me in person as you’ve had, yet when they hear the gospel, they will believe and be just as thrilled as you are.”

The Purpose of This Book

³⁰There were many other things that Jesus said and did in the presence of His disciples, but they didn’t write them all down. ³¹The things they did record are written so you can build your faith on the fact that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Believing this, you

can have eternal life because of what He has done for you.

Breakfast by the Sea

21 The next time the disciples saw Jesus, they were by the Lake of Galilee (also known as the Sea of Tiberius). ²About seven of them were there at that time: Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, the two Zebedee brothers and two other disciples. ³Peter was still remorseful about what he had done, so he decided to go fishing. He announced his intention to the group, and some of the disciples said, “Just wait, and we’ll go with you.” Late that afternoon, they got into one of their boats and fished all night without catching a thing.

⁴At dawn, Jesus appeared on the beach, but the disciples didn’t recognize Him. ⁵As they came closer to shore, He called out to them, “Have you men had anything to eat? Did you catch any fish?” They called back, “No, we haven’t!” ⁶Jesus replied, “Try casting your nets on the right side of your boat. You’ll catch some.” When they did, their net filled with so many fish that they couldn’t pull it back into the boat. ⁷Suddenly, John realized that the Man on the beach was Jesus. Turning to Peter, he said, “That’s the Lord!” Peter grabbed his robe and quickly put it on, because all he had on was a loin-cloth. Jumping into the water, he headed straight for Jesus. ⁸The boat was still about a hundred yards from shore, and the other disciples were working hard towing the net full of fish behind them.

⁹When they finally made it to shore, they could see that Jesus had built a little fire and was cooking some fish for them. They also noticed that He had a number of small loaves of bread nearby. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, “You had better drag your net up onto the beach, so you won’t lose any fish. Bring some of them here for breakfast.” ¹¹Peter rushed back and helped them pull the net onto the beach. The net was full of large fish. The disciples counted a hundred and fifty-three

fish and were amazed that the net had not broken. ¹²Then Jesus called to them, "Come, it's time to eat." They came and sat down, and no one needed to ask who He was, for they all knew it was Jesus. ¹³Then He served them, giving each man a fish and some bread. ¹⁴This was the third time that Jesus appeared to His disciples since He rose from the dead.

Peter Affirms His Love for Jesus

¹⁵After they had finished eating, Jesus looked at Peter and said, "Peter, do you love me more than these men do?" Peter answered, "Lord, you know that I'm your friend." Jesus said, "That's good. I want you to take care of my lambs." ¹⁶Jesus asked him again, "Peter, do you love me with all your heart?" Peter answered, "Lord, you know that I'm your friend." Jesus said, "That's good. I want you to take care of my sheep." ¹⁷Jesus asked a third time, "Peter, are you sure you're my friend?" This last question stung Peter's heart. With tears in his eyes, he answered, "Lord, you know everything, and you know I don't trust myself any more. You are the only One who knows whether I am really your friend or not." Jesus said, "I know that deep down you are my friend. So I want you to take care of my lambs and my sheep."

¹⁸Then Jesus looked at Peter with tears in His eyes and said, "Peter, you are still young and strong. You can decide what you want to do and where you want to go. But when you are old, some-

one else will dress you and take you where you'd rather not go. They'll tell you to stretch out your arms, and you'll have no choice but to do so." ¹⁹Jesus said this to let Peter know the kind of death he would die, that he would be arrested and crucified by the Romans. Then Jesus added, "But whatever happens between now and then, keep on following me."

This Gospel Is True

²⁰Later that morning as the disciples were walking along the beach, Peter, who was next to Jesus, turned and saw John close behind. This was the same John who had sat next to Jesus at the Passover supper and asked Him which one of the disciples would betray Him. ²¹Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, what does this man's future hold, and what are you going to ask him to do?" ²²Jesus said, "If I wanted him to live until I come back, he would. But you need to keep your eyes on me and not keep looking at him." ²³Then the rumor got started among the other disciples that John would never die. But that was not what Jesus had said. All He had said was, "If I wanted him to live until I come back, he would."

²⁴I am this John they were talking about, and I am the one who has been writing this gospel. Everything in this gospel is the truth.

²⁵There are numerous other experiences we had with Jesus that I could write about, but if all the things He did

ACTS

Luke's Second Book to Theophilus

1 Dear Theophilus, in the first little volume I sent you, I wrote about what Jesus did and what He taught from the beginning of His ministry ²until the day He was taken up into heaven. But He did not leave before giving instructions to the apostles He had chosen and promising them the Holy Spirit. ³For forty days after His resurrection He appeared to hundreds of His followers many times, giving them convincing proof that He was alive. He talked and ate with them and shared with them many things about God's kingdom.

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit

⁴At their last meeting together, He told them to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit whom the Father would send and whom He Himself had promised. ⁵He also told them that although John the Baptist had baptized with water, in just a few days they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

⁶They asked if now was the time for Him to set up His kingdom and restore the glory of Israel. ⁷He told them it wasn't necessary for them to know the dates and times the Father by His own authority has set to usher in His kingdom. ⁸In the meantime, they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach the good news of salvation to everyone, first in Jerusalem, then in Judea and Samaria, and finally to the whole world.

Jesus Ascends to Heaven

⁹After the meeting was over, they walked through Jerusalem out to the Mount of Olives. There He said good-bye. Then as they watched, He was lifted off the ground, higher and higher up into the sky, until a cloud of angels welcomed Him and He disappeared from sight. ¹⁰While they were standing there hoping to catch one last glimpse of Jesus, suddenly two men dressed in white robes

stood next to them and said, ¹¹"You Galileans, why are you standing here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus whom you have just seen go up to heaven will come back the same way you saw Him leave."

The Upper Room

¹²So they left the Mount of Olives which was only a short distance from Jerusalem and returned to the city. ¹³When they got there, the eleven apostles returned to the upper room where they had been meeting. There were Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, the son of Alphaeus, Simon the patriot, and the other Judas also called Thaddaeus, the son of a man named James. ¹⁴They came together to pray and were soon joined by some of the women who had followed Jesus, including His mother Mary, as well as His stepbrothers.

Judas Replaced

¹⁵A day or so later, all the believers came together (about one hundred and twenty of them), and when they were all assembled, Peter stood up and said, ¹⁶"Brothers and sisters, the Scriptures have been fulfilled, just as the Holy Spirit said when, through David, He told us that Judas would become a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷Judas became a disciple because we urged Jesus to accept him into the group. ¹⁸After he sold Jesus, he went and hanged himself from a tree just outside the city walls. As you know, the rope broke, and his swollen body fell and burst open, and the dogs came and ate his intestines. It was a horrible sight. So the priests took the money he had returned and bought a field where they buried him. ¹⁹Everyone in Jerusalem knew about it and they now call that field Akeldama, which means The Field of Blood.

²⁰"As it says in the Psalms, 'Let the house of those who took part in the

death of the Messiah become empty and let no one live there.' Another Psalm says, 'Let someone else take his position.' ²¹So we need to choose a replacement for Judas. It should be someone who has been with us from the beginning of Jesus' ministry. ²²It should be someone who knew Jesus from the time He was baptized by John, and who met Him after His resurrection and saw Him ascend to heaven."

²³The group followed Peter's suggestion and selected two men, Joseph, called Barsabbas, (or Justus by the Romans) and Matthias. ²⁴Then the believers prayed earnestly, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two men you have chosen to replace Judas. ²⁵We want him to serve as an apostle in Judas' place, who left the ministry and chose to go his own way." ²⁶After praying, they drew lots to see which one should replace Judas and the lot fell on Matthias. He was then officially added to the group as one of the twelve.

Pentecost

2 When the day of Pentecost came, ten days after Jesus ascended, they were all together in one place, praying for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as Jesus had instructed them. ²Suddenly they heard a noise coming from the sky like the rush of a mighty wind, and the sound filled the whole house. ³Then they saw what looked like flames of fire that separated and hovered over each person's head. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and were able to speak different languages as the Spirit empowered them.

The Gift of Tongues

⁵This happened while devout Jews from all over the Roman Empire were visiting Jerusalem. ⁶Others heard this strange sound and word quickly spread throughout the city that something unusual had happened. Soon a large crowd gathered outside the house where the apostles were meeting. When the apos-

tlés came out to speak to them, the people were amazed and couldn't figure out how each person heard them speak in his own language. ⁷They said, "This is incredible! Aren't all these men Galileans? ⁸If that's the case, how can we all hear them speak to us in our various languages and dialects at the same time?"

⁹People were there from Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and other parts of Asia. ¹⁰Others had come from Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya near Cyrene, and Rome. Both Jews and converts to Judaism were there. ¹¹Some had even come from Crete and Arabia. Every one of them heard the apostles speak in their own language or dialect at the same time. They said, "This can only come from God!" ¹²While everyone stood there amazed and confused, some of them began to say, "What's the meaning of this?" ¹³Others started laughing, saying, "What's really happening is that these men are drunk. We just think we're hearing them speak in our own language, but it's not true at all!"

Peter's Sermon

¹⁴Then Peter, standing with the other apostles, said to the crowd, "Men of Judah and all you who are visiting Jerusalem, listen to me. Let me tell you what this is all about. ¹⁵We're not drunk as some of you think. After all, it's only nine o'clock in the morning! ¹⁶No, this is a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. God said to him, ¹⁷"This is what I will do in the days to come. I will pour out my Spirit on people. Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message. I will speak to your young men in visions and to your old men in dreams. ¹⁸I will pour out my Spirit on men and women everywhere and they will proclaim my message. ¹⁹And in the last days I will perform miracles on the earth and in the sky. The sky will turn red like blood, and fire and smoke will fill the air. ²⁰Even the sun will stop shining and the moon will look like blood. All this will

happen before the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹But, whoever calls on the Lord for help will be saved.'

²²"Men of Israel, now listen to this: Jesus from Nazareth was a Man whose divinity was clearly proven by the miracles and other wonderful things God did through Him, as you well know. ²³Yet this is the Man whom our leaders turned over to the Romans for crucifixion and death; and God knew this beforehand, because it was His set purpose for Jesus to die for our sins. ²⁴Then God resurrected Him by breaking the power of death, because it was impossible for death to hold Him. ²⁵David wrote about Him: 'I keep the Lord before me at all times. Because He is by my side, I will not be troubled. ²⁶That's why my heart is glad and my voice full of melody. That's why I rest in the hope that my body will live again. ²⁷God will not let me perish forever. He will not allow His Holy One to rot away in the grave. ²⁸You have taught me the way to live, and being with you again will fill me with joy.'

²⁹"Brothers, let me make it plain what this means. Our forefather David is dead, and his body is buried right here in Jerusalem. While his flesh has rotted away, his bones are still with us in his grave. ³⁰He was not only a king but also a prophet and knew what God had said. God had promised to place one of David's descendants on the throne to occupy it forever. And He confirmed this by an oath. ³¹From what David said, that God would not leave His Holy One in the grave nor let His body decay, we can see that he believed the Messiah would die and be raised from the dead. ³²Jesus is this Holy One! He died, and God did raise Him from the dead. We are all witnesses to this fact. ³³Now He's ascended to heaven where He sits next to God the Father and as He promised He has sent the Holy Spirit in full power to help us preach the good news. This is what God has done, and the result is what you see and hear this morning.

³⁴"David wasn't resurrected, nor did

he ascend to heaven and sit next to God. He wasn't talking about himself when he said, 'The Lord God will say to my Lord: Come, sit next to me ³⁵until I subdue all your enemies.' ³⁶That's why all Israel needs to know that this Jesus whom our leaders crucified is both Lord and Christ, whom David wrote about."

³⁷When the people heard this, they felt guilty and their hearts were troubled. So they called out to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸Peter answered, "Repent and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as a sign that you've been forgiven, and you, too, will receive the Holy Spirit. ³⁹This promise is for you and for your children and for all who are near or far away. It is for everyone, for the Lord is calling all of us to come to Him."

Thousands Baptized

⁴⁰Peter continued encouraging them, appealing to their hearts and urging them to give themselves to God and not to take part in the nation's sin of rejecting Jesus. ⁴¹Many believed what Peter said and responded to his appeal. About three thousand people decided to be baptized and were added to the church. ⁴²All of them committed themselves to what they had been taught. They enjoyed each other's fellowship, ate together, shared their food and prayed for each other.

⁴³The apostles also worked miracles and healed all kinds of diseases, and everyone who saw them do these things was amazed at what was happening. ⁴⁴The believers were such a closely-knit group that they even shared their possessions with one another. ⁴⁵Some sold their properties and gave the money to the apostles so they could distribute it to those who needed it. ⁴⁶Every day they went to the Temple to pray. Gladly they shared their food and invited others to their homes. They did all this humbly and with gratitude. ⁴⁷They were always happy, continually thanking God for His blessings. As a result, they enjoyed the

good will of neighbors and friends. Every day more believers were added to the church as they responded to the promptings of the Holy Spirit to be saved.

A Lame Man Healed

3 One day, about three o'clock in the afternoon, Peter and John went to the Temple to pray. ²When they came to the Beautiful Gate, a man who had been crippled from birth was sitting there begging for money. He did this every day. ³When he saw Peter and John coming, he stopped them just as they were about to walk through the gate, and begged them for money. ⁴They said to him, "Look at us and listen carefully to what we have to say." ⁵The man looked up at them and listened, hoping they would give him some money.

⁶Peter said, "We don't have money to give you, but we'll give you what we do have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." ⁷Then he reached down and took the man's right hand to help him up. Instantly the man's feet and ankles straightened out and his muscles strengthened. ⁸He literally jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with Peter and John into the Temple courtyard, leaping and praising God. ⁹When the people saw this man walking and praising God, ¹⁰they recognized him as the same man who usually sat in front of the Beautiful Gate begging for money. They could hardly believe their eyes.

Preaching in the Temple

¹¹Then the people came running to Peter and John at Solomon's Porch while the man clung to them. ¹²When Peter saw what was happening, he said to the crowd, "Men of Israel, why are you surprised at this? And why are you staring at us? Do you think this man was healed by our power or godliness? ¹³The God who was worshiped by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—the God who led our fathers out of Egypt—is the same God who sent

His Son Jesus Christ to save us. But you turned Him over to the Romans, then shouted for His execution when Pilate wanted to set Him free. ¹⁴Jesus was holy and good, but you rejected Pilate's offer and demanded that he release Barabbas the murderer. ¹⁵So, in effect, you killed the Holy One of God, the Prince of life. But God raised Him from the dead, and we are witnesses to that fact. ¹⁶It was the power of Jesus Christ that healed this man and made him whole. What happened to him came through faith in Jesus, the source of all life and power. That's why the man stands in front of you now, perfectly well and strong. You can see this with your own eyes.

¹⁷"I know, my brothers, that what you and the leaders did to Jesus Christ you did out of ignorance. ¹⁸God knew long ago that this would happen. Through His prophets He told us that the Messiah would come and suffer. That's exactly what took place. ¹⁹So you need to repent, turn your lives around and confess your sins. God will blot out your sins and refresh your souls by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised to all who accept Him as their Lord. ²⁰This is the One who was appointed to be your Savior, even Jesus Christ. ²¹He is now in heaven and will stay there until the time comes for God to restore all things, which through His prophets He has promised to do.

²²"This is what Moses had in mind when he said to our fathers, 'The Lord our God will raise up a Prophet from among you like me. When this Prophet comes, you are to listen to Him and do what He tells you to do. ²³Anyone who does not obey Him will be called to account and will be cut off from God's people.' ²⁴Other prophets, like Samuel and those who came later, all foresaw these events. ²⁵You belong to the people to whom God sent the prophets and to whom He gave the covenant. God said to Abraham, 'Through your descendants everyone in the whole world will be blessed.' ²⁶God sent Jesus

Christ to us and raised Him from the dead so you would be the first ones to have a chance to repent and turn from your wicked ways.”

Peter and John Arrested

4 While Peter and John were talking to the people, the officer in charge of the Temple guards, together with some priests and Sadducees, came and interrupted them. ²They were upset because the disciples were telling people that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. ³So they arrested Peter and John and put them in jail until the next morning, as it was already too late in the day to hold a trial. ⁴But many of the people believed what the apostles had said and accepted Jesus Christ as the Messiah. The number of men who believed grew to about five thousand, not counting the women and children.

Forbidden to Preach

⁵The next morning, the Jewish leaders called together the elders and teachers of the law for a council meeting. ⁶Annas, the retired high priest; Caiaphas, his son-in-law, who was the officiating high priest; plus Annas' son Jonathan, and Alexander and other members of the high priestly family were there. ⁷They brought in Peter and John and the healed beggar and had them stand in the middle of the room. Then they questioned them, saying, “By what power or name did you heal this man?”

⁸Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, answered, “Honored leaders, elders and teachers of our people, ⁹if we are being examined about a good deed done to a crippled man and if we are being asked by what means he was healed, ¹⁰you and the people have a right to know. He was healed through the name of Jesus Christ whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead. It was the power of Jesus Christ that healed this man who is standing here before you. ¹¹Jesus Christ is the Stone which you rejected as being worthless. But like the stone in Solomon's

time that was first laid aside and then found to be the perfect cornerstone for the Temple, so Jesus has been found to be the great Cornerstone of our spiritual house. ¹²Salvation is found in no one else. No other power is given by which we must be saved, except His.”

¹³When the leaders and elders saw the boldness of Peter and John, knowing that they were uneducated fishermen, they were amazed at their conduct and their ability to speak in public. They knew these men had no special training, except that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴Seeing the healed man standing right in front of them, they had nothing more to say. ¹⁵Then they asked the apostles and the man to leave so they could discuss the situation among themselves. ¹⁶They asked one another, “What should we do with these men? There is no doubt they have worked a notable miracle and that the crippled man is healed. Probably everyone in Jerusalem already knows about it. We can't deny it. So now what do we do? ¹⁷Somehow we have to keep the news of this thing from spreading. Let's give these men a stern warning not to do this again and to stop preaching in the name of this man Jesus.”

¹⁸They called the apostles in and ordered them to stop healing and teaching the people about Jesus. ¹⁹Peter and John replied, “Whether it's more important to listen to God or to men, you'll have to decide. ²⁰As for ourselves, we have decided that if people ask us what happened today at the Temple or if they ask us to tell them more about Jesus, we have no choice but to tell them the truth of what we've seen and heard.” ²¹The authorities warned them again not to heal or to teach, and then they let them go. They found no reason to punish them. Besides, the people were praising God for what Peter and John had done. ²²Everyone knew that the man who was healed was more than forty years old and that he had been crippled since he was born.

Believers Pray for Boldness

²³As soon as the apostles were released, they went and told the other believers everything that had happened and also what the leaders and elders had said to them. ²⁴When the group heard this, with one mind and heart they lifted up their voices in prayer and said: "Lord God, you are the Creator of everything in heaven, on earth and in the sea. ²⁵You also are the One who spoke by the Holy Spirit through our father David when he said, 'Why are the unbelievers so furious and why do they keep plotting against God?' ²⁶The kings of the earth and the local rulers have joined together to stand against the Lord God and against His anointed One.'

²⁷"This is exactly what happened when Jesus was born. First, Herod wanted to kill Him, then the leaders of Israel together with some of the people turned Him over to Pilate, and the Gentiles crucified Him. ²⁸You knew ahead of time that this would happen just as you had said. ²⁹Lord, now they have threatened us and told us not to speak to others about you. We pray that you will give us courage and boldness to speak your word. ³⁰Also give us power to work miracles so the people might be drawn to your Son. We promise to do all these things in His name." ³¹As soon as the believers had finished praying, the place where they were meeting started to shake. Everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the truth about Jesus with boldness.

Believers Share Their Possessions

³²The believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that his possessions were his own, but they gladly shared everything they had. ³³So with great power the apostles preached about Jesus and His resurrection, and God richly blessed all that they did. ³⁴Everyone's needs were cared for. Those who owned property or houses sold them and gave all the money to help others,

especially those who had lost their incomes because of believing in Jesus. ³⁵They turned the money over to the apostles, who distributed them to those in need.

³⁶Now one of the believers who did this was Joseph, a Levite born in Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas, meaning The One Who Encourages Others. ³⁷Barnabas had sold the property he owned and given the money to the apostles.

Ananias and Sapphira Lie to the Holy Spirit

5 Among the believers was a man named Ananias who, together with his wife Sapphira, also agreed to sell a piece of property and give the money to the Lord. ²But then they decided to keep part of the money for themselves since they got more for the property than they had expected. Ananias took the money that the property appeared to be worth and brought it to the apostles, telling them that it was the full amount. ³When he handed it to the apostles, Peter said, "Ananias, why did you let Satan control you and make you lie to the Holy Spirit? Why are you telling us that this is the full amount you sold the property for when you know it's only part of it? ⁴Before you promised to sell the property, it was yours to sell or not to sell. If you had sold it without promising it to the Lord, was not the money at your disposal to do with it as you wanted? But since you told the Holy Spirit you would give the full amount and then gave only part of it, you not only lied to us, but to God."

⁵When Ananias realized that Peter knew what he had done, he fell down and died. News of what had happened spread among the believers and instilled in everyone enormous respect for the Holy Spirit. ⁶Then Peter called in some of the young men of the church and asked them to wrap up Ananias' body, carry it out and find a place to bury it.

⁷About three hours later, Sapphira

came in, having no idea what had happened. ⁸She asked to see Peter, and when he met her, he said, "Tell me, how much did you and your husband sell the property for? Was it for this much?" She replied, "Why, yes, it was." ⁹Peter said to her, "Why did you two agree to lie about the whole thing? What were you trying to do? A few hours ago your husband fell over dead when he found out that we knew what you two had done, and the men who buried him are coming to carry you out too." ¹⁰When Sapphira heard this, she collapsed and died. When the young men came in and saw her dead, they wrapped up her body, carried it out and buried her next to her husband. ¹¹As word about this spread through the ranks of the believers, a holy awe came upon the whole church.

Miracles and Healings

¹²In addition to this witness of the Holy Spirit's presence among them, the apostles also worked numerous miracles, healing the sick of all kinds of diseases. Every day the believers met together to pray in the shaded walk around the Temple called Solomon's Porch. ¹³But some Jews from the ruling class were afraid to be seen with them there, even though the apostles were highly regarded by the people. ¹⁴Yet more and more people kept joining the church, large numbers of men and women alike. ¹⁵Peter became so well known in Jerusalem that people brought their sick and placed them on mats along the streets, hoping that as Peter passed, his shadow would fall on them and heal them. ¹⁶Throngs of people from the towns and villages around Jerusalem also brought their sick, including some who were demon possessed, and the apostles healed all who came.

Apostles Arrested Twice

¹⁷Then the high priest and his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, felt threatened by the

popularity of the apostles. So they decided to do something about it. ¹⁸They ordered the apostles to be arrested and put in jail. ¹⁹But that night the Lord sent an angel to open the jail doors and let them out. Then the angel said to them, ²⁰"Early tomorrow morning the Lord wants you to go back to the Temple and stand your ground, telling the people all about salvation through Christ." ²¹The apostles obeyed, and at the first sign of dawn, they entered the Temple to preach. When the high priest came to work, not knowing what had happened the night before, he called together the full Jewish council, including the elders, and asked the Temple guard to take the apostles out of jail and bring them in for questioning.

²²When the guards went to the town jail where the apostles had been kept, they found the place empty. They hurried back to the council and said, ²³"When we got to the jail, we found the doors closed and locked. All the guards were at their posts, but when they unlocked the cell door, the place was empty!" ²⁴While the high priest and the captain of the Temple guards were wondering how such a thing could happen, ²⁵a man came rushing in and shouted, "Listen! The men you put in jail yesterday are standing in the Temple courtyard teaching the people about Jesus!" ²⁶The high priest told the captain to take his officers and go arrest the apostles and bring them in. They did so, but without violence, because they were afraid that the people might stone them.

²⁷When the apostles were brought in, the high priest had them stand in the center of the courtroom; then he started questioning them. ²⁸"Didn't we warn you not to preach or teach the people openly about this man, Jesus Christ? And what have you done? You've preached about Him all over the city! What are you trying to do, make the people believe that we were responsible for killing Him?" ²⁹Peter and the apostles said, "We must obey God first and then man. ³⁰You had Pilate hang Him on a cross, but God raised Him from

the dead. ³¹Then God exalted Him to sit on His right hand as Savior and Lord to give us the ability to repent and to forgive our sins. ³²We've seen these things, and the Holy Spirit, whom God gives to all who obey Him, confirms what we say."

Gamaliel's Advice

³³These words were like a knife cutting deep into the hearts of the council members. So they decided that all the apostles should be executed. ³⁴Then one of the council members, a Pharisee named Gamaliel who was highly respected as a teacher, stood up and asked that the apostles be taken outside. ³⁵He addressed the council, saying, "Men of Israel, be careful what you do to these men. ³⁶Remember that before Jesus of Nazareth came along, a man called Theudas appeared, claiming to be the 'Deliverer.' He had about four hundred men ready to fight and free Israel. But he was killed. His followers were soon scattered and nothing came of it. ³⁷After him came Judas, a Galilean, who started a movement during the last Roman census. He and his zealots also drew crowds of people, but he was killed and his followers dispersed. ³⁸So in this case, don't take any action against these men. It will only draw attention to their cause. Just leave them alone, because if they started this thing on their own, it will fail just as the others did. ³⁹But if their movement was started by God, you can't stop it no matter what you do. You might even find yourselves fighting against God Himself."

⁴⁰The council members agreed that what Gamaliel said made sense. So they had the apostles brought back in, told them never to speak to the people about Jesus again and ordered them whipped and released. ⁴¹After the apostles were set free, they went home rejoicing because they felt it an honor to suffer and be disgraced for Jesus. ⁴²The next day they went back to preaching and teaching. And every day, both in the Temple and in the people's homes, they shared

with them the good news that Jesus was the Messiah.

Seven Deacons

6 As the number of believers grew, there was a disagreement between the Greek-speaking Jews and the local Jews. The Greek-speaking Jews claimed that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. ²So the apostles called the believers together and said, "It's not right for us to stop preaching in order to spend so much time settling disputes and supervising the distribution of food. ³You need to choose seven good men with common sense, full of the Holy Spirit and heavenly wisdom, and put them in charge of this ministry. ⁴This will give us more time to study, pray and preach the Word."

⁵The believers were pleased with the apostles' suggestions. The first person they chose was Stephen, a man of strong faith and full of the Holy Spirit. The other six chosen were Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶The believers presented these men to the apostles, who prayed for them and then ordained them for their special ministry.

⁷So the word of God continued to be preached with power, and every day new believers were added to the church in Jerusalem, including a considerable number of priests.

Stephen Arrested

⁸Stephen not only functioned as a deacon, but was empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach, to work miracles and to heal the sick. ⁹Soon he was challenged by men from Cyrene and Alexandria who belonged to the Synagogue of Free Men, as it was called, because they had been slaves. These and other Greek-speaking Jews from Cilicia and Asia started arguing with Stephen. ¹⁰But the Holy Spirit gave Stephen such wisdom that when he answered them, they were speechless.

¹¹So they bribed a couple of men to say

that they had heard Stephen curse Moses and the God of Israel. ¹²In this way they were able to stir up the people against him and at the same time get the attention of the city fathers and the teachers of the law. So Stephen was arrested and brought before the Jewish High Council, the Sanhedrin.

¹³Then the bribed witnesses were brought in to accuse him of blasphemy. They said, "This man keeps talking against the Temple and against the law of Moses and everything he taught us. ¹⁴We heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth will come back and destroy the Temple and change the customs that Moses handed down to us." ¹⁵When the council members looked at Stephen standing in the middle of the courtroom, they noticed that his face was so radiant with faith that it looked like the face of an angel.

Stephen's Sermon

7 Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these things true? What do you have to say for yourself?"

²Stephen answered, "Fellow citizens, brothers and fathers: Kindly listen to what I have to say. Centuries ago God appeared to Abraham before he left Mesopotamia to go and live in Haran. ³God said, 'Leave your relatives and your country and go to live in a land that I will show you.' ⁴So Abraham left Mesopotamia and lived in Haran for a while until his father died; then he moved here to this country where we now live. ⁵God did not give him possession of the land as soon as he got here but promised to someday give him the whole country which would then belong to him and his descendants forever. This was before he even had any children. ⁶God said to Abraham, 'Your descendants will be treated as foreigners. They will be made slaves and forced to serve another nation. All this will last for more than four hundred years. ⁷Then I will judge that nation which enslaved them and free my people and bring them out to serve me in

this land.' ⁸God also gave the covenant of circumcision to Abraham. So eight days after Isaac was born, Abraham circumcised him. Later, Isaac circumcised his son Jacob, and Jacob circumcised his sons, who became the heads of our twelve tribes.

Israel in Egypt

⁹"But Jacob's sons became jealous of their brother Joseph and sold him as a slave, and he was taken to Egypt. However, God was with him. ¹⁰He stood by young Joseph in all his troubles and gave him favor with the king of Egypt. The king recognized his wisdom and made him governor over all the land and manager of the royal house. ¹¹Then a famine came which spread over Egypt and Canaan and caused great suffering. Jacob and his sons could not find enough to eat. ¹²When Jacob heard that there was food in Egypt, he sent his sons there to buy some. ¹³Later, he sent them down again, and that's when Joseph told his brothers who he was. When Pharaoh heard about it, he offered to let Joseph bring his whole family to Egypt. ¹⁴So Joseph sent for his father and invited him and all his brothers and their families to come to Egypt. In all, there were seventy-five of them, counting Joseph, his two sons and five grandsons. ¹⁵So Jacob and his sons moved to Egypt where they all lived and where they eventually died. ¹⁶Later their bodies were carried to Shechem where they were buried in the cave that Abraham bought from the sons of Hamor for cash.

¹⁷"When the time came for God to carry out the promise He had made to our father Abraham, our people in Egypt had increased to become a small nation. ¹⁸Then another Pharaoh came to the throne who refused to acknowledge what Joseph had done for Egypt. ¹⁹He dealt craftily with our people, was cruel to our men and even caused the babies to be killed. ²⁰During this time Moses was born. In God's sight he was a beautiful

baby, and his parents succeeded in hiding him at home for three months. ²¹When he was hidden in a basket, Pharaoh's daughter found him, adopted him and raised him as her own son. ²²She educated Him and trained him in all the wisdom and military arts of the Egyptians, and he became a great leader in words and actions.

²³"When Moses was about forty years old, he decided to go and find out how his fellow Israelites were doing and how they were being treated. ²⁴While visiting a worksite, he saw one of his Israelite brothers being mistreated by an Egyptian foreman. So he went over to defend his brother and in the process ended up killing the Egyptian. ²⁵He hoped that this incident would be understood by his brothers as a sign that God had sent him to deliver them and that they would rally around him. But they didn't see it that way. ²⁶The next day he went down to the work sites again and this time found two Israelites fighting with each other. He separated them and said, 'Listen to me, men. You two are brothers, not enemies. You shouldn't be fighting like this.' ²⁷But the one who was beating up his brother pushed Moses away and said, 'Who do you think you are, telling us what to do? Who made you our ruler and judge? You're not in charge of us. ²⁸Are you going to kill me like you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' ²⁹Then Moses knew that the Israelites had misunderstood his intentions and were not willing to accept his leadership. So he fled the country and went to live in the land of Midian, where he married Jethro's daughter and had two sons.

³⁰"Forty years later, God spoke to him from the middle of the flames of a burning bush in the wasteland near Mount Sinai. ³¹When Moses saw that the bush kept on burning, he went over to see how this could be. As he came close, the Lord spoke to him out of the bush and said, ³²'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' When

Moses heard this, he was afraid and started to tremble with fear and didn't dare look in the direction of the fire. ³³The Lord continued, 'Take off your sandals because the ground on which you're standing is holy.' Moses obeyed. ³⁴Then God said, 'I've seen how cruelly my people are being treated in Egypt. I've heard their prayers, and I've listened to their groanings. I've decided to set them free, and I'm sending you to Egypt to bring them out.'

³⁵"Moses remembered how, years before, the people had rejected his leadership when they said, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?' Yet this same Moses, God sent back to Egypt to be our ruler and liberator with the help of the Angel who spoke to him from the burning bush. ³⁶God was with him and worked mighty miracles through Moses and did many marvelous things, first in Egypt, then at the Red Sea and for the next forty years in the wilderness.

After Sinai

³⁷"It was Moses who said to the children of Israel, 'The Lord God will send you a Prophet taken from your own people to lead you, just as He sent me.' ³⁸This is the same Moses who was with our people in the wilderness, who was with the Angel of God on Mount Sinai (the same One who spoke to him from the burning bush), and who received from God the Ten Commandments and His words that give us life. ³⁹But our fathers rejected Moses and refused to obey him. They longed to go back to Egypt. ⁴⁰They said to Aaron, 'Make us gods we can see who can take us back. Moses brought us out of Egypt, but he's been up in the mountain for forty days and who knows what happened to him!' ⁴¹They made a calf-idol, offered sacrifices to it and joyfully worshiped something they had made with their own hands. ⁴²So God turned away from them and let them worship the sun, moon and stars. Later, the prophet Amos, speaking for God, said, 'People of

Israel, was it only to me that you sacrificed animals during your forty years in the wilderness? ⁴³It was not. You also sacrificed your animals to idols. Then you set up the tent of the god Molech and sacrificed your animals to the star god Rephan. In Canaan you carved figurines of these gods and worshiped these pieces of wood, asking them to bless you. I can no longer protect you, so the Babylonians will come and capture your city and take you away.'

The Heavenly Sanctuary

⁴⁴"In the wilderness our forefathers had the Sanctuary, which God told Moses to pattern after the Sanctuary in heaven which He had shown him. ⁴⁵Our people carried this tent Sanctuary with them everywhere they went. Under Joshua's leadership, they moved into the land of Canaan and worshiped at that Sanctuary all through the years until the time of David. ⁴⁶Then David, who was a man after God's own heart, wanted to build a permanent Sanctuary for the Lord. So he asked God's permission. ⁴⁷God said, 'No,' and gave the privilege of building the Temple to Solomon. ⁴⁸We all know that the Most High God can't be confined to a building or to just one place. As Isaiah the prophet, speaking for God, said, ⁴⁹'Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. What Temple can you build for me that will hold me? What place is there that can confine me?' ⁵⁰Do I need a building of wood or stone in which to rest? Haven't I created everything that exists?"

Stephen Cuts His Sermon Short

⁵¹When Stephen saw how disturbed the council members became when he said he didn't believe the Temple was necessarily a sign of the presence of God, he cut his speech short and said, "How stiff-necked and stubborn can you be? Your ears are no better than those of the Egyptians who refused to listen to God and to let His people go. You're resisting

the Holy Spirit today just as your fathers did in the wilderness. ⁵²Has there ever been a prophet whom your fathers didn't mistreat or persecute? They even killed prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah. And not one of you spoke up for John the Baptist. To make matters worse, you turned the Just One over to the Romans to be crucified. This makes you both traitors and murderers. ⁵³You claim you are the ones charged with safeguarding God's law which was given in the presence of angels. But you yourselves pay no attention to the law and have not obeyed it."

The Stoning of Stephen

⁵⁴When the council members heard this, they were beside themselves with anger. Their pride was so hurt that they actually ground their teeth in a fit of rage. ⁵⁵But Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing by His right hand. Then he said, ⁵⁶"Look! I can see into heaven, and I see Jesus, the Son of Man, standing at the right hand of God!" ⁵⁷When the council members heard that, they shouted, "Stop him!" and put their fingers in their ears to keep from hearing what to them was blasphemy and rushed toward him like madmen. ⁵⁸They grabbed him, pushing him out of the courtroom and through the streets of Jerusalem until they were outside the city. They took off their coats and asked a young man named Saul to watch them. ⁵⁹As they were stoning Stephen, he put his hands over his head and cried out, "Lord Jesus, I give myself to you! Receive my spirit!" ⁶⁰As he sank to his knees, he cried out again, "Lord Jesus, please don't hold this against them!" Then he slumped over and died.

Saul Persecutes the Church

8 Then young Saul, who had agreed to the killing of Stephen, was appointed to the Sanhedrin. From that day on, he led a cruel persecution against the

church beginning in Jerusalem. As a result, the believers left the city and scattered throughout Judea and Samaria until only the apostles and a few others were left. ²Some of the believers had watched from a distance as Stephen was stoned. After the crowd left, they went and, with tears and deep mourning, took his body and buried it. ³But Saul was determined to destroy the church. He personally went from house to house searching for believers, dragging them out and sending them to prison, men and women alike.

The Gospel Preached in Samaria

⁴Meanwhile, those who had left the city scattered everywhere preaching the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵Philip, one of the deacons, left Judea and went to Samaria to preach Christ. ⁶The people eagerly listened to what he had to say because he not only preached the gospel but also worked miracles. ⁷He even healed people who were demon possessed, and when he did, the demons would leave with loud shrieks. He also healed many who were paralyzed and deformed. ⁸As a result, a wave of joy and happiness swept through the whole city.

The Power of Witchcraft

⁹In this same city there was a man called Simon who had made a good living by practicing witchcraft and making extravagant claims for himself. ¹⁰It seemed that everyone listened to him and did what he said, from the city officials to the common man in the street. They all believed that his power came from God. They even called him, The Man With the Power of God. ¹¹Another reason so many in the city believed him and became his followers was because he had amazed them with his witchcraft for a long time. ¹²But when the people heard the good news from Philip about the kingdom of God and about Jesus Christ, many of them accepted Him as their Savior, and scores of them were baptized, both men

and women alike. ¹³Even Simon said he accepted Jesus and was baptized. He followed Philip everywhere, watching every move he made, observing with amazement the miracles he saw him do.

Buying the Holy Spirit

¹⁴When the apostles in Jerusalem heard what was going on in Samaria and how people were accepting the gospel, they sent Peter and John to see what was happening. ¹⁵When they arrived in Samaria, they earnestly prayed that the new believers would be given the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶Though they had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they had not received the gifts of the Spirit. ¹⁷So Peter and John prayed and laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸When Simon saw that by the simple laying on of hands the power of the Holy Spirit was given to believers, he offered to pay Peter and John to give him power to do the same thing. ¹⁹He said, "Please sell me this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands will receive the Holy Spirit."

²⁰Peter said to him, "If you think you can buy the Holy Spirit so you can use His gifts to make yourself rich, then may you and your money perish together. ²¹Your attitude shows that your heart is not right with God. So there's no way that you can have a part in this ministry. ²²You need to repent and ask God to forgive you for even thinking about using the Holy Spirit. ²³It's obvious that you're jealous of what we're doing and you're being controlled by the power of sin, not by the power of God." ²⁴Then Simon said to Peter and John, "Please pray for me that none of the things you said may happen to me." (But his repentance wasn't genuine, because for years afterward he followed Peter wherever he went to trouble him.)

²⁵On their way back to Jerusalem, the two apostles continued preaching the word of God and giving their testimony about Christ in towns and villages throughout Samaria.

Philip and the Ethiopian

²⁶Then the angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Leave this area, go south past Jerusalem, then take the road to Gaza going into the desert." ²⁷Philip said goodbye to the believers and left. He took the Desert Road south as the angel had told him. Meanwhile, the minister of finance for Candace, Queen of Ethiopia, had come to Jerusalem to worship and ²⁸was on his way back home. While slowly riding along in his chariot, he was reading the book of Isaiah out loud, trying to understand what it meant. ²⁹As his chariot approached Philip, the Holy Spirit said, "Philip, as this chariot passes you, stay close to it and I will tell you what to do."

³⁰So as the chariot passed him, Philip ran up behind it and heard the Ethiopian reading from the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah—about a man being led to the slaughter like a sheep and saying nothing. Then the Holy Spirit prompted Philip to call out to the man, "Do you understand what you're reading?" ³¹The official said, "How can I understand these Jewish expressions unless someone helps me!" He ordered his driver to stop the chariot and asked Philip if he would come up and help him. ³²The passage of Scripture the official couldn't understand was: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb standing in front of its shearers does not speak, so He said nothing. ³³He was humiliated and they gave Him no justice. He will leave no descendants because they will take His life." ³⁴The official showed Philip this passage and said, "Who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?"

³⁵Philip explained the passage to him and told him all about the Lord Jesus. ³⁶As they studied together and traveled down the road, they came to a small pool of water. The Ethiopian said, "Look, here's water! Is there any reason why I can't be baptized right here?" ³⁷Philip said, "If with all your heart you believe in Jesus and accept Him as your personal Savior, you may be baptized." The man

responded, "I believe that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God and my Savior."

³⁸Then he ordered the driver to stop, and he and Philip went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit picked Philip up and carried him away. The Ethiopian stepped into his chariot and went on home, happy in his newfound faith. He never saw Philip again. ⁴⁰Suddenly Philip found himself in the ancient city of Ashdod called Azotus on the Mediterranean coast. From there he went north preaching the good news about Jesus Christ until he came to Caesarea, where he and his family settled and continued to spread the gospel.

Saul Converted

9 In the meantime Saul, now a member of the High Council and full of hatred, threatened to kill the believers wherever he happened to find them. ²One day he went to the high priest and asked permission to go as far north as Damascus in search of Christians. He said that all he needed were letters to the synagogue leaders authorizing him to arrest any Jewish Christians he found there. He would then bring them back to Jerusalem to stand trial, whether they were men or women. ³The high priest gave Saul the letter of authorization he requested and immediately Saul headed for Damascus. After days of travel, he and his companions were nearing the city when suddenly a brilliant light from heaven flashed around Saul. ⁴He stumbled and fell blinded to the ground. Then he heard a voice, saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

⁵Trembling, Saul said, "Who are you, Lord?" The voice answered, "I'm Jesus, the One you're persecuting. You've been fighting against your own conscience and covering your guilt by persecuting my people ever since you consented to Stephen's death." ⁶Saul said weakly, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" The Lord answered, "Get up and go into

Damascus. There you'll be told what to do." ⁷The men who were with Saul stood speechless. They had heard a voice but because of the bright light didn't see anyone. ⁸When Saul stood up and opened his eyes, he realized that he was totally blind. His companions had to lead him by the hand the rest of the way to the city. ⁹For the next three days, Saul sat in his room, blind, refusing to eat or drink, his mind going over the prophecies about the Messiah.

Saul Baptized and Called Paul

¹⁰In Damascus there was a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ called Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a night vision, saying, "Ananias?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, I'm here." ¹¹The Lord said, "Get up and go to Judas' house on Straight Street and ask to see a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is fasting and praying, asking for help. ¹²I told him in a vision that a man named Ananias would be coming to see him and that you would restore his sight by placing your hands on his head." ¹³Then Ananias answered, "Lord, this sounds like the man I've heard about who's been going from house to house in Jerusalem looking for Christians, arresting them and sending them to prison. ¹⁴I've also heard that the high priest gave him the authority to come here to arrest us and take us back to Jerusalem." ¹⁵The Lord said, "Go and do as I've told you. I've chosen Saul to serve me and I want him to carry the good news of salvation to the Gentiles, to princes and kings and to the Jews scattered throughout the empire. ¹⁶I also need to share with him how much he will have to suffer for my sake."

¹⁷So Ananias went to the house where Saul was staying. When he met him, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus Christ who stopped you on the way here has sent me to heal you." Then he placed his hands on Saul's head and said, "Receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸Instantly, something like fish scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could

see. He stood up and went down to one of the rivers with Ananias who baptized him. (From then on those who knew about his conversion began calling him by his Roman name Paul.) ¹⁹Then Paul ended his fast, and after eating something, his strength began to return. For a few days he stayed with the believers in Damascus.

Paul Preaches in Damascus

²⁰Immediately, Paul was convicted to preach. So he went to the nearest synagogue to tell the people that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. ²¹Everyone who heard him preach was amazed and said, "Isn't this the man who went from house to house in Jerusalem arresting and destroying those who worship Jesus? Wasn't he sent here by the high priest to do the same thing and to take believers back to Jerusalem for trial?" ²²Yet each day he preached more powerfully than the day before, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. The Jews who argued with him could not disprove what he said.

Paul Escapes

²³Their hatred grew so intense that the Lord directed him to Arabia where He personally taught him for three years. Then Paul returned to Damascus to preach. The Jews were so upset that they decided to kill him. ²⁴But he found out about their plot and learned that they had stationed men at each of the city gates to kill him as soon as he came out. ²⁵So the believers took him to an opening in the city wall, put him in a large basket (for he was small), and with ropes gently lowered him to the ground.

Paul in Jerusalem

²⁶From Damascus Paul went to Jerusalem to make peace with the believers there. But they were still afraid of him because they thought he had been sent to spy on them and that his talk about conversion wasn't true. ²⁷But Barnabas befriended him, learned more about his

conversion, then took him to the apostles. Barnabas explained to them what had happened to Paul on the way to Damascus and how the Lord had appeared to him and spoken with him. He also told them about Paul's days of fasting and prayer, his baptism at the hands of Ananias and how he had gone into the synagogue and boldly preached Jesus Christ in Damascus. ²⁸So they welcomed Paul and had him stay with them. He went all over Jerusalem with them, preaching the good news about Jesus. ²⁹Everywhere Paul went to preach, he did so openly and boldly, telling the people that Jesus Christ was Lord. He also debated with the Greek-speaking Jews, and it wasn't long before they made plans to kill him, also. ³⁰When the believers heard this, they urged Paul to leave town to save his life. They chose some from among them to accompany him as far north as Caesarea. When they got there, he went on to his home in Tarsus.

The Church Grows

³¹Then the churches in Judea, Galilee and Samaria had a time of peace. Strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, the believers showed their deep reverence for the Lord by the way they lived, and many were added to the church.

Peter Heals Aeneas

³²About this time, Peter, on his itinerary, stopped to see the believers in Lydda. ³³He was introduced to a man named Aeneas who was paralyzed and had not been able to get out of bed for eight years. ³⁴When Peter met him, he said, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and make your bed." Immediately the man got up. ³⁵In a matter of hours, all the people in Lydda and the plain of Sharon heard about it and were eager to see Aeneas. Many of those who came gave their hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter Restores Dorcas

³⁶Not far away in Joppa, one of the

women believers died. Her name in Aramaic was Tabitha, and in Greek, it was Dorcas. She had always done good and helped others, especially the poor. ³⁷She had been sick only a few days before she died. The believers prepared her body for burial and laid it out in an upstairs room. ³⁸Joppa was near Lydda, and when the believers heard that Peter was there, they asked two men to hurry and get him. The men went and urged Peter to come. ³⁹So Peter left with them, and when he arrived, they took him upstairs to where Tabitha's body was. The room was full of widows mourning her death. They showed Peter the clothes she had made for them before she became sick and told him how much they needed her.

⁴⁰Peter asked all of them to leave the room. Then he knelt and earnestly prayed for her life to be restored. When he finished praying, he stood up, turned toward the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Instantly she opened her eyes, looked at Peter and sat up. ⁴¹He reached out his hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called to the widows and other believers in the house to come and see what the Lord had done. ⁴²The news about this spread rapidly throughout the city, and many believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴³Peter stayed in Joppa and worked with the believers for some time, staying with a man named Simon, a tanner.

Cornelius Sends a Delegation

10 About thirty miles up the coast from Joppa, there lived a man in Caesarea named Cornelius who was an officer in the Roman army in charge of the Italian military unit. ²He was a very religious man and together with his family worshiped God and helped the poor. He always took time to pray. ³About three o'clock one afternoon while praying, he received a vision. An angel appeared to him and said, "Cornelius?" ⁴He looked in the direction of the voice, saw the angel and with a quivering voice asked, "What do you want, Sir?" The

angel said, "God has heard your prayers and has noticed what you've been doing for the poor. He has not forgotten you. ⁵He wants you to send a messenger down the coast to Joppa to find a man named Peter and bring him here. ⁶He's staying with a leather tanner named Simon, whose house is located by the sea. He will tell you what to do." ⁷Then the angel disappeared and the vision faded. Cornelius immediately called two of his servants and one of his military attendants who was as devoutly religious as he was. ⁸He told them what had happened and asked them to saddle some horses and go to Joppa to find Peter.

Peter's Vision

⁹They rode all night, and about noon the next day, they could see Joppa in the distance. Meanwhile, Peter went up on the flat roof of Simon's house to enjoy a little peace and quiet and to find some time to pray. ¹⁰Soon he became hungry, and while the meal was being prepared, he received a vision. ¹¹He saw heaven open and a huge sheet descending, held up by its four corners. ¹²Inside this sheet were all kinds of unclean animals, snakes and wild birds. ¹³As he looked, he heard a voice say, "Are you hungry, Peter? Get up and kill one of these animals and eat something." ¹⁴Peter answered, "No, Lord! I've never eaten anything that's considered impure or unclean." ¹⁵The voice spoke again, "Don't call anything impure or unclean that God has made clean." ¹⁶This happened three times, and the sheet was taken back to heaven.

¹⁷While Peter was trying to figure out what this vision meant, the three men whom Cornelius had sent found the house of Simon the tanner and stopped at the gate. ¹⁸They called out to see if this was where Peter was staying. ¹⁹Peter was still on the roof trying to understand the vision when the Holy Spirit said to him, "There are three men downstairs looking for you. ²⁰You need to go down to see them. They will ask you to

go with them. Don't hesitate, because I'm the One who sent them here to find you." ²¹Peter went downstairs to meet these men whom Cornelius had sent. He introduced himself, saying, "I'm Peter. Are you looking for me?" They answered, "Yes." Peter said, "Why?"

²²They replied, "Cornelius, captain of the Italian regiment stationed in Caesarea, sent us here to find you. He's a good man who worships God and is well thought of by the Jewish people. Yesterday an angel appeared to him in a vision and told him to send for you so he can ask some questions." ²³Peter invited them in, and they stayed overnight with Simon the tanner to get some rest. Early in the morning, Peter left for Caesarea with the three men and six carefully chosen believers.

Peter Goes to Caesarea

²⁴When they arrived in Caesarea the next day, they found Cornelius waiting for them. His house was filled with relatives and friends he had invited to come to hear Peter. ²⁵As Peter and the others came through the gate, Cornelius went out to meet them. When he was introduced to Peter, he fell on his knees to worship him. ²⁶Peter quickly pulled him up and said, "Stand up! I'm not a god. I'm a human being like you!" ²⁷Cornelius and Peter talked together as they walked into the house. The place was full of people waiting to hear Peter speak. ²⁸After he was introduced to the group, he said, "All of you know that a Jew is not allowed to visit and eat in the house of a Gentile because that makes him ceremonially unclean. But God has shown me in vision that I have no right to look down on any man and call him impure or unclean. ²⁹So when you sent for me, I came without objection. But what I would like to know is, Why did you send for me?"

³⁰Cornelius said, "About four days ago, I went on a fast. About three o'clock in the afternoon while I was taking time for prayer, a man in a bright, shining robe,

bathed in a brilliant light, suddenly stood in front of me. He said, ³¹‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayers and has seen what you’ve been doing for the poor. He has not forgotten you. ³²Send some of your servants to Joppa for a man named Peter who is staying with Simon the leather tanner, whose house is by the sea.’ ³³I immediately sent for you and you’ve been kind enough to come. Now we are all here waiting to hear everything the Lord has told you to tell us.”

Peter Shares the Gospel

³⁴Then Peter said, “Now I know it’s true that God doesn’t respect one person more than another. ³⁵I can see that anyone who loves Him and does what is right, He accepts as part of His people, no matter what nationality or race he or she belongs to. ³⁶I’m sure you’ve heard how the God of Israel has sent a message of goodwill and peace to all men through His Son Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of all. ³⁷You must have heard about the great things Jesus did, beginning in Galilee when John the Baptist was preaching in Judea, and how from there, the influence of His ministry spread throughout the land of Israel. ³⁸At His baptism, God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and power. Everywhere He went, He did good, healing the sick and even casting out demons, because God was with Him. ³⁹We were with Jesus and saw everything He did throughout the land of Israel. In Jerusalem we saw the authorities arrest Him and then demand that He be taken to Pilate and crucified. ⁴⁰But on the third day after His crucifixion, God raised Him from the dead, and we saw Him and spent forty days with Him going to different places. ⁴¹After His resurrection, He didn’t mingle with the public as much as He had during His ministry, but He did eat and drink with us, because God wanted us to be witnesses to the fact that He was alive. ⁴²Then Jesus commissioned us to preach the good news of salvation to everyone and to tell them that

He is the One whom God appointed Judge over the living and the dead. ⁴³All our prophets have spoken of Him, telling us that whoever believes in Him will be forgiven.”

Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit

⁴⁴While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit came on all those sitting there listening to him. ⁴⁵The Jewish believers who were with Peter were surprised to see God giving the Holy Spirit to Gentiles. ⁴⁶They were really surprised when these people began praising God for what He had done for them, speaking in languages they hadn’t learned. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷“How can we refuse to baptize these people when they’re receiving the Holy Spirit the same way we received Him at Pentecost?” ⁴⁸So he authorized them to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. After the baptism, they asked Peter to stay with them for a while so they could learn more about Jesus, and Peter did.

Peter Returns to Jerusalem

11 Word reached the apostles and believers in Judea that Peter had taken the good news of the gospel to the Gentiles and that they too had accepted Jesus Christ. ²So when he came back to Jerusalem, a group of believers who thought that Gentiles must first be circumcised and become Jews before they could be considered true Christians challenged Peter, saying, ³“You mean to tell us that you stayed overnight in the house of those who aren’t even circumcised and ate with them?”

⁴Then Peter told them everything that had happened from the beginning, saying, ⁵“While I was in Joppa visiting our believers, one day at noon I was praying when suddenly I was in vision. I saw what looked like a huge sheet being lowered from heaven by its four corners. It stopped right in front of me. ⁶Inside the sheet I saw all kinds of wild animals, snakes and wild birds. ⁷Then I heard a

voice call to me, 'Come, Peter, kill and eat!' ⁸I said, 'Not me, Lord. I've never tasted anything that was impure or unclean.' ⁹The voice spoke to me again and said, 'Don't call impure and unclean what God has made clean.' ¹⁰This happened three times, and then the sheet with its unclean animals was taken back to heaven. ¹¹At the same time, three men were downstairs by the gate asking for me, wanting me to go with them to Caesarea. ¹²The Holy Spirit told me to go with them and not to ask any questions. So I went, taking six carefully chosen believers from Joppa with me. We finally arrived in Caesarea at the house of a man named Cornelius who had sent for me.

¹³After we were introduced, he told us how an angel had appeared to him in his own house while he was praying. The angel said to him, 'Send some of your servants to Joppa for a man called Peter. ¹⁴When he comes, he will answer your questions and tell you what you need to know to be saved.' ¹⁵So I started telling them about the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the middle of my presentation, the Holy Spirit came on them as He had on us at Pentecost. ¹⁶When I saw what was happening, I remembered what the Lord had said, 'John is baptizing people with water, but you will see people baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷I decided that if God gave these Gentiles who believe in Jesus the same gift that He gave us, who was I to stop God?" ¹⁸When the group heard this, they had no further objections but praised the Lord, saying, "This means that God has also given people of other nations the ability to repent and be saved!"

Paul and Barnabas

¹⁹In the meantime, many believers had left Jerusalem to escape the persecution that followed the stoning of Stephen. Some went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling others the good news that Jesus was the Messiah, but they shared it only with the Jews. ²⁰However, some of these new believers

from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and shared the good news about Jesus Christ with the Gentiles. ²¹The power of the Lord was with them, and great numbers of people believed and turned to the Lord. ²²Before long, the news reached the church leaders in Jerusalem, so they decided to send Barnabas to Antioch to see what was happening and to report back to them. ²³When Barnabas saw how the grace of God had changed these people, he was glad and encouraged them to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. ²⁴Barnabas was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. While he was in Antioch, many more accepted Jesus Christ and were added to the church. ²⁵Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Paul to ask him to come and help him. ²⁶He found Paul and brought him to Antioch. For a whole year, the two of them worked with the believers, teaching them and adding more converts to the church. In fact, it was in Antioch that the believers were first called Christians.

Believers in Antioch Send Offering to Judea

²⁷About this time, some of those from Jerusalem who had the gift of prophecy came to visit Antioch. ²⁸One of them named Agabus stood up in a meeting one day, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, predicted that there would be a severe drought throughout the Roman world. Agabus warned that believers should prepare for it. This happened in the days of the Emperor Claudius. ²⁹When the drought came, the believers in Antioch decided to help their brothers and sisters in Judea all they could. ³⁰After they collected the relief funds, they gave them to Barnabas and Paul and asked them to take these funds to the church in Jerusalem for distribution.

James Beheaded

12 In the meantime, Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great,

had begun persecuting the church in Jerusalem by arresting some of its members. ²He arrested James, the brother of John, and had him beheaded just like his uncle Herod Antipas had done to John the Baptist. ³When he saw how this pleased the Jews, he also arrested Peter. This happened during the Jewish festival of the Passover. ⁴He put Peter in the Fortress of Antonia and ordered rotations of four squads of four soldiers each to take turns guarding him. Herod decided not to behead Peter secretly as he had James but to make a public show of his execution.

Peter Arrested and Freed by an Angel

⁵While Peter was in prison, the believers pleaded with God day and night for his release. ⁶The night before Peter was to go on trial, he was sleeping in his prison cell, bound with two chains to two guards, with two other guards standing just outside the door. ⁷Suddenly an angel of the Lord stood next to Peter, lighting up the whole cell. He shook Peter's shoulder and said, "Wake up, Peter! Hurry and get dressed!" Peter woke up, and as he struggled to his feet, the irons around his wrists holding the two chains fell off while the guards stood motionless. ⁸Peter was only half awake as he tried to get dressed. The angel had to tell him, "Don't forget to buckle your belt and put on your sandals." Peter did as he was told and the angel said, "Now wrap your outer robe around you and follow me."

⁹The cell door opened noiselessly, the angel led the way and Peter followed. During all of this, Peter thought he must be dreaming or having a vision. ¹⁰On the way out, they passed the second set of guards by his cell, who also stood motionless. When they got to the big iron gate leading to the city, it opened just as noiselessly, and they walked past the regular guards and on outside. As they made their way down one of the side streets, suddenly the angel disappeared. ¹¹That's when Peter came to, as if waking from a

dream. He felt the chill night air and said to himself, "This isn't a dream! This is real! The Lord sent His angel to deliver me from Herod and from what the Jews were expecting!"

¹²He hesitated for a moment, then decided to go to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, because he knew that people would be there praying for him. ¹³He knocked on the door, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer it. ¹⁴When she recognized Peter's voice, she became so excited that she forgot to unlock the door but ran back to tell everyone the good news, leaving Peter standing outside in the cold. ¹⁵"Who was it?" they asked. "It's Peter!" she exclaimed. They said, "Rhoda, you must be out of your mind. Peter's in prison." But she insisted, so they said, "She probably heard the voice of his angel." ¹⁶But Peter continued knocking. Finally, someone went to check, and when they opened the door, they were astonished to see that it truly was Peter. ¹⁷He put his finger to his lips, motioning for them to be quiet. They let him in, and once inside, he told the whole story of how the Lord had sent an angel to get him out of prison. When he finished, he said, "Go tell James, the Lord's stepbrother, and the others that their prayers have been answered." Then he said good-bye and left the city.

¹⁸As soon as it was daylight, the guards were terrified. "Where's Peter? What happened?" ¹⁹Herod Agrippa launched a search for Peter who couldn't be found. He cross-examined the guards and ordered them executed. Then he left Jerusalem and went to Caesarea.

The Death of Herod

²⁰Herod had a political quarrel with the people of Tyre and Sidon and had threatened to punish them. So they befriended Blastus, the king's personal secretary, who made an appointment for them to see the king. When they were ushered into Herod's presence, they pleaded with him

not to cut off their food supply or shipping trade. He agreed, and they made peace. ²¹Now on the festival set aside to vow loyalty to Caesar, Herod put on a royal robe woven with strands of silver and gold. Then he stood by his throne and gave a tremendous oration. ²²When he had finished, the audience shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not the voice of a man!"

²³At that moment, the same angel who had released Peter came and touched Herod's body and instantly Herod was in agony. With excruciating pain, he left the festive hall knowing he was about to die. Guilt seized him and he remembered his relentless persecution of the followers of Christ and his unreasonable vengeance on Peter's prison guards. The festivities ended, and a few days later Herod died, his intestines having been eaten by worms. ²⁴Meanwhile, the word of God was spreading everywhere, and the church continued to grow.

Paul and Barnabas Set Aside for Mission Service

²⁵When Paul and Barnabas had finished their mission and had taken the donations of the believers in Antioch down to Jerusalem, they went back to Antioch and took a young man named John Mark with them.

13 In the church at Antioch there were some who had the gift of prophecy and others who had the gift of teaching. These included: Barnabas; Simeon, whom they called Niger; Lucius, who was originally from Cyrene; Manaen, who as a boy had grown up with Herod Antipas; and, of course, Paul. ²One day as they were worshiping together after having fasted and prayed, the Holy Spirit spoke to them, saying, "Set aside Paul and Barnabas for mission service, because I want them to do the work that I've called them to do." ³Again they fasted and prayed. Then they ordained Paul and

Barnabas for their special work and sent them on their first missionary journey.

In Cyprus

⁴The Holy Spirit directed Paul and Barnabas to go to Seleucia on the coast, and from there they took a ship to the island of Cyprus. ⁵When they arrived at the port city of Salamis, they and John Mark, who was with them, visited all the synagogues in the city and preached the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁶Then they left Salamis and made their way on foot across the island to the city of Paphos. While there, they met a Jew called Bar-Jesus, who practiced sorcery and claimed to be a prophet. ⁷This man was in the service of Sergius Paulus, the island's governor, who had a reputation for being intelligent and prudent in all he did. Paul and Barnabas hadn't been in the city very long before they were invited to the governor's palace and were asked to share with him the word of God. ⁸But Bar-Jesus, who was also called Elymas, tried to turn the governor away from hearing about the Christian faith by accusing Paul of having used trickery to perform his miracles.

⁹Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, turned to Elymas and said, ¹⁰"You are really a son of the devil! You're against everything that is good. With your so-called magic and witchcraft you turn people away from God. When will you stop turning the Lord's truth into lies? ¹¹The Lord has finally decided to stop you. From this moment on you will be totally blind until He decides to restore your sight." Instantly a heavy mist settled over Elymas' eyes, and he found himself in total darkness; someone had to come and lead him out of the room. ¹²When the governor saw what had happened, he was amazed and no longer doubted the truth of what Paul had told him. He accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord and became a Christian.

In Antioch in Pisidia

¹³From Paphos, Paul and his companions took a ship to Asia Minor and from the port of entry walked the next eight miles to Perga, the capital of the province of Pamphylia. Here John Mark decided that he had had all the missionary work he wanted and went back home to Jerusalem. ¹⁴From Perga, Paul and Barnabas went on to Antioch, one of the major cities in the region known as Pisidia. The next Sabbath they attended the synagogue and sat in the congregation among the other worshipers.

¹⁵After the Scripture reading, which was taken from the books of Moses and some of the other prophets, the elders of the church sent a note to Paul and Barnabas that read, "We see that you men are fellow Israelites, so if you have a word of encouragement for us, come up and speak." ¹⁶Paul went up front and motioned with his hand for everyone to be quiet. Then he said, "Men of Israel and all of you here who worship God, listen to me. ¹⁷Our God, the God of Israel, chose us to be His people and made us into a nation after He delivered us from slavery in Egypt. He did this with such power that even Egypt had to acknowledge His sovereignty. ¹⁸For the next forty years He took care of us and fed us as a compassionate father would, with great patience and discipline as we made our way through the wilderness. ¹⁹After He subdued seven kingdoms, He turned the land of Canaan over to us and divided it among our twelve tribes. ²⁰Our people had been slaves in Egypt, but God gave us a rule of law with a court system and area judges. This lasted for about four hundred fifty years until Samuel the prophet came along.

²¹"When the people asked for a king so they could be like the other nations around them, God reluctantly consented and chose Saul, the son of Kish, from the tribe of Benjamin. Saul ruled the country for about forty years. ²²However, God had to remove Saul because of his dis-

obedience. So He permitted him to be killed in battle. In his place, God chose David to be king and said, 'I have chosen David, the son of Jesse, from the tribe of Judah, because he's a man after my own heart, a man who will do what I ask him to do.' ²³It was from this man's descendants that God brought to Israel a Savior named Jesus, as He had promised.

²⁴"Before Jesus came, John the Baptist preached in Judea, telling the people to repent and inviting them to be baptized. Then Jesus of Nazareth, from the tribe of Judah and a descendant of David, came to be baptized and began His ministry. ²⁵When John was about to finish his mission, the people asked him who he was. He said, 'Don't think that I'm the One you've been looking for, because I'm not. He's coming after me. I'm not even worthy to untie His sandals.' ²⁶Listen to me, men and brothers, those who are Israelites and descendants of Abraham and who worship God. The message of salvation sent to us by God through Jesus of Nazareth is not only for us in Palestine but also for all of you.

²⁷"Sad to say, the people in Jerusalem and their leaders, except for a few, did not accept the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was the One whom David had talked about. They didn't understand the words of the prophets, even though they had heard them read every Sabbath in their synagogues. In spite of themselves, they made the prophecies come true by arresting Jesus and condemning Him to death. ²⁸Though they could find no reason to do so, they brought Him to Pilate, the Roman governor, and demanded to have Him crucified! ²⁹So He was put to death just as the prophets had said He would be. Then His body was taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb. ³⁰But three days later, God raised Him from the dead! ³¹For the next forty days He fellowshipped with the men who had traveled with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem. These men, as well as others, are living witnesses of what God has done.

³²“This is the good news we want to share with you, how the promise God made to our forefathers has been fulfilled. ³³David told us God would resurrect Jesus from the dead. In the second Psalm he spoke for God, saying, ‘You are my Son in a new way, because this day I raised you up from the dead.’ And this is what happened. ³⁴God raised Jesus from the dead before His body started to decay. Through Isaiah, God said, ‘I will raise you up and give you all the blessings I promised David.’ ³⁵In another place David said to God, ‘I know that you will not let the body of your Holy One decay in the grave.’ ³⁶But after David had served the people in his generation and had fulfilled God’s purpose for his life, he died just as his ancestors had, and his body rotted in the grave. ³⁷But not so with Jesus! God resurrected Him and His body did not decay. ³⁸I want all of you, men and brothers, to know that through Jesus Christ, the power of death has been broken and the forgiveness of sin is proclaimed everywhere. ³⁹Because of what Jesus did for us, all who believe that God’s promise has been fulfilled in Him can be put right with God, which the law of Moses can’t do. ⁴⁰But let’s beware that the other things that the prophets said do not also happen to us. ⁴¹God warned us when He spoke through the prophet Habakkuk, ‘Look out, you who have a doubting heart, or you will die in your sins. I’m going to do something in your day that will surprise you. You will see something you will not believe even though I send someone to tell you about it.’”

Invited to Preach the Next Sabbath

⁴²After the Jews left the synagogue, the Gentiles begged Paul to come back the next Sabbath and preach to them again, which he did. ⁴³After the congregation dispersed and the people left the synagogue, many of the Jews and a number of Gentile converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who urged

them to continue in the grace of God through Jesus Christ which they had begun to enjoy.

⁴⁴The next Sabbath, it seemed that everyone in town came to hear these two men preach the word of God and explain the Scriptures to them. ⁴⁵But when the Jewish leaders saw the crowds, they became jealous and started talking against what Paul was saying, contradicting him publicly and even speaking abusively to him. ⁴⁶Then Paul and Barnabas said to the Jewish leaders, “It was right and proper for us to first bring the good news of salvation to you, but if you don’t believe what we’re telling you, you have judged yourselves as unworthy of eternal life, and we feel justified in turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷This is what the Lord told us to do. He said, ‘I’m sending you as a light to the Gentiles to take the good news of salvation to them, so they too can be saved.’”

⁴⁸When the Gentile converts heard that, they were glad and praised God. They shared this good news with other Gentiles and when they realized that they could have eternal life, they also believed. ⁴⁹The word of the Lord quickly spread throughout that whole region. ⁵⁰But the Jewish leaders didn’t give up. They continued to oppose Paul and persuaded women of high social standing interested in Judaism to speak to their husbands, telling them that Paul and Barnabas ought to be stopped. So the city officials forced Paul and Barnabas to leave town. ⁵¹In protest, Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet and went on to Iconium. ⁵²But there remained in Antioch many joyous Jews and Gentiles who were filled with the Holy Spirit.

In Iconium

14 Much the same happened in Iconium. Paul and Barnabas attended one of the synagogues and shared the truth about Jesus Christ with the members. As they shared this good news, a large number of Jews and Greeks responded and believed in the Lord

Jesus Christ. ²But some Jews who refused to believe stirred up the community and turned the people against the believers. ³In spite of this, Paul and Barnabas stayed there for some time, boldly preaching the truth about Jesus Christ. The Lord bore witness to their preaching by giving them power to heal the sick and to do many other signs and wonders. ⁴Soon the people of the city were divided, some supported the Jews and others supported the apostles. ⁵The Jews and Greeks who opposed the apostles finally persuaded the city officials to have Paul and Barnabas arrested. They wanted to rid the city of the apostles by having them stoned to death. ⁶As soon as Paul and Barnabas heard about this, they immediately decided to go to Lystra and Derbe in Lycaonia ⁷where they continued to preach God's good news.

In Lystra

⁸In Lystra there was a man who had been born with deformed feet and was unable to walk. ⁹He listened intently to everything Paul had to say. Paul watched him closely and could tell that the man believed God could heal him. ¹⁰So in a commanding voice he said, "Stand up on your feet!" The man jumped to his feet and began to walk. ¹¹When the people saw this, they started chanting in their Lycaonian dialect, "These men belong to the family of the gods and have come down in human form to visit and honor our city!" ¹²They thought Barnabas was the chief of the Greek gods because he looked so dignified, so they called him Zeus. They thought Paul was the spokesman for the Greek gods, so they called him Hermes. ¹³Unknown to Paul and Barnabas, the chief priest in charge of the temple of Zeus, located just outside the city, had brought young bulls and loads of flowers to the city gates where he and the people planned to sacrifice these animals to them. ¹⁴When Paul and Barnabas heard what the people were planning to do, they ran to the city gates,

tore their robes and waded into the crowd, shouting, ¹⁵"Don't do this! Stop! Listen to us!" When Paul got their attention, he said, "We are just human beings like you. We've come to bring you the good news that you can turn from worshiping useless idols and worship the real God, the One who created the heavens, the earth and the sea and everything in them. ¹⁶In the past, He permitted nations to walk in their own ways, ¹⁷but He never left Himself without some witness of His existence. He sent rain when we needed it. He gave us good harvests of food, and He filled our hearts with gladness." ¹⁸Paul and Barnabas spoke earnestly to the people and tried to stop them from offering sacrifices to them, but even with strong words such as these, they barely succeeded in doing so.

Paul Almost Dies From Stoning

¹⁹Meanwhile, some of the Jews from Antioch in Pisidia and from Iconium had followed Paul and Barnabas to Lystra and had won the crowd over to their side. Then the people turned on Paul, stoned him and dragged his body outside the city, thinking he was dead. ²⁰After the crowd left, a few believers stayed by to bury Paul. As they stood there crying, suddenly Paul moved! He got up and slowly walked back into the city with them. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

In Derbe

²¹They again preached God's good news, and many people in Derbe accepted the Lord Jesus Christ and became believers. From there they made their way back to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia. ²²They visited the believers and encouraged them to remain true to the faith. They also told them that they could expect to be misunderstood and mistreated just as the Lord Jesus had been. ²³In each city, Paul and Barnabas ordained elders, and after fasting and praying with them, they entrusted them

to the Lord Jesus in whom they had come to believe.

Paul Returns Home

²⁴After going through the region of Pisidia, they went on to the province of Pamphylia. ²⁵There they stopped and preached to the people in Perga again, and then went on to Attalia. ²⁶From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch in Syria, where they had originally been committed to the grace of God and sent out as missionaries. ²⁷As soon as they arrived, they called the believers together and told them everything that God had done and how He had opened the way for the Gentiles to hear the good news. ²⁸They stayed with the believers in Antioch quite some time to rest and recover from their arduous journey.

Should Gentiles Be Circumcised?

15 Meanwhile, some men had come to Antioch from Jerusalem and were teaching that new believers were not true Christians and could not be saved until they first converted to Judaism and were circumcised according to the law of Moses. ²Paul and Barnabas confronted these men, and soon the arguments became so heated that new believers began to take sides. The members decided that Paul and Barnabas, together with Titus and some of the local elders, should go to Jerusalem to ask the apostles' advice. ³So with the blessing of the church, they left Antioch and passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, sharing with believers along the way how the Gentiles had accepted the message and how it had changed their lives. This kind of news greatly cheered and encouraged them. ⁴When Paul and his company got to Jerusalem, the believers there welcomed them, as did the elders and apostles. Then they called a special meeting during which Paul and Barnabas shared with them all the things that God had done through them on their first mis-

sionary journey. ⁵But some of the Jewish believers who had been Pharisees stood up and insisted that there was no way for Gentiles to be saved unless they were circumcised and committed themselves to obeying the laws of Moses.

The Jerusalem Council

⁶So the apostles called for a General Council when they and the leading elders would consider the question and decide the issue. ⁷After a long discussion about what the Gentiles should or should not be required to do, Peter stood up and said, "Brothers, you remember how God used me about ten years ago to take the gospel to Cornelius and his family who were Gentiles so they could learn more about Jesus and become believers? ⁸You remember how God, who knows everyone's heart, verified the rightness of the act by giving them the Holy Spirit as He did for us at Pentecost? ⁹Obviously, it made no difference to God who they were. He accepted them and made their hearts pure because of their faith. ¹⁰So why do you want to question the sincerity of these new believers in Antioch? Why do you want to load them down with unnecessary rules and requirements which even our Jewish believers have a hard time bearing up under? ¹¹We already know that we're saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. And they are saved the same way."

¹²After Peter finished, there was dead silence. No one had anything more to say. Then Paul and Barnabas told them about the miraculous healings and other wondrous things which God had done for the Gentiles through them. ¹³When they finished, James, the stepbrother of Jesus who was chairing the meeting, stood up and said, "Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴As Peter just said, about ten years ago God gave us strong evidence that Gentiles believers were part of His people. ¹⁵This is in harmony with what Amos, the prophet, said when he spoke for God, saying, ¹⁶'In that day I will raise up the fallen house of

David. I will rebuild the walls of the city and make them strong again. ¹⁷People everywhere who long to know me will come and be accepted, and I will call them by my name because they also belong to me. ¹⁸I, the Lord, have designed this from the beginning.' ¹⁹Therefore, it seems to me that we should not burden the Gentiles with our rituals just because they're worshipping our God. ²⁰But we should write them a letter asking them not to identify with paganism by eating things sacrificed to idols, not to adopt the sexual practices of the world with its many perversions and not to eat meat with blood still in it, or meat from strangled animals. ²¹On the positive side, we should also ask them to familiarize themselves with the writings of Moses, of which we read a portion every Sabbath in the synagogue."

The Council's Decision

²²James' consensus statement pleased the apostles and elders, who together with the representatives from the churches, decided to choose two men to go with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to deliver the letter. The two chosen were Judas (also called Barsabbas) and Silas, both of whom were leading men among the believers. ²³The letter they sent with Judas and Silas read as follows: "We, the apostles and elders who are your brothers in Christ, send greetings to all our Gentile brothers and sisters, not only in the city of Antioch but also in the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²⁴Since we've heard that some members from here have troubled you with the idea that you must first become circumcised and keep the laws of Moses before you can become Christians and be saved, we want you to know that they were not sent by us. ²⁵So we decided to call a General Council to discuss the matter and agreed to let you know how we feel about this. We decided to send two representatives with Paul and Barnabas to deliver this letter. ²⁶Paul and Barnabas are reliable and trustworthy men who have risked their lives for the

Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷The other men are Judas and Silas. They will verify that what we have said in the letter is true. ²⁸We feel that the Holy Spirit has directed us not to put any burden on you except the following necessary guidelines, in order to promote greater fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. ²⁹First, don't identify with paganism by eating things sacrificed to idols. Second, don't eat food prepared with blood or eat meat from strangled animals as the pagans do. And third, don't adopt the sexual practices of the world with its many perversions. If you do this much, you'll do well. Best wishes from us to you."

Gift of Prophecy Encourages People

³⁰The men took the letter and went to Antioch. When they got there, they called a special meeting and presented the letter to the local leaders. ³¹After the elders read it to the members, they all rejoiced over the words of acceptance and encouragement. ³²Then Judas and Silas, both of whom had the gift of prophecy, spoke to the people, encouraging them in the word of the Lord. ³³After they had spent some time there, the members asked them to take a message of peace back to the apostles in Jerusalem. ³⁴Judas agreed to go, but Silas decided to stay. ³⁵Paul and Barnabas also stayed, and together with others, went throughout the city teaching and preaching the word of the Lord.

Paul and Barnabas Go Different Places

³⁶Some time later, Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's go visit our brothers in the cities we went to on our first missionary journey to see how they're doing." ³⁷Barnabas agreed and decided to take along his cousin, John Mark. ³⁸Paul didn't think that was a good idea, because John Mark had deserted them on their first journey when they reached the province of Pamphylia and had gone back home. ³⁹Such a strong difference of opinion arose between them over John Mark that they separated. So Barnabas took Mark

and sailed to the island of Cyprus to visit the believers there, ⁴⁰and Paul chose Silas to visit the believers where he had been before. The church members in Antioch had prayer and placed all of them in the care of God. Then they departed. ⁴¹As they went through the northern regions of Syria and on into Cilicia, Paul confirmed the believers in the faith wherever he went.

Timothy Joins Paul

16 After Paul and Silas had visited the believers in Derbe, they went to Lystra and met Timothy. His mother was a Jewish believer and his father was Greek. ²Everything they heard from the believers in Lystra and Iconium about young Timothy was good. ³So Paul decided to take Timothy with him, but not before he was circumcised. Paul did this, not because he believed that it was necessary for the young man's salvation, but because all the Jews in the region knew that Timothy's father was Greek, and Paul wanted them to accept him as a fellow Jew. ⁴From Lystra they visited the believers in the various cities where Paul had been before, sharing with them the three rules of conduct for the world church that the apostles and elders had agreed on in the General Council in Jerusalem. ⁵Not only were the believers encouraged and strengthened in the faith, but new ones were joining the churches every day.

The Macedonian Call

⁶After they had gone through the region of Phrygia, they decided to head north into the area of Galatia where they hadn't been before, but the Holy Spirit restrained them. ⁷So they continued on in a more westerly direction, sailing for the coastal province of Mysia. On their way, they thought of making a loop into Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit would not let them go there either. ⁸Then they headed straight west until they came to Troas, a city located on the coast of Asia

Minor just across from Greece on the continent of Europe. ⁹The first night there, Paul had a vision in which he saw a man from Greece standing on the other shore trying to get his attention. The man called to him, saying, "Come over and help us!" (At this point I, Luke, had joined the group.) ¹⁰The next morning Paul told us about his vision and soon we were ready to cross over into Europe. There was no doubt in our minds that the Holy Spirit wanted us to share the good news of salvation with the people in Greece.

In Philippi on Sabbath

¹¹We boarded a ship which was leaving Troas and took a straight course to the island of Samothrace and the next day on to the port city of Neapolis. ¹²When we got there, we disembarked and made our way inland to Philippi, one of the more important cities in that area as well as a town full of Roman veterans. When we arrived, we felt convicted we should stay and preach the gospel. ¹³The first Sabbath, we went out of town to a place by the river where the Jews met for prayer since there was no synagogue for them. We found a group of women already there and sat down to join them in worship. ¹⁴One of the women was Lydia from the city of Thyatira in Asia Minor. She was a merchant woman who traded in expensive purple cloth and had become a worshiper of the true God. We soon could tell that her heart was open to the gospel as she listened to Paul sharing with them the good news of salvation. ¹⁵Soon afterward, she, her family and others in her house decided to be baptized. She invited us to come and stay with her, saying, "If you have really accepted me as a believer, then you won't hesitate to stay at my house and eat with me." So we went and stayed with her.

Paul and Silas Imprisoned

¹⁶One day while we were going through the city to the place of prayer by

the river, a slave girl who had an evil spirit met us. She would chant, give a shrill cry like the pagan priestesses at Delphi, and then predict the future. Her owners were getting rich from her fortune telling. ¹⁷She began to follow us, and everywhere we went, she shouted to the people, "These men are servants of the Most High One who are showing you the way to be saved!" ¹⁸She did this day after day, and soon the people began to think of Paul as a servant of their god, rather than a servant of the God of heaven. One day as this girl was following us and shouting about salvation, Paul turned and said to the evil spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of her!" Instantly the demon left her. She was totally free from the evil spirit and became a believer.

¹⁹When her owners saw what had happened and realized that their hope of making money through her was gone, they grabbed Paul and Silas and took them to the Roman magistrates in the marketplace. ²⁰There they accused them of disturbing the peace, saying, "These men are Jews and are causing all kinds of trouble in our city. ²¹They're trying to convert people to Judaism by teaching things which we as Roman citizens are forbidden by law to accept or to practice." ²²Soon a crowd gathered, and when they heard the accusations against Paul and Silas, they also joined in accusing them. Then the magistrates ordered Paul and Silas to be stripped to the waist and beaten with rods in the town square as the people stood by and watched. ²³After they had been beaten, the magistrates ordered them thrown in prison and told the warden to watch them carefully until morning. ²⁴Determined to do a good job, the warden did more than he was asked to do and ordered the guards to take Paul and Silas to the maximum security section, had them sit down and clamped their ankles between heavy blocks of wood that had holes for their feet.

Jailer Saved

²⁵That night Paul and Silas praised the Lord that they had been found worthy to suffer for Him because of the gospel. They prayed and sang and shared the good news of salvation with the rest of the prisoners. ²⁶About midnight, the earth began to shake as a violent earthquake hit that whole area. The prison foundations shook, doors flew open and the chains on every prisoner fell off. ²⁷The warden woke up, saw the prison doors open, and thought that all the inmates had escaped. He pulled out his sword and was ready to kill himself rather than be publicly executed for losing his prisoners. ²⁸When Paul heard him draw his sword, he shouted, "Don't kill yourself! We're still here! No one's escaped!" ²⁹The warden couldn't believe his ears. He called for a torch, rushed into the security block and stood there in unbelief as he realized that all the prisoners were still there. He had heard what the slave girl had said about Paul and Silas being servants of the Most High One, so he fell on his knees in front of them and begged them to forgive him for treating them so harshly. ³⁰Then he led them out of the security block, saying, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved and so will those in your household who believe." ³²At the warden's house, they shared the story of Jesus with him and everyone there. ³³After the warden had washed their wounds and everyone had listened to the story of Jesus, they went with Paul and Silas to the pool in the prison courtyard and were baptized. ³⁴Then the warden took Paul and Silas back to his house and fed them, and the whole family rejoiced over their new-found faith.

Paul and Silas Roman Citizens

³⁵Later that morning, the magistrates sent a couple of officers to the prison with an order for the warden to release Paul and Silas. ³⁶The warden took the officers

to the prison where Paul and Silas were and said to them, "These officers have come with an order from the magistrates to release you. This means I can let you go! Go in peace!" ³⁷But Paul said to the officers, "The magistrates had us publicly beaten and jailed without a trial even though we're Roman citizens; now they want us to leave town quietly as if nothing has happened? No! Let the magistrates come and officially release us, acknowledge that we were beaten without a trial, and declare us innocent. Then we'll go."

³⁸The officers took the message back to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were afraid because of what they had done. ³⁹So they decided to go to the prison and personally apologize to Paul and Silas, ordering the warden to release them. Then they asked them to quietly leave the city. ⁴⁰Paul and Silas accepted their apology, left the prison and went back to Lydia's house where they stayed a couple of days to encourage the new believers in their faith. Then they quietly left the city as they had been asked to do.

In Thessalonica

17 From Philippi, Paul and Silas traveled in a southwesterly direction, passing through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia, and then headed west to Thessalonica because there was a synagogue there. ²Following his usual practice, Paul went to the synagogue and for the next three Sabbaths discussed with the people the meaning of the prophecies about the Messiah. ³He showed them from the Scriptures that in order for the Messiah to fulfill the prophecies, He had to come and suffer, then die and be raised from the dead. He concluded by saying, "This Jesus I've been telling you about is the Messiah."

⁴Some of the Jews were convinced and accepted the teachings of Paul and Silas with great joy, as did a large number of God-fearing Greek men who had been converted to Judaism, and more than a

few of the city's prominent women.

⁵The Jews who didn't believe became jealous and angry with Paul and Silas over losing so many of their converts. So they formed a mob, and soon the whole town was in an uproar. They even broke into the house of a man named Jason, who lived near the synagogue, looking for Paul and Silas. ⁶When they didn't find them, they grabbed Jason and a couple of other believers and dragged them out of the house to the city officials. At the courthouse they started shouting, "These kinds of people cause trouble everywhere they go! And now they've come here!" ⁷When the Roman magistrates came out to see what the trouble was, the leaders of the mob said, "This man Jason is harboring fellows who are breaking the laws of Caesar. They are telling everyone about another supposed ruler or king, a Jew from Galilee called Jesus."

⁸With these charges, the magistrates and the city officials became alarmed. ⁹They decided to charge Jason and those in his house with disturbing the peace. After Jason and the others paid the required fine, the authorities let them go.

In Berea

¹⁰That night the believers asked Paul and Silas to leave town for their own safety. They agreed and left before daylight, heading west and then south to Berea. After they arrived, they attended the synagogue as they had in other places. ¹¹As a group, Bereans were more open-minded than the Jews in Thessalonica. They eagerly listened to what Paul and Silas had to say and every day studied the Scriptures for themselves to see if what these men were saying was correct. ¹²As a result, many of them believed, including many Greek women of high social standing and a number of Greek men. ¹³When the unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica heard that Paul and Silas were preaching in Berea, they went there to start a riot just as they had done back home. ¹⁴When the believ-

ers heard about this, they immediately asked Paul to leave, hoping to prevent a disturbance. The members picked out some men to go with Paul, while Silas and Timothy stayed behind.¹⁵ When Paul and his new companions reached the coast, they boarded a ship going south to Athens. After arriving, the men thought about staying with Paul, but in a few days, Paul sent them back with a message that Silas and Timothy should come as quickly as possible.

In Athens

¹⁶While Paul waited for Silas and Timothy, he became more and more disturbed by what he saw. Everywhere in Athens there were statues of gods.¹⁷ Meanwhile, he attended the synagogue and started discussions with the Jews and converted Greeks, and also in the public square with anyone who would listen.¹⁸ One day he chose a place where the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers usually met to carry on their philosophical debates. After they had listened to him for a while, some said, "What is this fellow babbling about?" Others said, "What is he trying to tell us? Something about a new god?" They asked these questions because Paul was preaching about Jesus and the resurrection, which they thought was worth pursuing.¹⁹ So they took Paul to the Athenian Council at the Areopagus, located just outside the city on a hill dedicated to the god Mars. They said to Paul, "Tell us more about this new teaching of yours."²⁰ Some of the things you were talking about in town sounded strange. We would like to know what these things mean."²¹ This attitude was quite characteristic of the whole city, including international students who had come there to study. They enjoyed spending their time either telling or listening to the latest ideas.

Mars Hill

²²Paul stood on Mars Hill and spoke to the city fathers, saying, "Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious."²³ As I

walked through your city, I found numerous statues and altars dedicated to many different gods. On one altar I saw written, Dedicated to the Unknown God. I want to tell you about this Unknown God.²⁴ This God whom you worship is the One who made the world and everything in it. But since He is the Lord of heaven and earth, He doesn't need a temple made by human hands.²⁵ He doesn't require any of the things people usually bring to gods when they come to worship because He owns everything. He is the God who gives all men life and breath and everything else.²⁶ In the beginning, He created just one male, which makes all men brothers. When the descendants of this man multiplied, He scattered them over the face of the whole earth and determined ahead of time where the different groups should live.²⁷ He did all of this because He wants men everywhere to search for Him with all their hearts, and if they do so, they will find Him, because He is not far away from any of us.²⁸ This is similar to what some of your poets said to honor your own god whom you call Zeus, 'In him we live and move and have our being, which makes us his offspring.'²⁹ Therefore, if we are the offspring of the God who made us, we shouldn't think that we can use our artistic skills to make an image of the God of heaven out of silver or gold.³⁰ He has overlooked our past ignorance. But now He expects people everywhere to turn to Him and change their ways.³¹ He has fixed a day in time when He will judge the world by a Man of His own choosing. Proof of this is that He has already raised Him from the dead."

³²When Paul reached this point in his speech and started talking about a Man named Jesus who was raised from the dead, the city fathers interrupted Paul and questioned the rationality of a resurrection. Others made fun of him and said, "We'll listen to you concerning this sort of thing some other time."³³ The meeting broke up and Paul went back into the

city. ³⁴However, a few did follow Paul, and when they heard more about Jesus, they believed. One of them was Dionysius, a member of the city council, and another was a woman called Damaris. There were also some others.

In Corinth

18 Soon afterward, Paul left Athens and traveled overland in a westerly direction until he came to Corinth. ²There he met a Jew named Aquila who was born in the northern section of Asia Minor. Aquila and his wife Priscilla had been in the tent-making business in Italy but recently moved to Corinth because the Emperor Claudius had ordered all Jews out of Rome. ³Since Paul had been trained as a tent-maker when he was a young man, he asked Aquila for a job so he could support himself. Aquila and Priscilla not only hired him, but invited him to stay with them. ⁴Every Sabbath Paul reasoned with the Jews and Greeks who worshiped there, trying to persuade them to believe in Jesus.

⁵About this time, Silas and Timothy arrived from Thessalonica. Paul attended the synagogue with them, being compelled more than ever to show the people from Scripture that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah. ⁶But when the Jews refused to believe and started cursing Paul, accusing him of blasphemy by making a man into God, Paul shook the dust off his feet and said, "I will not preach here again. I've done so in all sincerity. You'll have to face the consequences of your own unbelief. From now on I'll preach to the Gentiles." ⁷He left the synagogue and was invited by Justus, a Greek who had been worshiping with the Jews, to come next door to his house and preach there. ⁸Crispus, the leader of the local synagogue, was another who, together with his whole family, believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Soon many people in Corinth, after hearing the good news of salvation, also believed and were baptized. ⁹One night the Lord

spoke to Paul in a vision, saying "Don't be afraid; but continue to preach and don't think about leaving. ¹⁰I'm with you and will see to it that no one hurts you, because I have many people in this city who will hear and believe." ¹¹So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, preaching and teaching the word of God.

¹²While Gallio was governor of the southern part of Greece, the unbelieving Jews stirred up the people against Paul as they had done in other places. They dragged him to the town square in front of the courthouse and asked to see the governor. ¹³When Gallio came out, they said to him, "This fellow is going all over town telling our people to worship God in ways contrary to our law. Our religion is recognized by the state and we don't want it perverted." ¹⁴Just as Paul was about to say something in his own defense, Gallio said to the Jewish leaders, "If you had brought to me a question of civil disobedience or a crime of some sort, I would gladly listen to you. ¹⁵But since this is a question of Jewish theology and a dispute over words and distinctions within your own religion, you settle it. I will not sit in judgment on your beliefs." ¹⁶So he dismissed them and had them driven from the town square. ¹⁷Taking a cue from the snub Gallio gave the Jewish leaders, the crowd that had gathered turned on Sosthenes, who had become the synagogue leader after Crispus was converted. They beat him unmercifully right in front of the courthouse because he was the one who had caused the disturbance. But Gallio showed no concern.

Paul Returns Home

¹⁸So Paul stayed in Corinth quite a while longer but finally decided to leave. After saying good-bye to the believers, he left with Aquila and Priscilla for Cenchræa to board a ship for Syria. It was at Cenchræa that Paul cut his hair short as a sign of the vow he had made rededicating himself to God. He would carry the cuttings with him to Jerusalem where the

priest would shave his head and then burn all Paul's hair on the altar along with his sacrifice. ¹⁹The next day their ship docked at Ephesus where Aquila and Priscilla remained. While waiting for the next ship out, Paul attended the synagogue and held numerous discussions with the Jews. ²⁰When they asked him to stay longer, he told them he couldn't because of the vow he had taken. ²¹Just before he left, he said to them, "Even though I have to go to Jerusalem to keep this vow and to attend the upcoming festival, if it is God's will, I will come back." So he said good-bye, boarded the ship and sailed toward Palestine.

²²The next stop was at Caesarea where Paul got off. From there he made his way south to Jerusalem on foot. After greeting the church leaders, he fulfilled the thirty days of purification required by the vow and then headed north to Antioch where he had begun both of his missionary journeys. ²³He rested there for some time and then decided to once again go through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia to encourage and strengthen the believers.

The Ministry of Apollos

²⁴About this time, a Jew named Apollos, born in Alexandria, Egypt, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent speaker and had a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. ²⁵He had heard some things about Jesus and the message John the Baptist had preached, and believed what he had heard. He enthusiastically preached what he knew, which was the need for people to repent and be baptized. ²⁶Soon he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him and noticed how committed he was to what truth he knew, they invited him home to dinner and explained to him God's plan of salvation more fully, which he gladly accepted. ²⁷Then Apollos decided to leave Asia Minor and go over to Greece. Before he left, the believers in Ephesus gave him a letter of recommendation, telling the believers there that he

was trustworthy and asking them to warmly welcome him. By God's grace he was a tremendous help to the believers, especially to those who had recently been converted and were seeking to understand the gospel more fully. ²⁸Apollos did not hesitate to publicly debate the Jews, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus Christ was the Messiah.

Paul Goes to Ephesus

19 While Apollos was preaching in Corinth, Paul crossed Asia Minor on foot and arrived back in Ephesus as he had promised. When he was introduced to the newest believers, he said to them, ²"When you became Christians, did you receive the Holy Spirit?" They said, "No. No one even told us about a Holy Spirit. What is it?" ³Then Paul said, "The Holy Spirit is a Person. Who prepared you for baptism and which baptism did you receive?" They answered, "We were told to repent and were baptized according to John the Baptist's baptism." ⁴Paul said, "John baptized people as a sign of repentance, but he pointed them to Jesus as the Messiah, who was baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit." ⁵After careful preparation, he rebaptized them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. ⁶He also laid his hands on them, and the Spirit came upon them just as He had on the disciples at Pentecost. Not only did these new believers speak in languages they had never learned, but they also received the gift of understanding prophecy. ⁷There were about twelve who were rebaptized and received the Holy Spirit.

⁸For the next three months Paul preached in the local synagogue as boldly as ever, doing his best to convince the people to accept what he said about the kingdom of God. ⁹As usual, some of them were stubborn and refused to believe, and they said evil things about what was called "the Way of Jesus" in front of everyone. So Paul left them and took those who believed with him to the

lecture hall of Tyrannus, where he taught them daily. ¹⁰This went on for two years, with one group finishing and another beginning until nearly everyone in Ephesus and the surrounding area, whether Jew or Greek, had a chance to hear about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul Confronts Magic and Demonology

¹¹During this time, God worked a number of miracles through Paul, giving still greater credibility to his work. ¹²People even took the handkerchiefs and work aprons which had touched Paul and passed them around to those who were sick. As soon as these objects were laid on them they were healed, including those who had been demon possessed. ¹³About this time, some Jews came to Ephesus who had been traveling around the country claiming to have power to heal people and through exorcism to cast out demons. When they saw what Paul was doing, they thought that they would just have to say to the demons, "We command you in the name of Jesus Christ, the one whom Paul preaches, to come out!" ¹⁴There were seven brothers who planned to do this, all sons of Sceva, a leading Jewish priest. ¹⁵The very first time they tried it, the evil spirit said, "Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you?" ¹⁶Then the man who had the evil spirit attacked the brothers with such violence that he overpowered all seven of them, and they ran out of the house bleeding, with half of their clothes torn off. ¹⁷It didn't take long for this to get around; then both Jews and Greeks in Ephesus treated Paul with great respect and the name of Jesus was magnified. ¹⁸This encouraged believers to openly admit that they had not totally given up practicing magic. ¹⁹Many of them had also been consulting evil spirits. They brought their books of magic and demonology and burned them in the public square. The cost of these books was estimated to be more than fifty thousand pieces of silver, one piece of silver being one day's wage.

²⁰By the power of the Lord, the message kept spreading and growing.

Riot at Ephesus

²¹After these events Paul decided to go from Asia Minor over to Greece to visit the churches there before returning to Jerusalem where he would rest up for his next missionary journey. His extended plans were to go to Rome and then to Spain. ²²So he sent two of his assistants, Timothy and Erastus, ahead of him into Greece while he finished his work in Ephesus. ²³All at once, the whole city seemed to explode with violence against the gospel. ²⁴It all started when a man named Demetrius began losing business. He, along with others, had been making silver statuettes of the goddess Artemis (also called Diana) and miniature replicas of her temple and selling them at a very good profit. ²⁵Demetrius called all the silversmiths together for an outdoor rally and said to them, "Men, you know what a good income we have from this trade of ours. ²⁶But you can see what's happened to our business. Just listen to this infidel, Paul, and watch the people flocking to hear him and you'll know that soon we'll have to close shop. This man is telling the people that Artemis is not a goddess and that her statue was not made in heaven and then given to us. Many people believe him, not only here in Ephesus but throughout Asia Minor. ²⁷So our business will be affected throughout the province, and our tourist trade will be hurt. Furthermore, what about the future of the temple and our city? People in all the provinces and throughout the Roman world will think that the temple of our great goddess is not important. They won't come here to worship anymore!"

²⁸When the craftsmen and other businessmen attending the meeting heard this, they became furious and started shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ²⁹Soon the whole city was in an uproar. Then the crowd became vio-

lent and grabbed Gaius and Aristarchus, two of the Greek believers who had been traveling with Paul, and shoved them along toward the town's sports arena. ³⁰When Paul saw what was happening, he wanted to rush in and speak to the crowd, but the believers would not let him risk his life. ³¹Also, some of the city officials who had become Paul's friends sent him a message telling him that he should stay away. ³²Meanwhile, the crowd reached the arena. There was total confusion, with some people shouting one thing and others shouting something else. Some didn't even know what it was all about or why they were there.

³³The Jews saw this as their chance to stop Paul, so they pushed Alexander the coppersmith out front to tell the people what had happened. Alexander motioned with his hands to quiet the crowd so he could make his defense. ³⁴When the people saw that he was a Jew and that he began speaking for his own cause and not for Artemis, they again started chanting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" and they kept this up for two hours.

³⁵Finally, the city clerk came out and was able to quiet them down by saying, "People of Ephesus! Who doesn't already know that our city is the home of our Great Mother Artemis and that we worship her? Everyone knows where her temple is and that her statue fell from heaven as a gift from Zeus, the chief god in our pantheon. ³⁶No one can argue against this fact. So you ought to calm down before you do something rash which will hurt our city's reputation and which you'll later regret. ³⁷You grabbed and shoved these two men, Gaius and Aristarchus, through the streets and brought them here for trial when you know that they're harmless. They're not robbers. They haven't defiled our temple or stolen anything from it. Neither have they said anything bad about it nor have they cursed our goddess. ³⁸We have courts of law. So if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have legitimate complaints against any-

one, they should come to our judges on regularly scheduled court days when their charges will be heard and the whole matter will be settled. ³⁹And if any of you have personal complaints, those, too, can be settled in court or in a lawfully called meeting of our citizens. ⁴⁰The way you've carried on today looks more like a riot than a public meeting where complaints are heard. In fact, we may still be called into question by the Romans for what has happened here today, especially since there was no reason for it." ⁴¹After he had finished, he dismissed the crowd and the people went home.

Paul's Plans to Return Home

20 When the uproar was over and things were back to normal, Paul called the Ephesian believers together, and with words of encouragement said good-bye. From there we headed north, then west to Troas and over the Aegean Sea into Greece. ²After going through the upper part of Greece, encouraging the believers, we turned south and finally arrived in Corinth. ³Paul stayed there about three months and then made plans to sail back home. But when he heard that some Jews were plotting to kill him, he decided we should retrace our steps and go through the northern parts of Greece, then head east toward the coast and catch a ship from there. ⁴Some of those who joined our group were Sopater from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Tychicus and Trophimus from Ephesus and Timothy from Lystra. ⁵These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. ⁶The rest of us followed, going more slowly. When we arrived at Philippi, we stayed a week, long enough to keep the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Then we went to the port city of Neapolis, boarded a ship and five days later arrived at Troas, where we met Timothy and the others and stayed for seven days.

In Troas

⁷After sundown on Saturday night, the believers got together for a fellowship meal and to say good-bye to Paul. That evening he spoke to them until midnight, after which he hoped to get a few hours sleep before leaving early Sunday morning. ⁸The whole upper floor of the large house was lighted by burning torches which also made the place quite warm. ⁹As Paul talked, a young man named Eutychus sat in the open window to catch the cool night breeze. While listening to Paul, he fell asleep, lost his balance and fell from the third story to the ground. The believers rushed down, but when they tried to help him up, they found he was dead. ¹⁰Paul ran downstairs, knelt beside the body, hugged him and prayed earnestly to the Lord. Then he turned to the believers and said, "Don't worry. He's alive." ¹¹When the young man got up, the believers rejoiced, and everyone went back upstairs to celebrate the Lord's Supper and have their fellowship meal. Paul spoke to them until early morning. As the day began to dawn, he said good-bye and we were on our way. ¹²The family took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted, praising the Lord for what He had done.

In Miletus

¹³We went on down to the docks and boarded a ship heading down the coast to Assos. At the last minute, Paul decided to make the short trip by foot instead, and we would meet him there. ¹⁴At Assos, Paul came back on board and from there we sailed to Mitylene. ¹⁵The next day we arrived at Chios; the day after, at Samos. We stopped and took on supplies at Trogyllium, and the following day we docked at Miletus. ¹⁶We had purposely taken a ship that would not stop at Ephesus because Paul didn't want to be detained by the members and spend any more time in Asia Minor. He wanted to get to Jerusalem in time for the Jewish festival of Pentecost.

Paul Encourages Local Elders

¹⁷But he had sent a message to Ephesus, asking the church elders to come to Miletus to meet him. ¹⁸When they came, he reassured them by saying, "Do you remember when I first came to Asia Minor and how long I stayed with you? Do you remember the kind of life I lived? ¹⁹I didn't preach the word of the Lord arrogantly but shed many a tear. I went through some hard times, especially when my own people tried to kill me. ²⁰You know that I didn't hold anything back from you but told you everything that was for your own good. I talked straight to you, and what I taught you in your homes, I also preached publicly. ²¹I made no difference between Jews and Greeks but told everyone that they needed to repent, turn to God and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. ²²I'm now going to Jerusalem in obedience to the Holy Spirit, not knowing exactly what awaits me there.

²³"The only thing I know is that in almost every city on the way here, the Holy Spirit, through one means or another, has told me that I would have nothing but trouble once I get there and that I would finally be arrested and imprisoned. ²⁴I'm not worried because my life doesn't mean that much to me. The only thing that really matters is to do the work the Lord Jesus asked me to do as long as my life lasts, which is to preach the good news of God's grace. ²⁵I want you to know how much you've meant to me since the first day I preached the gospel to you. I'm afraid we'll never see each other again. ²⁶I want to go on record in front of all of you that I'm innocent of the blood of both Jew and Gentile and am not responsible if any of those who believed are lost. ²⁷I've told you everything you need to know to be saved. I've explained to you the essentials of God's plan of salvation and held nothing back.

²⁸"Watch out for yourselves and for the sheep in your church. The Holy Spirit has selected you to be their shepherds and to

care for them and feed them because they are the Lord's property, which He bought with His own blood. ²⁹I know that after I'm gone wolves will come in among you and attack the sheep. ³⁰Even from within your own group, men will begin to teach unscriptural things, and there will always be some who believe what such men say and follow them. ³¹Be alert and remember that for three years I carefully taught you what's right and cried over you with tears. ³²My brothers, I commit you to the care of God and to the grace and power of His word. It is through the Scriptures that you will grow and become strong, loyal and steadfast. God's word will continue to do this for you until He gives you the inheritance He planned for you and for all those who believe in Him. ³³I have never longed for anyone's money, whether it was silver or gold, nor did I long for fine clothes or a leisurely life. ³⁴You know how hard I worked making tents to take care of my own needs and the needs of those with me. ³⁵I wanted to leave you an example of what it means to be a follower of Christ. As elders, you too must be willing to work with your hands, if need be, to support yourselves and those weak in the faith. Remember the words of our Lord Jesus who said, 'Happiness comes from giving, not from receiving.'

³⁶When Paul finished speaking, we all knelt on the shore, and he prayed for the elders, committing them to the Lord. ³⁷When we got up, we were all crying, and the elders gave Paul one last hug. ³⁸What grieved them so was that they might not see Paul again. Then they walked with him to the ship.

In Caesarea

21 After we said our final farewells, we took a straight course toward the island of Cos. The next day we reached Rhodes, and from there we sailed to Patara. ²Here we disembarked and looked for a ship going to Phoenicia, just north of Palestine. When we found one, we booked passage, and in a matter

of hours we sailed. ³After some days, we passed Cyprus on our left, then headed southeast toward the coast of Lebanon. We stopped at Tyre because the ship had to unload most of its cargo there. ⁴We stayed in Tyre about a week, and some believers there invited us to stay with them. Through the Holy Spirit they warned Paul about going to Jerusalem. ⁵But when the week was up, we said good-bye and started on our way. Then the men, together with their wives and children, decided to go with us to see us off. We walked to the docks and then knelt down on the beach to pray. ⁶After saying a final good-bye, we boarded the ship and they went back home.

⁷From Tyre we sailed south along the coast to Ptolemais, where we were greeted by the believers and invited to stay overnight. ⁸The next day we continued to sail along the coast until we came to Caesarea, where we disembarked and stayed with Philip, the evangelist who was one of the seven original deacons. ⁹He had four unmarried daughters, all of whom had the gift of prophecy. ¹⁰We stayed with him a number of days. While we were there, a man named Agabus, who also had the gift of prophecy, arrived from Judea. ¹¹When he met Paul, he took the strip of leather that Paul used as a belt, wrapped it around his own feet and then his hands and said, "This is a message from the Holy Spirit. The Jews in Jerusalem will bind the hands and feet of the man who owns this belt and turn him over to the Gentiles for trial and execution." ¹²When we heard these words and realized that it was execution that awaited Paul in Jerusalem, we begged him not to go. ¹³Paul listened to our plea, then said, "Why are you crying like this? Are you trying to break my heart? If the Holy Spirit is leading me to Jerusalem, and I firmly believe He is, I want to thank Him for warning me about what to expect. I'm willing not only to be arrested and bound in Jerusalem, but I'm willing to die there for the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴When

we couldn't change his mind, we stopped pleading with him and said, "May the Lord's will be done."

Paul Arrives in Jerusalem

¹⁵After spending a few more days in Caesarea, we packed our things and made our way on foot toward Jerusalem. ¹⁶Some of the believers from Caesarea decided to go with us. At the end of our first day out, they took us to the house of a man called Mnason, where we were to stay. He had come from Cyprus and settled in Palestine and was one of the first believers in this area.

¹⁷The following day we arrived in Jerusalem. The believers there were thrilled to see us and gave us a warm welcome. ¹⁸The next day we went with Paul to see James, the stepbrother of Jesus and leader of the church in Jerusalem. All the leading elders were also there. ¹⁹Paul greeted them and gave a report of everything that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

²⁰When he finished, they all praised God and said to Paul, "God has also blessed us. Since you've been gone, thousands of Jews have accepted the Lord Jesus as the Messiah. They're just as zealous in keeping the laws of Moses now as they were before they became Christians. ²¹The problem we face is that they're upset over what they've heard about you. They've been told that you're teaching even your Jewish converts not to keep the laws of Moses or to circumcise their children or to observe our other customs. ²²As soon as word gets out that you're in town, they'll call a meeting to discuss this whole thing. Our worry is how to keep all this from hurting the church.

²³Our suggestion is this: We have four men who took the Nazarite vow about three weeks ago, as we see you have done. They still have one week of fasting and prayer to go and we would like you to be their sponsor and bear their expenses. ²⁴All you have to do is guide them

through the purification ceremony, pay for their Temple sacrifices and at the end of that week have their heads shaved by the priest. This way our people here will know that there is no truth in what they've heard about you. They'll see for themselves that you believe it's necessary for Jewish Christians to still keep the laws of Moses to be saved. It will be a compromise with our Jewish believers, but it will be worth it. ²⁵As far as the Gentiles are concerned, remember, we agreed earlier not to require this of them. We even sent a letter to them asking them to keep only three things in mind: first, not to identify with paganism by eating things sacrificed to idols; second, not to eat food mixed with blood or meat from strangled animals; and third, not to adopt the sexual perversions of the world. But here in Jerusalem, we're faced with the problem of working with Jewish converts."

Paul Arrested

²⁶Paul agreed to follow their advice just to please them. So the next day he took the four men the apostles and elders had introduced him to and together they went to the Temple. There they gave notice when their week of fasting would end and made arrangements to have their heads shaved and for the priest to burn their hair on the altar with their sacrifices. ²⁷Near the end of that week, when Paul and the men he was sponsoring were about to finish their days of purification, some Jews from Asia Minor visiting Jerusalem were also in the Temple. When they spotted Paul, they grabbed him and started shouting and pointing at him until they attracted a sizeable crowd.

²⁸They shouted, "Men of Israel! Help! This is the man who talks against the people of Israel and against our law and against the Temple! He does this everywhere he goes! He's even brought uncircumcised Greeks into the courtyard reserved for Jews only! He has defiled the Temple!" ²⁹Earlier that week they had seen Paul and Trophimus from Ephesus

walking together in the city. They supposed that Paul had brought him into the Temple, thus defiling its sacredness. ³⁰Suddenly there was confusion in the Temple, and news spread through the whole city like wildfire. The people in the Temple took hold of Paul and dragged him into the outer court and closed the Temple doors behind him.

³¹The crowd would have beaten Paul to death, but someone told the commander of the Roman guard that there was a riot in the Temple and that the whole city was in an uproar. ³²He immediately alerted his troops, and they rushed to the Temple. When the people saw the troops coming, they stopped beating Paul and left him lying in the courtyard. ³³The commander told his troops to arrest Paul and put chains on him. Then he turned to the crowd and said, "Who is this man and what has he done?" ³⁴Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another. Amid such confusion the commander couldn't make out what had happened. So he ordered his men to take Paul back to headquarters to find out for himself what the trouble was. As the troops left with Paul, the angry crowd went along, shouting as they went.

³⁵By the time they got near the broad stairway leading into the Fortress of Antonia overlooking the Temple, the soldiers had to carry Paul on their shoulders to protect him from the mob that was now violent enough to kill him. ³⁶They tried to get their hands on Paul and shouted, "Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!"

Paul Defends Himself

³⁷When the soldiers were about to take Paul into the fortress itself, he turned to the commander and said, "Sir, could I speak with you a moment?" The commander was surprised to hear Paul speaking Greek and said, "Where did you learn to speak Greek? ³⁸Aren't you the Egyptian who just a little while ago set up camp in the desert to train four thousand terrorists?" ³⁹Paul said, "No, I'm a Jew,

born in Tarsus, which is a major city in Cilicia honored by the Romans. I'm not a terrorist. Please, let me speak to these people." ⁴⁰The commander agreed. So Paul, standing on the upper step, motioned to the crowd to be quiet. Finally, the crowd quieted down, and he spoke to them in Aramaic,

22 "Brothers and fathers, listen to me. I want to say something in my defense."

²When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet, so he continued, ³"I'm a fellow Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, in Asia Minor. I was educated right here in Jerusalem under the great teacher Gamaliel. He taught me all about our ancestors and the importance of the laws of Moses. I was very zealous for the honor of God, just as all of you are. ⁴I became a member of the Sanhedrin and persecuted those who followed Jesus, the Nazarene. I arrested them, had them thrown in jail and even demanded their execution. ⁵The high priest and the council members know this because they were the ones who authorized me to do it. They even gave me permission to go to Damascus and arrest the followers of Jesus there and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial.

⁶"When I neared Damascus about noon, suddenly an extremely brilliant light beamed down from heaven and totally engulfed me. ⁷It literally knocked me to the ground, and I heard a voice saying, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' ⁸I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' The voice replied, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, the One you are persecuting.' ⁹The men who were with me saw the light; they also heard a voice, but not distinctly enough to understand it. ¹⁰Then I said, 'Lord, what do you want me to do?' The Lord answered, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you'll be told what to do.' ¹¹Then the light disappeared. When I got up, I was blind and those who were with

me had to lead me to Damascus.

¹²“In Damascus lived a man named Ananias, a very religious man who carefully kept the laws of Moses and who was highly respected by all the Jews in the community. ¹³He came to see me, put his hands on my head and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight! Now open your eyes and you’ll be able to see again.’ I opened my eyes and at that moment I was able to see! ¹⁴Then Ananias said to me, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you to do a special work. He sent the Righteous One to appear to you so you would see Him and hear Him speak to you with His own mouth. ¹⁵He wants you to witness for Him by telling everyone what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶So what are you waiting for? Come and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the Lord to save you.’

¹⁷“Three years later I came back to Jerusalem. One day as I was praying in the Temple, I was given a vision. ¹⁸In the vision I saw the Righteous One whose voice I had heard when I was on the way to Damascus. He said to me, ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately. Don’t start witnessing for me here, because most of the people won’t accept what you have to say.’ ¹⁹I answered, ‘Lord, the people here know how zealous I was for the laws of Moses. They remember how I went into the synagogues and houses of believers, arrested them, and had them flogged and imprisoned all because they accepted you as the promised Messiah. ²⁰When Stephen witnessed on your behalf before the Sanhedrin and was sentenced to death by stoning, I approved of his execution by silently standing nearby, keeping an eye on the coats of those who threw the stones. But you’ve changed me, Lord, and this should be a powerful witness to those who knew me before.’ ²¹The Lord said, ‘I want you to leave Jerusalem now and take the good news of salvation to the Gentiles.’”

Paul’s Roman Citizenship Saves Him

²²Up to this point, the crowd had quietly listened to what Paul was saying, but when he told them that he was sent to offer salvation to the Gentiles, they began to shout, “Kill him! Kill him! He’s not fit to live!” ²³They screamed, tore off their coats and threw dust and dirt into the air and at Paul to show their hatred and contempt for him. ²⁴When the Roman commander saw what was happening, he ordered his men to take Paul inside and scourge him until he confessed why the Jews were screaming and why they hated him so much. ²⁵The guards did as they were told, grabbed Paul and took him upstairs, stripped him to the waist and tied him to the whipping post, ready to scourge him. But he got the attention of the officer in charge and said, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a Roman citizen who hasn’t been found guilty?”

²⁶When the officer heard this, he told his men to hold it and went to see the commander, saying, “Sir, we had better be careful what we do to this man. He claims to be a Roman citizen!” ²⁷The commander went to question Paul. “Are you a Roman citizen?” Paul answered, “Yes, I am.” ²⁸The commander said, “I’m a Roman citizen, but I had to pay a lot of money for it.” Paul replied, “I’m a citizen by birth.” ²⁹The men, who were ready to scourge Paul immediately backed off. The commander became concerned, because he had put a Roman citizen in chains before giving him the right of a trial.

³⁰He ordered the guards to take the chains off Paul but to keep him in custody until it was determined what the uproar was all about. The next day he ordered the chief priests to call a special meeting of the Sanhedrin and brought Paul in to defend himself.

Paul Before the Jewish Council

23 Paul looked earnestly at the Sanhedrin Council and said, “Brothers, I have lived before God with a clear conscience until this very day.”

²Then Ananias, the high priest, told one of the Temple guards standing close to Paul to slap him across the mouth, which the guard did. ³Paul said to the high priest, "God will punish you for this. How can you sit there and judge me for breaking the law of Moses when you break the law yourself? You ordered this man to slap me, and you know it's against the law to punish an accused person until he's proven guilty. You're nothing but a whitewashed wall around a dead man's tomb." ⁴Those standing nearby said to Paul, "Do you know who you're talking to? That's the high priest!" ⁵Then Paul apologized and said, "My fellow Israelites, I'm sorry I spoke the way I did. I didn't know this man was the high priest. The law of Moses says, 'You should never speak evil of the ruler of your people.'"

⁶As the proceedings continued, Paul noticed from the discussions that some of the council members were Pharisees and others were Sadducees. So he said, "Fellow Israelites, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, and I am being tried because I preach the resurrection of the dead!" ⁷Immediately the Pharisees and Sadducees began arguing over whether or not there is life after death, so the council was divided. ⁸The Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection, the reality of a future life or in the existence of heavenly beings, but the Pharisees do. This is what caused the contention. ⁹Soon their arguing turned into a shouting match, and the Pharisees stood up and said, "We can't find anything wrong with this man! Maybe a heavenly being did speak to him! Let's not fight against God." ¹⁰Then men from each group took hold of Paul and tried to pull him away from the other group. Their actions became so violent that the Roman commander was afraid they would tear Paul apart. So he ordered his troops to restore order and to take Paul back to the fortress.

The Plot to Kill Paul

¹¹That night the Lord Himself appeared to Paul to comfort him, saying, "Don't be afraid, Paul. You have given an excellent testimony about me in Jerusalem. Nothing will happen to you because I want you to give a similar testimony in Rome."

¹²The next day some young men among the Jews formed a conspiracy and took an oath that they would not eat or drink until they had killed Paul. ¹³About forty of them took the oath and laid out the plot. ¹⁴After agreeing on what to do, they went to the leading priests and elders and said, "We have taken an oath not to eat or drink until we have killed this man. ¹⁵If you can make arrangements with the commander of the Roman guard to bring him before the council just one more time, we promise that on the way here, we'll break through the guards and kill him."

¹⁶When Paul's nephew, his sister's young son, overheard some people talking about a plot to kill his uncle on the way to the council, he told his mother, and she told him to quickly run to the Roman barracks to tell Paul, which the boy did. ¹⁷Then Paul asked one of the guards if he could see the officer in charge. When the officer came, Paul said, "Please take this young boy to see the commander because he has something urgent to tell him about a plot of the Jews." ¹⁸The officer took the youngster to the commander and said, "The prisoner, Paul, asked me to bring this young boy to see you because he's overheard some people talking about some kind of plot." ¹⁹The commander took the boy by the hand and led him off to one side and said, "Tell me about this plot; what is it that you heard?" ²⁰The boy said, "Word is quietly going around the city that the Jewish leaders will come to you tomorrow and ask you to bring Paul down to the council just one more time pretending to want to ask him some more questions. ²¹Don't listen to them, because

forty men will be waiting to break through the guards on the way there to kill him. They've even taken an oath not to eat or drink until he's dead." ²²The commander said to the boy, "Don't tell anyone what you've told me. Thank you. You may go now."

Paul Taken to the Governor

²³He called in two officers and said, "Get two hundred foot soldiers ready to march north toward Caesarea. Also, get seventy horsemen and two hundred frontline spearmen to go with them. I want all of them ready to leave by nine o'clock tonight. ²⁴And take a couple of extra horses with you, one for Paul and the other to carry any baggage he might have. I want him safely delivered to Governor Felix." ²⁵Then he sat down and wrote the following letter:

²⁶"From Commander Claudius Lysias to his Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings. ²⁷A few days ago the Jews seized a man named Paul and were about to kill him. When I found out that he was a Roman citizen, I sent my troops down to the Temple to rescue him. ²⁸I wanted to find out what this disturbance was all about, so I made arrangements with the Jews to call a council the next morning to hear his case. ²⁹I discovered that he had not committed any crime and certainly didn't deserve to die or even be put in prison. The accusations against him had to do with various interpretations of their religious laws. ³⁰This afternoon I was told about a plot against him. The Jews wanted me to bring Paul down to the council just one more time and on the way certain ones would break through the guards to kill him. That's why I'm sending him to you. I've also told his accusers that they would have to bring the charges they have against him to Caesarea. Farewell."

³¹By nine o'clock that night, the troops were ready. They took Paul as ordered and by the next day had gotten as far as Antipatris, about half way to Caesarea

and over thirty miles from Jerusalem.

³²There the two hundred foot soldiers and the two hundred frontline spearmen rested and then returned to Jerusalem, while the seventy horsemen went on with Paul to Caesarea. ³³When they got there, they went straight to the governor, delivered the letter and handed Paul over to him as the commander had directed. ³⁴The governor read the letter and asked Paul where he was from. When he learned that he was from Tarsus in Asia Minor, he said to him, ³⁵"I'll keep you here where you'll be safe and will listen to the charges when your accusers come." He ordered Paul to be kept under guard in the governor's palace, which had been built by Herod.

Paul Accused of Defiling the Temple

24 About five days later, Ananias, the high priest, together with some of the leading elders and Tertullus, the council's attorney, arrived in Caesarea to see the governor to bring charges against Paul. ²The governor asked the guards to bring Paul in and the trial began. Tertullus was asked to state his charges. He began by saying, "Your Excellency, it is your wise leadership which has brought such great peace to our land. Many evils are being corrected and reforms are being carried out by you for the good of our people. ³We welcome your leadership everywhere and at all times. We are deeply grateful for your presence in our country, most noble Felix. ⁴I do not want to take up too much of your time or be tedious to you, so I ask you to listen kindly to our short statement of charges against this man Paul. ⁵We have found him to be a dangerous man and a constant troublemaker. He's continually disturbing the peace by stirring up the Jews and starting riots among the people throughout the Empire. He's the ringleader of a sect we call the Nazarenes. ⁶He has willfully defiled our Temple, and when we caught him, we were about to try him according to our law, ⁷but the

Roman commander in Jerusalem came with his troops and violently took him out of our hands. ⁸Then he asked us to present our charges against this man to you in Caesarea. If you would question the accused yourself, you will find out that the charges we are bringing against him are true.” ⁹When Tertullus finished, the rest of the Jewish delegation confirmed what he had said.

Paul Speaks in His Own Defense

¹⁰Then the governor motioned for Paul to speak in his own defense. Paul said, “I know that Your Excellency has been the governor for a number of years and that you’ve heard numerous cases involving the Jews. So I’ll gladly defend myself since you’ve asked me to do so. ¹¹About twelve days ago I went to Jerusalem to worship, which you can easily verify. ¹²The Jews did not find me arguing with anyone in the Temple or stirring up the people in their synagogues or anywhere else in Jerusalem. Neither have I defiled the Temple. ¹³They have no proof to substantiate their charges against me. ¹⁴However, I must admit this to you. I do worship the God of my fathers in a way that the Jews call a sect. I believe everything Moses and the prophets have written, including what they wrote about the Messiah.

¹⁵“Other than that, I have the same hope in God that they have. I believe in the resurrection of the dead, both good and bad, as most of them do, and that all of us will stand before the judgment seat of God, each one to answer for himself. ¹⁶That’s why I have always done my best to have a clear conscience, both before God and man. ¹⁷After being away from my country for several years, I decided to come back to worship and do what I could to help the poor among my people. I brought donations with me from many parts of the Roman Empire, given by people who care about their brothers in Jerusalem.

¹⁸I was ceremonially clean. I had said nothing to stir up the people or cause a disturbance. ¹⁹But some Jews visiting Jerusalem from Asia Minor saw me worshipping in the Temple and grabbed me. They started a riot by shouting that I was unclean. They are the ones who should be here bringing their charges against me. ²⁰Or let those who are here tell you exactly what crime they found me guilty of when I stood in front of their council the next day. ²¹The only thing they can charge me with is for saying, ‘The reason I’m being tried by you today is that I believe in the resurrection of the dead.’ This caused them to argue among themselves, and they couldn’t agree what I was guilty of.”

Paul Left in Prison

²²When Paul finished, Felix, who knew about the followers of Christ, closed the hearing and said, “When Lysias, the Roman commander, comes to Caesarea, I’ll investigate the matter more carefully and then decide the case.” ²³He ordered the officer to take Paul away and keep him under guard but to give him some freedom and let his friends attend to his needs.

²⁴A few days later, Felix, accompanied by his Jewish wife, Drusilla, sent for Paul to hear him privately and to ask him questions about his faith in Jesus. ²⁵As Paul talked to them about right living, self-control, and God’s judgment to come, Felix was visibly shaken and said, “You can go now, Paul. When it’s convenient, I’ll call for you again.” ²⁶He said this because his conscience was bothering him, but also he was hoping that Paul, in one of their private meetings, would offer to pay a bribe to be released. ²⁷This went on for two years, but Felix would not let Paul go without being paid. He kept him in prison in the hope of gaining favor with the Jews. So the case was left for Festus, the new governor, to settle.

Paul Meets the New Governor and Appeals to Caesar

25 Three days after Festus took office in Caesarea, he went down to visit Jerusalem. ²While he was there, the high priest and the leading elders told him about the charges they had made against Paul and begged him to settle the case. ³They asked Festus to do them a favor by transferring Paul to Jerusalem so they could try him, especially since the charges against him were religious and not civil. Their plan was to kill Paul along the way. ⁴Festus said to them, "Since Paul is a Roman citizen, I need to judge him. Besides, he's already being held in custody in Caesarea. When you're ready, why don't you come up to Caesarea for the trial?" ⁵In fact, why don't you leave with me, and after we get there, we can have the trial the very next day."

⁶About ten days later, Festus left Jerusalem for Caesarea and the Jews went with him. Festus kept his word, and the day after he arrived, he convened the court, took his place as judge and called for Paul. ⁷The Jews who had come from Jerusalem with Festus accused Paul of all sorts of things, including what he was supposed to have said against Caesar, none of which they could prove. ⁸Paul defended himself well and concluded by saying, "I have done nothing wrong, either against the laws of the Jews or against their Temple or against Caesar." ⁹But Festus wanted to please the Jews and gain their friendship, so he asked Paul, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem with these men and defend yourself there?"

¹⁰Paul answered, "I've already been tried there and they could prove none of their charges. Therefore, I appeal to Caesar. That's where the decision ought to be made, not in Jerusalem. Besides, I have done nothing against the Jews, as you yourself know. ¹¹If I were a criminal and had done something to deserve the death sentence, I would be willing to die for it. These accusations are false, so why should I be tried by them? There's

no assurance I'd get a fair trial or even arrive safely in Jerusalem. So I'm appealing to Caesar." ¹²After Festus heard Paul's appeal, he quietly conferred with his advisors and turned again to Paul, "You're a Roman citizen. You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go." He then stood up and dismissed the court.

King Agrippa Requests to Hear Paul

¹³Not long afterward, Herod Agrippa II and his wife Bernice came to Caesarea for a visit to congratulate Festus on his appointment as governor. ¹⁴They stayed there for some time, and while they were there, Festus told them about Paul. He said, "There's a man held prisoner here by the name of Paul who was put in custody by Felix. ¹⁵When I took office, one of the first things I did was to visit Jerusalem. While I was there, the leading priests and city fathers told me about this man and wanted me to sentence him for crimes he supposedly had committed against them and against Caesar. ¹⁶I told them that it's not our custom as Romans to hand a man over just to please someone before he has a chance to meet his accusers and defend himself in a regular trial.

¹⁷"So we set a time when I would leave Jerusalem and they came with me. The day after we arrived, I convened the court and ordered the prisoner to be brought in to meet his accusers and to defend himself against their charges. ¹⁸When his accusers stated their charges, they didn't accuse him of any criminal act as I had anticipated. ¹⁹Instead, their charges had to do with their own religion. These centered around a Man called Jesus Christ who, a few years ago, was executed by crucifixion under Pilate. Paul says that Man is now alive. ²⁰Since I was at a loss to know how to investigate all this without getting involved in a theological dispute and didn't fully understand the charges myself, I asked him whether he would be willing to go back to Jerusalem with the Jews to be tried there. ²¹But the prisoner

appealed his case and asked to be tried in Caesar's court in Rome. So I issued orders for him to be kept under guard and be taken to Rome for trial."

²²Agrippa said, "I'd like to hear this man myself." Festus replied, "Tomorrow I'll give you a chance to hear him." ²³The next day Festus and Agrippa came to court with great pomp and ceremony. They were accompanied by military chiefs and leading men of the city. When everyone was seated, Festus ordered the guards to bring Paul in. ²⁴Then Festus addressed the dignitaries and guests and said, "King Agrippa, and all you men of rank, this is the man whom the Jews have accused of certain crimes against their Temple. They have been pleading with me both here and in Jerusalem to sentence him to die. ²⁵When I examined him, I found that he had done nothing to demand his execution. But because he's a Roman citizen and appealed his case to Caesar, I decided to honor his request and send him to Rome to be tried there. ²⁶I have nothing with which to charge him, but I have brought him before all of you and especially before you, King Agrippa, to see if you can help me find something to put in my letter to Caesar before I send him to Rome. ²⁷It is quite unthinkable to send a prisoner to the emperor's court without telling him what the charges are."

Paul Shares His Early Life

26 After Festus sat down, Agrippa turned to Paul and said, "You may now speak on your own behalf." So Paul raised his hand as a sign that he would do so and began his defense by saying, ²"I consider it a privilege, King Agrippa, to have this opportunity to defend myself in your presence against all the charges the Jews have brought against me. ³This is especially true since you're familiar with the religious customs and practices of the Jews and with their theological disputes. Therefore, I beg of you to listen to me patiently.

⁴"The Jews know where I grew up. They know that I received my training right there in Jerusalem, and that throughout my youth, I carefully observed all our customs and practices. ⁵They also know that according to the strictest Jewish sect, I lived as a Pharisee. ⁶I now stand before you to be tried because of the hope I have in the promise that God made to our forefathers. ⁷It is because of this that the twelve tribes of Israel worship God, looking for that promise to be fulfilled. It is because of my hope in this promise, King Agrippa, that I am being accused by the Jews. ⁸Why should it be thought incredible for God to raise the dead?

⁹"At one time, I thought to rid the country of all those who believe that God raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead, the One whom Pilate had crucified. ¹⁰In fact, the leading priests authorized me to do this. All over Jerusalem I arrested those suspected of believing in Jesus Christ, even though they were my own countrymen. I had them locked up, and when they were put to death, I gave my approval. ¹¹This happened not just once, but many times. In fact, I had these people whipped right in their own synagogues to force them to blaspheme this Jesus. I was so furious with them that I even went to other cities to hunt them down.

Paul Talks About His Conversion

¹²"That's why I went to Damascus, commissioned by the leading priests to bring these people back to Jerusalem for trial. ¹³About noontime, not far from Damascus I suddenly saw a brilliant light coming down from heaven, even brighter than the sun. The next thing I knew, it had engulfed me and those who were with me. ¹⁴All of us fell to the ground. From somewhere out of that light, a voice spoke to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Why do you act like a mad ox kicking at its master's cattle prod?' ¹⁵I finally found my voice and said, 'Who are you, Lord?' He

said to me, 'I'm Jesus, the One you're persecuting. ¹⁶Get up on your feet. I've come to you for a purpose. I want you to tell others that you have seen me and also to tell them the things I will show you later. ¹⁷I will go with you to deliver you from your own people and from the Gentiles to whom I'm sending you. ¹⁸I want you to open their eyes to their true condition that they may repent and turn from darkness to light and from the bewitching power of Satan to God. Then their sins will be forgiven and they will have a place among my people who are set apart by faith in me.'

Paul Tells the Purpose of His Ministry

¹⁹"King Agrippa, I never turned against the commission given to me in that vision and I don't intend to do so now. ²⁰Since that time, I have preached the good news of salvation in Damascus, Jerusalem, throughout Palestine and in many parts of the Roman Empire to anyone who would listen. Everywhere I've been, I've urged people to change their ways, to repent of their sins and to live for God. ²¹This was the reason the Jews grabbed me in the Temple and dragged me into the courtyard to kill me. ²²But as God promised, He used others to protect me. That's why I can stand here today and share the good news of salvation with all of you. What I told you about Jesus of Nazareth is what Moses and the prophets said would happen. ²³They said that the Messiah would come and suffer and die and be the first to rise from the dead by His own power. Through Him God offers eternal life as a free gift to all who believe. The prophets also said that the good news of salvation would go to the whole world, to Jew and Gentile alike."

Paul Appeals to Agrippa to Become a Christian

²⁴At this point, Festus interrupted. "Paul, you're beside yourself! Too much study is pushing you over the edge of reason! You're out of your mind!" ²⁵Paul an-

swered, "Governor Festus, I'm not out of my mind. What I'm telling you is not fiction. I am not going over the edge. What I'm telling you is the sober truth. ²⁶King Agrippa, you know what I'm talking about. That's why I can speak openly to you without being misunderstood. I'm sure you've heard what I'm telling you because nothing that Jesus of Nazareth did was done in a corner. ²⁷King Agrippa, you believe what the ancient prophets said, don't you? I know you do!" ²⁸Agrippa was convicted, but he answered Paul, saying, "Paul, do you think in so short a time you can persuade me to become a Christian?" ²⁹Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that you, the governor and everyone here would decide to become as I am, a Christian—except, of course, for these chains."

³⁰Then the king stood up, signaling that the hearing was over, and he and his wife Bernice and all the others left the room. ³¹Once outside, the king and the governor talked with each other about Paul, saying, "This man has done nothing worthy of death or of imprisonment." ³²Agrippa said to Festus, "It's my opinion, your Excellency, that this man could have been legitimately set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

Paul Sails to Rome

27 Soon afterward, a date was set for Paul to leave and we were allowed to sail with him to Italy. Paul and some other prisoners were placed in the custody of a Roman officer named Julius, head of a Roman detachment called the Emperor's Regiment. He was responsible for transporting the prisoners safely to Rome. ²On the day set, we boarded a ship that had come from the city of Adramyttium in Asia Minor. It was ready to sail back home, stopping at some ports along the way. Among our group was a man called Aristarchus, a Macedonian believer from Thessalonica. He and Gaius had been grabbed by the mob in Ephesus and hauled before the authorities for their faith.

³We set sail and left Caesarea heading north along the coast. The next day we arrived at Sidon. Here the Roman officer Julius was kind enough to let Paul visit his friends and to refresh himself. ⁴From Sidon we sailed north, then west toward the island of Cyprus, rather than taking the more direct route, because of the strong headwinds. ⁵From there we headed straight west and sailed along the coastal waters of Cilicia and Pamphylia where Paul had done so much missionary work. Finally, we anchored at Myra, a port city in the province of Lycia. ⁶While in Myra, Julius, the Roman officer, found a ship from Alexandria which was sailing to Italy and decided that we should board it instead. ⁷We sailed slowly along the coast for a number of days because of the lack of a good wind to take us out to sea. When we came to Cnidus, we pulled into port to take on supplies. The winds were not blowing westward as we would have liked, so we sailed south, heading for the eastern tip of the island of Crete with the port city of Salmone on our right. ⁸Then, turning west, we sailed along the southern part of the island to the coastal town of Fair Havens, which wasn't far from the inland city of Lasea.

Paul's Warning Ignored

⁹We spent more time there than we should have, so by the time we left, sailing west had become very dangerous. The Jewish Day of Atonement had already passed which put us into a season when sailing was more difficult because of winter storms. Paul warned them, ¹⁰"Men, it seems to me that if we sail now, we're taking an unnecessary risk. At this time of the year the storms can be violent enough to damage your ship, force you to throw your cargo overboard and we could even lose our lives." ¹¹But Julius listened to the captain and the owner of the ship rather than to Paul and decided that we should sail. ¹²The sailors felt that Fair Havens was too small a place to spend the winter. And most of the passengers

were willing to take the risk and have us sail at least to Phoenix, a much more pleasant place with a harbor facing both northwest and southwest.

The Storm

¹³At the first sign of a gentle south wind, the ship's owner decided to sail to Phoenix. So the crew set the sails, pulled up the anchor, and we headed west, hugging the coastline of Crete as closely as we could. ¹⁴Soon after we left the safety of the harbor, we were hit by a powerful wind which the sailors call a Northeasterner. It came roaring down from the cliffs and hit us without mercy. ¹⁵It struck our ship so hard that it was impossible to keep it on course without tearing the sails apart. Soon the sailors gave up and let the ship be carried along by the wind. ¹⁶After we had been blown miles out to sea, we finally gained some relief when we passed south of the little island of Cauda. With the gale somewhat subsided, we managed with difficulty to at least secure the lifeboat. ¹⁷The lifeboat had been in tow, so the sailors hoisted it on board and tied it down. They even passed ropes along the ship to help hold it together. They also lowered the sails and let the ship ride because they were afraid the winds would drive us south into one of the sandbanks off the coast of Libya.

¹⁸As soon as we had passed the little island of Cauda, the gale winds hit us again. The next day the storm became so violent that the crew started throwing some of the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. ¹⁹By the third day, the storm was so bad that the crew even threw some of the ship's tackling and equipment overboard. ²⁰The winds continued to blow for days on end. When we saw no indication of a break in the storm and had not caught a glimpse of the sun or stars for days, we lost all hope of coming out of this alive. ²¹Everyone on board was seasick and hadn't eaten for some time.

Then Paul called the passengers together and, shouting above the wind,

said, "Men, you should have listened to me when I told you not to leave Fair Havens on the coast of Crete. Then you wouldn't have suffered all this damage and loss.²² But keep up your courage, because not one of you will lose your life, even though the ship will be lost.²³ Last night an angel of God appeared to me in a vision, sent by the God of heaven whom I serve and to whom I belong.²⁴ He said, 'Paul, don't be afraid. God wants you to appear before Caesar. He has heard your prayers and will save everyone on board ship.'²⁵ So take courage, because what my God says is true and it will happen just as I've been told.²⁶ We will soon be shipwrecked on an island not far from here."

²⁷At midnight, on the fourteenth day after being driven out to sea, and about five hundred miles off course, the sailors sensed that we were nearing land.²⁸ They managed to drop a line with a heavy weight over the side, and when they pulled it up, the water was only one hundred and twenty feet deep. A few hours later it was only ninety feet deep.²⁹ Everyone was afraid and expected that at any moment we would be smashed on the rocks. Then they let down four anchors from the back of the ship, and we prayed that these would at least keep us in place until morning.³⁰ That night some of the sailors tried to escape and were in the process of lowering the lifeboat under the pretense of lowering some anchors from the front of the ship.³¹ Paul saw what was happening and alerted Julius, saying, "Those sailors are trying to escape, but unless we all stay together, not everyone will survive."³² Then Julius ordered his men to go to the front of the ship and cut the ropes holding the lifeboat. They did so and it dropped into the sea.

³³Just before dawn, Paul begged everyone to eat something. He said, "We've been in this storm for over fourteen days now, and most of us haven't eaten very much since it began, but³⁴ try

to eat something. You'll need it to help you survive. And don't worry; not a hair from your head will be lost."³⁵ When he had finished encouraging everyone, he took a piece of bread, gave thanks to God, then broke a piece off and ate it.³⁶ This gave the others courage, and they all began to eat.³⁷ We had two hundred seventy-six people on board.³⁸ After everyone had eaten something, the crew lightened the ship still more by throwing the cargo of grain into the sea.

Shipwrecked on Malta

³⁹When morning finally began to dawn, we could see a coastline in the distance, but the sailors didn't recognize where we were. However, they did see a bay with a sandy beach, and the bay looked like a safe place to run the ship ashore.⁴⁰ So the crew pulled up the anchors, loosened the ropes holding the rudder in place, hoisted the sail near the front of the ship and instantly we were heading for shore.⁴¹ But the water was more shallow than the sailors had thought, and soon we hit a sandbank with such force that the front of the ship got stuck and wouldn't budge, while the violent waves began breaking the back of the ship to pieces.

⁴²The soldiers asked Julius for permission to kill the prisoners before they could swim away and escape, or else they would have to pay for it with their lives.⁴³ But Julius didn't want to see Paul killed, so he ordered all those who could swim to jump overboard and head for shore.⁴⁴ Those who couldn't swim were to jump and float ashore by holding on to planks or other pieces of wood from the ship. All of us finally made it safely to land.

Paul Heals the Father of the Island's Chief

28 After we came ashore, we learned that we were on the island of Malta.² Though the natives seemed quite primitive, they were very kind to us. They helped us gather wood and start a fire in some of the sheltered areas because it was

raining and cold. ³Paul gathered wood with the rest of us. As he threw his bundle of sticks on the fire, a small poisonous snake driven out by the heat, struck his hand and hung on. ⁴When the natives saw this deadly snake, they jumped back and said, "This man must be a murderer, because even though he escaped the sea, the goddess Justice will not let him live." ⁵But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and was unaffected. ⁶Everyone expected to see his hand swell up or possibly that he would fall over dead, but as they watched, nothing happened. Then they changed their minds and said that Paul was a god.

⁷Not far from the beach was the property and house of the island's chief, called Publius. When he heard what had happened, he invited Paul and his friends, together with Julius, the Roman officer, to be his guests. He welcomed us courteously, treated us very kindly, and for the next three days, we stayed at his house. ⁸When we first arrived, Publius' father was in bed with intermittent high fevers and sick with dysentery. Paul asked to see the old man and prayed for him; then he put his hands on the man's head and instantly he was healed. ⁹News of this spread and soon other sick people on the island came to Paul, and he healed them all. ¹⁰Then they honored us with many gifts, and when we were ready to sail, they gave us all the supplies we needed.

From Malta to Rome

¹¹We had been on the island three months. Finally, we boarded a ship from Alexandria, with the figurehead of the twin Roman gods, Castor and Pollux. It had wintered on the other end of the island. After we were all on board, we set sail for Italy. ¹²Our first stop was Syracuse on the large island of Sicily, not far from Italy. We stayed there for three days. ¹³From Syracuse, we took a straight run north to Rhegium on the southern tip of Italy. The next day we caught a good wind coming up from the south and sailed north along Italy's west coast, and

a day later we reached the city of Puteoli, near Naples, where we disembarked.

¹⁴Here we contacted some believers who invited us to spend a week with them. Julius the Roman officer in charge granted permission, so we were able to rest a bit before going on to Rome, which was still a hundred and forty miles north.

¹⁵From Puteoli, we made our way the next hundred miles on foot. When we reached the place called the Forum of Appius, a number of believers from Rome were there to meet us. The same thing happened at the next place called Three Inns. This gave Paul added courage and he thanked God for their open affection and care even though he was chained to a group of criminals. ¹⁶After forty miles on the Appian Way, we finally reached Rome. Then Julius turned all the prisoners over to the captain of the emperor's guard for imprisonment. But they treated Paul with respect because of his role in the shipwreck which Julius had told them about. So the captain allowed Paul to pay for private quarters but assigned a soldier to guard him.

Paul in Rome

¹⁷Three days later, Paul sent word to the local Jewish leaders to come and meet with him. When they arrived, he said to them, "Brothers, I don't know what you might have heard, but I have done nothing against our people, nor have I broken any tradition of our fathers. Yet I was jailed in Jerusalem and handed over to the Roman governor in Caesarea. ¹⁸When the governor examined me, he found me innocent of the charges the Jewish leaders had brought against me and would have let me go because I had done nothing to deserve death. ¹⁹But when the Jewish leaders objected to my being set free and I could see that the Roman governor might turn me over to them, I appealed to be taken to Caesar. Even though I was mistreated by those back home, I am not bitter and I am not planning to say anything against them to

Caesar. ²⁰This is the reason I called you here. I wanted to meet you and explain to you why I was arrested. It has to do with my belief that the Messiah, the hope of Israel, has already come. That's why I am bound with this chain." ²¹They said, "We haven't received any letters from the Jewish leaders back home telling us about you, nor has anyone come here to accuse you of anything. ²²But we would like to hear what you have to say about the Messiah, because people everywhere are talking against this new religion you say you belong to."

²³So they agreed with Paul on a later date when more of them could meet with him to hear what he had to say. The next time they met, Paul talked with them from morning until evening, showing them from the Scriptures the true meaning of the kingdom of God. He also showed them from the books of Moses and the prophets that Jesus was the expected Messiah. ²⁴When he had finished, some of them believed but others did not. ²⁵Then they started arguing among themselves.

But before they left, Paul said, "The Holy Spirit was right when He spoke to our forefathers through the prophet

Isaiah, saying, ²⁶'Go to these people and say to them: You keep listening, but you don't hear. You keep looking, but you don't see. ²⁷Your hearts are not in the right place, so your minds are dull, your ears are closed and your eyes can't see. You're afraid to see with your eyes, hear with your ears and understand with your hearts because you don't want to change and be healed.'" ²⁸Paul added, "I hope you realize that God's message of salvation is also for the Gentiles, and whether you accept Jesus as Lord and Savior or not, many of them will." ²⁹The Jews didn't really hear what Paul had said, but smiled and said good-bye and went out the door still arguing among themselves.

³⁰For the next two years, Paul remained under house arrest, confined to his private quarters with a guard by his side. But he was allowed to have visitors and to talk to anyone who came to see him. ³¹He always shared with those who came to see him the good news about the kingdom of God and boldly told them about the Lord Jesus Christ. He did this openly, and no one prevented him from witnessing, even to those who came to him from Caesar's palace.

ROMANS

Paul's Commission

1 This letter is from Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle and set apart by Him to spread the good news of what God has done through Christ ²and to show that He has kept His promise given by His prophets throughout the Scriptures. ³This promise centers in His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, whose ancestry can be traced to King David, ⁴but whose divine nature was attested to by the power of the Holy Spirit within Him and by His resurrection from the dead. ⁵From Him we receive grace, and from Him I received my commission as an apostle which is to bring everyone, no matter what their nationality, to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the obedience that comes from faith in Him. ⁶You also are among the called who now belong to Jesus Christ.

⁷Greetings to everyone in Rome, beloved of God and set apart by Him to be His holy people. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's Plan to Visit Rome

⁸Before I say anything else, I want to praise God for each of you for accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and for living for Him. Your vibrant faith is talked about everywhere I go. ⁹God is my witness that I serve Him with my whole being, preaching the good news of salvation through Christ. I always include you in my prayers. ¹⁰I'm praying that God will allow me to come to see you and to give me a safe trip—if it's His will that I should go. ¹¹I want to fellowship with you and bring you some encouragement so you will be even stronger. ¹²But I also need the strength of your faith. This way we can help each other and be encouraged by our mutual faith in Christ. ¹³Brothers and sisters, I want you to understand that this isn't the first time I have tried to come to see you. I tried several times but

for one reason or another was always hindered. I would like to have a harvest of souls in your city as I've had among the Gentiles elsewhere. ¹⁴Because of what Jesus Christ did for me, I'm indebted to Him and in that sense am obligated to take the gospel to both Greeks and non-Greeks, to the educated and the uneducated. ¹⁵And, so far as I'm able, I'm ready to preach the gospel to the people in Rome also.

Righteousness Comes Through Faith

¹⁶I'm not ashamed of the gospel. Through it comes the power of God to save everyone who believes. It came to the Jews first, then to the Greeks. ¹⁷For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed, a righteousness that begins and ends by faith. As the Scriptures say, "The righteous live by faith in God and He declares them just."

God's Judgment Against the Gentiles

¹⁸God's displeasure is shown from heaven against all who suppress the truth about Him by their ungodly and wicked lives. ¹⁹They can know how to live without our telling them because God has revealed the truth about Himself in nature, which is plain enough for everyone to see. ²⁰People can understand Him sufficiently if they only watch His power and divine attributes at work in nature. It's been that way since the creation of this world. So they have no excuse for what they're doing. ²¹Although they could see God at work in nature, they still did not give Him credit for His marvelous acts, nor were they thankful for His blessings. They became arrogant and proud of their learning, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²They thought they were brilliant, but actually they were fools. ²³In attempting to fashion an image of the glorious, eternal God, they tried to make Him look like some Roman hero or like a god who is

half man and half goat, or even like some birds or creeping things.

²⁴So God couldn't do for them what He would like to have done. He let them do what they wanted to do, no matter how revolting it was to Him. They were so lustful and filthy that they ravished each other's bodies and behaved more like animals than humans. ²⁵Thus, they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and made Him look like a god of lust. They ended up worshiping the things He created instead of the Creator, who is forever to be praised. Amen.

²⁶God, being the kind of God that He is, didn't just step in and take away their freedom of choice. So they abused their freedom and did their own thing. Even their women departed from the Creator's pattern for them and engaged in all kinds of unnatural acts with other women. ²⁷Their men were no different. They went against the Creator's design for them and lusted after other men. Men were having sex with men, then reaping in themselves the results of their willful disregard of God's law.

²⁸Because they didn't want to recognize God as their Creator and keep Him in mind, their thinking became twisted, their actions gross, and they ended up doing all sorts of things people should never do. ²⁹Their lives became filled with every kind of wrongdoing, such as sexual abuse, perverseness, jealousy, maliciousness, greed, fighting, lying, hatred and murder. ³⁰They gossip, spread rumors, despise others and even hate God. They are proud and boastful, always inventing some new evil to do, and disobey their parents. ³¹They have no conscience, but make agreements without intending to keep them, love no one but themselves, are haughty and unmerciful. ³²They know God's law in their hearts and that they have no right to go on polluting their own bodies. Nevertheless, they not only do the things just mentioned, but give their approval to those who do them.

God's Judgment Against the Jews

2You who are from the seed of Abraham can offer no excuse for judging others. By sitting in judgment on them, you condemn yourselves. The same judgment you use to judge others applies to you, for you too have sinned. ²One thing we know for sure, God is against all sin, and His judgment is true and right. ³Do you really think that if you set yourselves up as judges and do some of the things you condemn in others that you'll escape God's judgment? ⁴Aren't you presuming on the riches of God's kindness, restraint and patience which are meant to lead you to repentance and a change of life? ⁵If you stubbornly persist in doing your own thing, you're storing up some terrible consequences for yourselves. If your sins don't catch up with you in this life, they will in the end when God's righteous judgment comes. ⁶At that time, each of us will have to face the consequences of what we have done in this life. ⁷Those who pursue eternal life and do good, enduring to the end will receive glory, honor and immortality. ⁸But those who disobey and stubbornly cling to their own selfish ways in face of the truth about God will reap His displeasure and ultimate destruction. ⁹Distress and anguish will come to everyone doing evil, foremost to the Jew, but also to the Gentile. ¹⁰But glory, honor and peace will come to everyone doing what is right, first to God's own people, then also to the Gentiles. ¹¹God does not show partiality. ¹²All who sin, having never heard of God's law, will not be judged by what is written in the law. But all who sin knowing what is written will be judged by the law. ¹³Having a knowledge of the law does not mean that a man is right with God; doing what the law says is what counts. ¹⁴There are Gentiles who do what God's law says, even though they've never heard it. They live out the principles of His law because they're morally upright people. ¹⁵They give evidence that the principles of the law are written in

their hearts because their consciences are guided by God. They carefully weigh their actions to see whether they are right or wrong. ¹⁶When God decides to close up this world's history, He'll judge the secret thoughts of everyone through Jesus Christ, just as the gospel says.

Spiritual Pride

¹⁷You call yourselves Jews and feel secure because you know the law and brag about your special relationship with God. ¹⁸You claim to know His will and how to live right because of the law and what you were taught from Scripture. ¹⁹Furthermore, you are confident that you have been chosen to be a guide to those who are spiritually blind and a light to those who are walking in darkness. ²⁰You think you are teachers of the ignorant and those newly come to the faith because you have a knowledge of the truth. ²¹In teaching others, have you ever thought that you need to learn something yourselves? Those of you who teach others and preach against stealing, do you steal? ²²You tell others not to commit adultery, but do you commit adultery? You can't stand to see people worshiping idols or anything else, but aren't you worshiping something other than God by robbing Him in His own Temple? ²³You pride yourselves in knowing the law, yet you dishonor God by breaking it. ²⁴No wonder Isaiah said, "The Gentiles have little respect for God because of the way His people live."

Circumcision Saves No One

²⁵Circumcision or any other religious rite has meaning only if God's people live in harmony with the law, but if they don't, then circumcision or any other religious practice means nothing. ²⁶The opposite is also true, that people who are not circumcised, yet who do what God tells them is right, will be accepted by Him as if they were circumcised. ²⁷Won't uncircumcised people who do what God tells them judge circumcised people who disobey God's

law? ²⁸You see, a person is not a Jew simply because he's been circumcised in the flesh, that is, on the outside. ²⁹A person is a real Jew if he's been circumcised in his heart by the Holy Spirit. A true Israelite is one who is praiseworthy in the eyes of God, not in the eyes of men.

Twisted Thinking

3 What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew? What value is there in circumcision if outward circumcision doesn't mean anything? ²Much in every way; mainly because they were entrusted with the word of God which they were expected to believe and obey. ³What if some did not prove faithful and obedient? Does this make God's revelation faulty and nullify His promise? ⁴Certainly not! God is faithful and His promise sure. Men will lie, but God does not. As David said in the Psalms, "God's words are true and His judgment is right."

⁵Some argue that if our human failures show that God is right and reveal His goodness more fully, isn't He being unjust to be displeased with us? (I'm just using human logic to make my point.) ⁶Certainly not! Such reasoning is ridiculous. If what a person does doesn't matter to God because it shows how good He is, then how could He judge the world? ⁷Others argue, "If my dishonesty by contrast enhances God's truthfulness and grace and increases His glory, why should I be condemned along with common sinners?" ⁸Still others slander us by saying, "Paul and his friends are teaching people to ignore the law because the evil they do brings out God's goodness." They've all twisted what we've said and their condemnation is just.

All Have Sinned

⁹Let me ask the question I started with: Are we Jews any better off than anyone else? The answer is No! We've already said that both Jews and Gentiles are in the grip of sin. ¹⁰As it is written:

"No one is naturally righteous; no, not even one. ¹¹No one fully understands what goodness is; no one naturally longs for God.

¹²"All have gone astray. Everyone has done wrong; no one is without sin and totally good, not even one.

¹³"People's mouths are death traps. Their tongues rattle off deceit, and their lips drip with the venom of snakes.

¹⁴"They curse without thinking, as if it were nothing; their hearts are full of bitterness.

¹⁵"They are quick to commit murder and their consciences don't even bother them.

¹⁶"They bring destruction and misery wherever they go.

¹⁷"They do not know the path of peace.

¹⁸"They have no respect for God."

¹⁹The above passages speak to those who know the law. So everyone's mouth is stopped, and the whole world has to answer to God. ²⁰Therefore, no one can be made right with God just by keeping the law. The law can't justify anyone; all it can do is tell us what sin is.

Righteousness Comes Through Faith

²¹But God has given us a righteousness that is apart from keeping the law, and throughout the Scriptures the prophets bear witness to this fact. ²²This righteousness is found in God's own Son, and He offers it to anyone whose faith rests in Jesus Christ—and I do mean anyone, for God is never partial. ²³All of us have sinned and fallen short of reflecting the image and glory of God. ²⁴We are made right with God solely by His grace, freely given, and stand acquitted before the law, our penalty paid by Jesus Christ. ²⁵God has presented Jesus to the world as the mercy seat sprinkled with blood to show that He is just and that His patience of the past did not overlook our sins. ²⁶He did this not only to demonstrate His justice but to show us that He

has a right to justify anyone who has placed his faith in Christ.

We Have Nothing to Boast About

²⁷What do we have to brag about? There's no room for boasting about our own righteousness. If we want to boast, what should we boast about? Our knowledge of the Scriptures? Should we boast about our religious works? No. Being made right with God through faith stops all bragging. ²⁸There is no other conclusion. A person is justified by faith not by keeping the law or by faith in what he has done for God. ²⁹Is God only the God of the Jews? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? ³⁰There is only one God who justifies. And He does so on the basis of faith, whether that faith comes from a Jew or a Gentile. ³¹Do we then nullify the law by having this kind of faith? No! We uphold God's law and out of gratitude do what He has asked us to do.

Abraham Was Justified by Faith

4 Now what about our father Abraham? How does his life fit into this picture?

²The same rule applies to him. If he could stand blameless before the universe on the basis of what he had done, then he would have something to boast about, but not in the presence of a holy God. ³What do the Scriptures say about Abraham? They say that he trusted God, and it was credited to Him as righteousness. ⁴Now, when a man working for wages gets paid, he's getting something he's earned. His employer is not giving him a gift.

⁵There is no work man can do to be saved. But he who trusts God as the One who makes the ungodly righteous, his faith is credited to him as righteousness. ⁶David said the same thing when he described the happiness of the man to whom God credits righteousness without that man having worked for it: ⁷"Happy are the people whose wickedness is forgiven and whose sins are covered. ⁸Happy is the man whose sins the Lord does not hold against him."

Abraham Justified Before He Was Circumcised

⁹Can this happiness be experienced only if a man has undergone the ritual of circumcision? Or can those who are not circumcised experience this too? We just said that Abraham put his faith in God and it was credited to him as righteousness. ¹⁰When did this happen to Abraham? Was it before he was circumcised or after? It was before he was circumcised. ¹¹He was circumcised as a sign of being made right with God through faith which he had before he was circumcised. This made Abraham the spiritual father of all who by faith in God are counted righteous, even though they may not be circumcised. Therefore, everyone who believes can be said to be a child of Abraham. ¹²Abraham is also the father of the uncircumcised who place their faith in God just as he did before he was circumcised.

Abraham Believed God's Promise

¹³When God promised Abraham that he and his descendants would someday inherit the earth, this promise was not given because they kept the law, but it was given because he was made right with God through faith. ¹⁴If only those who are ritually obedient and who have a knowledge of the law are chosen as heirs of the world, then faith has no value and God's promise to Abraham is worthless. ¹⁵The law cannot solve the problem of sin but can only point out what sin is. If there is no law, then there is nothing to obey, and there is no sin.

¹⁶God's promise to Abraham rests on grace through faith. That's the only way the promise can be guaranteed to Abraham's offspring, not only to the Jews but to all who have the same faith in God that Abraham had. ¹⁷The Scriptures confirm that God said to Abraham, "I have made you the spiritual father of many nationalities." This promise was given to Abraham because he had faith that God would raise the dead and create a whole

new world in order to keep His promise. ¹⁸When everything looked hopeless to Abraham because he had no heir, he still had faith that God would make him the father of many nations. Abraham never forgot how God had asked him to look at the stars and said, "That's how numerous your descendants will be." ¹⁹He believed what God told him, even though he and Sarah were too old to have children. After all, Abraham was a hundred years old and Sarah had long passed the time for bearing children. ²⁰In spite of this, Abraham's faith in God's promise did not waver, but kept growing stronger, even though he tried to solve the problem of offspring by fathering Ishmael through Hagar. ²¹Abraham never doubted that God had the power to keep His promise to give him and his descendants their inheritance. ²²That's why Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. ²³The words "credited to him" were not written for him alone, ²⁴but also for us who have the same faith in God. He has demonstrated His power to keep His promise by raising Jesus Christ from the dead. ²⁵Jesus was handed over to die for our sins and was raised from the dead to make us right with God.

Faith Holds On to God's Promise in Christ

5 Therefore, since we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with Him through Jesus Christ, for now we know how very much He loves us. ²It is through Jesus Christ that we have gained access to God, having been brought into His grace. We rejoice in the hope of sharing in His glory. ³We can even be joyful when we go through hardships, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, ⁴and patient endurance produces strength of character, and character gives us unshakable hope. ⁵Such hope will not disappoint us, because God has also poured out His love

on us by giving us the Holy Spirit as a down-payment for an endless future.

Christ Died for Us

⁶For Christ came, as prophesied, to die for us while we were ungodly and totally powerless to do anything to make ourselves righteous. ⁷A person would hardly give his life for a self-righteous man, but you might find someone willing to give his life for a truly good man. ⁸But God showed His love for us while we were still sinners—His natural enemies—by giving His Son to die for us. ⁹Having been made right with God through the blood of Christ, how much more sure is our rescue from destruction now that He has reclaimed us as His own? ¹⁰If God loved us so much that He sent His Son to die for us while we were His enemies, how much more eager God must be to save us from evil through His resurrected Son now that we are His friends? ¹¹That's why we are so joyful, because of the kind of person God has shown Himself to be through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we now have received reconciliation and redemption.

Adam and Christ Compared

¹²Because of Adam's sin, a sinful nature was passed on to everyone in the world. From then on, sin has controlled everyone. All of us have sinned, so all must die. ¹³It's a fact that death and sin were in the world even before the law was written at Sinai. But God doesn't charge people as being guilty of sin if there is no law. ¹⁴Yet the law was there because people died from Adam to Moses before the law was written out, even if they did not sin against a direct command given by God as Adam had. In spite of what Adam passed on to us, in one sense he does typify Christ—but what a difference there is between them!

¹⁵The effects of Adam's sin came to all of us without a choice on our part, but the gift of God's grace is effective only if we choose to receive it. The similarity is

that if one man's sin can pass on death to all of us, how much more can God's free gift of grace through another man, Jesus Christ, be extended to all of us! ¹⁶Adam's sin brought condemnation, but through the one act of grace, the death of Jesus Christ, many sins are now covered and we are made right with God. ¹⁷If by one man's sin, death reigned, how much more will the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness received into the life reign through the sinlessness of another Man, Jesus Christ.

¹⁸As condemnation came to everyone because of one sinful act, so through one work of righteousness by Jesus Christ, justification is offered to all as a passport to life. ¹⁹If by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners, then by one Man's obedience, many will be made righteous! ²⁰So, the written law was given to increase awareness of sin and of our need for a Savior. But as sin continued to increase, so grace increased that much more. ²¹Just as sin reigns over everyone through the power of death, so grace reigns through the righteousness of Jesus Christ unto eternal life over all who believe.

Dead to Sin but Alive in God

6 What should we say after all of this? Should we keep on sinning so that we can receive more grace? ²God forbid that we should even think that way! How can we, who have died to our old sinful lives, turn around and sin again? ³Don't you know that those of us who were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ have joined Him in His death and have openly said that our old sinful lives died with Him? ⁴Therefore, if by our baptism we were buried with Him, then, just as Christ was raised from the dead to the glory of God, we also were raised to live a new life to the glory of God.

⁵If we joined Him in His death when we went down into the water, then we also joined Him in His resurrection when we came up out of the water. ⁶If our old self was crucified and died with Him and the

body that was once a slave to sin is dead, how can we possibly think of putting ourselves back into that kind of slavery? ⁷A person who is dead does not sin. He has been freed from slavery to sin. ⁸Therefore, if we have died and risen with Christ, then we should live for Him. ⁹We know that Christ was raised from the dead and that He will not die again because death no longer controls Him. ¹⁰When Christ died, He died as a sin offering, once and for all. He now lives forever to the glory of God. ¹¹That's how you should see yourselves, dead as far as sin is concerned, but alive for God through Jesus Christ.

¹²So don't let sin reign over you, thinking that you have to do what it prompts you to do. ¹³Don't give in and let your body become a tool in the hands of sin, but choose to serve God as those who have been rescued from death. Offer yourselves to God for doing good. ¹⁴Sin can't rule over you, because you're no longer under law which holds you guilty, but under grace which sets you free.

Free to Be a Willing Slave of Christ

¹⁵What should we do in this new realm of freedom? Should we go ahead and sin because we're no longer under law but under grace? God forbid! ¹⁶Don't you know that you become the slave of the one you turn your life over to? If you turn your life over to sin, it will eventually kill you. If you turn your life over to doing what is right, you'll receive eternal life. ¹⁷I thank God that though you were once controlled by sin, you've been changed and have wholeheartedly committed yourselves to obey the things you were taught. ¹⁸You're now free from slavery to sin and are willing slaves to right-doing. ¹⁹I'm speaking in human terms because I know the weakness of human nature. But just as you once yielded to sin and went from bad to worse, you can now yield to Christ and His righteousness and grow in grace doing what is right.

²⁰While you were a slave to your sinful

self, you felt no obligation to Christ and His righteousness, but now you do. ²¹Let me ask you, What would have happened to you as a result of the sinful things you did of which you're now so ashamed? The end of those things would have been eternal death. ²²But now, you have been freed from sin and have become willing servants of Jesus Christ. This kind of response to God's grace produces the fruit of holy living and results in living eternally. ²³The wages of sin is eternal death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Old Sinful Life Died

7 Dear brothers, you know that the law has jurisdiction over a man only as long as he's alive. Once he's dead, the law can't touch him. ²Let me illustrate what I mean by that. The Scriptures tell us that a married woman is obligated to her husband as long as he lives, but when he dies, she doesn't have to be faithful to him by staying single. She can get married again, and when she does, she's not an adulteress. ³If, while her husband is still living, she also has another man, she's considered an adulteress. But if her husband is dead, she's free from the law that bound her to him. She can marry again if she wants to, and no one will think anything about it, even though she's living with a different man from the one she first married.

⁴Spiritually speaking, your old sinful life died with Christ's body when He was crucified. So you can no longer be condemned by the law for having a new and different husband. You not only died with Christ; you were also raised with Him when you were baptized. So now you have a new life and a new marriage. You have chosen to marry the One who was raised from the dead, and this new marriage is to bear fruit for God. ⁵When we were controlled by our old sinful nature, the law showed us more clearly how wrong we were, which increased our knowledge of sin and led us further

along the path of death. ⁶But now we're delivered from the condemnation of the law because our sinful lives have died. We are no longer slaves to the law of sin but serve God willingly and joyously with a new spirit, not in the old way of obeying just the letter of the law.

The Law Is Holy and Good

⁷What shall we say in light of all this? Is the law the same thing as sin? Absolutely not! Without the law, sin has no power. I would not have recognized sin deeply within me if the law had not pointed it out. I would not have known myself as I needed to, except the tenth commandment says, "You shall not covet." ⁸It was this commandment that made me deeply aware of my sinful human nature. Without the law, there is no sin and I would not have realized that self-interest is the very essence of my being. ⁹I considered myself a normal, law-abiding person, but when I understood the true meaning of the tenth commandment, sin became very real, and I realized that in the eyes of God's law, I stood condemned and was as good as dead. ¹⁰So, the very law which promised life on condition of obedience proved to be for me a law of death. ¹¹Sin had blinded me to the high spiritual standard of the law, and in that sense, sin used the law to deceive me and, through the commandment, destroy me. ¹²I want you to understand one thing. God is holy; therefore, all His commandments are holy, just and good.

Sinful Human Nature Creates Conflict

¹³How then did the law, which was given for my good, turn against me? It didn't. It was sin, which has been part of our human nature since the fall of Adam, that used God's good law to condemn me to death. Yet when this happened I could see what sin was like and how deceptive and totally evil it really is. ¹⁴Clearly then, the law has not only a moral function, but also a spiritual one. The problem is

with my sinful human nature which, like a slave, is sold to perpetually serve sin. ¹⁵I was deceived into doing what I hated and not what I really wanted to do. I wanted to serve God, but ended up serving myself. ¹⁶So if I end up doing what I really don't want to do, then I'm admitting that what the law says about me is right—by nature I'm a sinner. ¹⁷However, I also realize that my problem isn't totally me, but the sinful nature I was born with. ¹⁸This means that my natural self isn't really good, so it can't be trusted. No matter how hard I try or how much I want to do what is right, I'm never able to be as good or to live as unselfishly as I really want to. ¹⁹Because of my sinful nature, what I do is not always the good I want to do, and I end up doing things I don't want to do. ²⁰Now if I do what I really don't want to do, I'm not actually the one doing it; it's my sinful human nature pushing me to do it.

²¹So I find it to be a law of life that when I want to do what's right, sin is always there to deceive and influence me to do what's wrong. ²²I really appreciate having God's law to guide me, because I long so much to be holy and to live an unselfish life. ²³But inside me is a sinful nature. It's always there urging me to think about myself, no matter how I set my mind against it. It's even strong enough to take me captive and to overcome my innermost longings to be good. ²⁴What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this sinful nature that is taking me to eternal death? ²⁵Thanks be to God, this problem has not been left for me to solve. It has been solved for me by Jesus Christ! Because of my sinful human nature, I still at times do wrong things and even right things for the wrong reasons. Nevertheless, with my mind I continue to choose to serve the law of God, even though my sinful nature is bent on serving the law of sin.

No Condemnation to Those in Christ

8 Therefore, there is no condemnation to those who are hid in Christ by faith. ²For the Holy Spirit has given me a new life in Christ and has freed me from the controlling power of my sinful nature which always stands ready to put me back on the road to death. ³No matter how holy and good the law of God is, it is powerless to save me from my sinful self. But what God's law could not do, His Son did. God sent Him to earth to take on human nature, to condemn sin and to overthrow its power. ⁴He did this so that by His obedience the righteous requirements of the law could be transferred to us who no longer follow our sinful human natures, but shape our lives according to the Spirit. ⁵Those who follow their sinful natures set their minds on what their sinful selves want. But those who have been changed by the power of the Holy Spirit set their minds on what the Holy Spirit wants. ⁶Obedying our sinful selves brings death, but obeying the things of the Spirit brings life and peace. ⁷The sinful mind of man is against God and refuses to submit to His law. Indeed, it never can. ⁸Therefore, those who are controlled by their sinful natures cannot please God.

⁹But you are no longer controlled by your sinful selves but by the Holy Spirit. If anyone does not have the Holy Spirit guiding his life, he doesn't really belong to Christ. ¹⁰If Christ through His Spirit is in you, even though, your bodies are aging and will one day die because of sin, the Spirit within you brings life because of the righteousness of Christ which God has already given us. ¹¹If the Spirit of God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead dwells in you, then He who raised Christ from the dead will also raise you from the dead through the same Holy Spirit, who's already in you.

Children of God Through the Holy Spirit

¹²Therefore, my brothers, we are not under obligation to our sinful human nature, to do what it tells us to do. ¹³If you

do, you will die. But if by the power of the Holy Spirit, you stop giving in to your sinful selves and doing the wicked things you're doing, you will live. ¹⁴Those who are guided by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. ¹⁵The Holy Spirit does not enslave us and make us fear. But through the Holy Spirit God has adopted us and claimed us as His own. With our deepest emotion we may call Him Father. ¹⁶The Spirit Himself, with our new spirit, confirms that we truly are God's children. ¹⁷If we're God's children, then we're His heirs and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we are willing to share in the struggles and suffering which Christ also had while living in this sinful world. And if we share in His sufferings, we will also share in His glory.

¹⁸The self-denial, temptations and sufferings that we go through because we're Christians are not even worth mentioning when compared with the glory that God will bestow on us when He comes. ¹⁹In fact, creation itself is eagerly waiting for the time when God will show the world who His sons and daughters really are. ²⁰All creation has suffered because of man's rebellion and sin. Nature did not choose to rebel, yet God allowed it to suffer with us. It can look forward to the restoration of all things just as we do. ²¹Yes, nature itself will be delivered from the effects of sin, freed from decay, to flourish as God's children will. ²²We know that all creation has been groaning under the load of sin, suffering like those in childbirth from the beginning of our rebellion until now. ²³Not only is nature groaning, but so are we who have tasted the firstfruits of the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit as we wait in hope for the gift of a new body. ²⁴Hope is vital for our restoration. If God answered all our prayers and gave us everything we asked for, we would not long for anything better. If we had everything, there would be nothing to hope for. ²⁵But if we hope for what we don't have, it helps us persevere. In this sense, hope strengthens our

faith in God and our belief in His promise.

²⁶The Holy Spirit is always ready to help us. We don't even know how we should pray or what we really need, and when we think we do, we don't know how to say it right. The Holy Spirit takes our deepest emotions and longings and puts them into the beautiful language of heaven, pleading with God for us as if we were right there. ²⁷Actually, God knows our hearts and the thinking and purpose of the Holy Spirit because the Spirit always speaks to God for His people according to what God wants for us.

God Works All Things for Our Eventual Good

²⁸We know that God is able to bring something good out of every circumstance, as long as we trust Him and remain true to the purpose for which He called us. ²⁹God knows everyone born into this world. His plan is that all of us should be like His Son. This makes His Son the firstborn in God's family, making us all brothers and sisters in Christ. ³⁰God has predestined those who believe in Him to be like His Son, so He gives us all the help we need. Therefore, whoever responds to God's call and believes in His Son. He justifies; and those whom He justifies, He intends to glorify.

³¹What shall we say in response to all this? If God is for us, who can be against us! ³²If God loved us so much that He did not spare His own Son, but let Him suffer for us all, wouldn't He willingly do anything else to help us? ³³Who, then, has a right to bring a charge against God's chosen people, against those who have responded to His call? It is God Himself who stands by their side and justifies them. ³⁴Who dares to condemn what God does? It was God's own Son who died, rose again and is now at the right hand of God interceding for us and confirming our standing with the Father before the whole universe. ³⁵Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Should troubles, hardships, persecutions, hunger, pov-

erty, danger or threat of death?

³⁶As the Scriptures say, "For your sake, Lord, we are willing to face death every day of our lives. We are regarded by the world as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷No! We can more than conquer all these things through Jesus Christ who loves us and died for us. ³⁸I am convinced that nothing can separate us from Christ—life, or death, or angels, or demons, or earthly powers, or things present, or things to come, ³⁹or heights or depths, or anything else. Nothing can drive a wedge between us and God's love as seen in Jesus Christ our Lord.

God and Israel

9 I want to tell you truthfully what I'm concerned about. I'll not lie to you—both my conscience and the Holy Spirit are my witnesses. ²I'm continually grieving, and at times my heart is very heavy. ³I would even be willing to be separated from Christ forever if my kinsmen and Jewish brothers around the world would accept Him. ⁴They are Israelites and have the privilege of being God's adopted people to whom He revealed His majesty and power. They are the people with whom God made agreements, to whom He gave His law, to whom He entrusted the worship services of His Sanctuary and to whom He gave His promises. ⁵The great patriarchs are their fathers. The Son of God Himself became a Jew and has been seated on the right hand of God and put in charge of all things. Praise Him forever! Amen.

God's Mercy

⁶I don't want any of you to get the idea that God's word has failed. Not everyone who is a physical descendant of Jacob, whom God renamed Israel, belongs to spiritual Israel. ⁷The true connection with Abraham comes through Isaac. ⁸We who are the physical children of Abraham are not automatically God's children. Each one of us has to experience the life-changing power of God just as Sarah did.

⁹Sarah's dead womb was changed by the power of God when He said to her, "At this time next year I will return and you will have a baby boy." ¹⁰God's power was seen again when He answered Isaac's prayer, and Rebecca became pregnant with twins. ¹¹Before children are born, they have done nothing good or bad. So why should one twin be chosen above another? If God decides to set one of them apart to do something special for Him, the child is not given that honor because he earned it, but because it was given to him. ¹²God simply told Rebecca, "The second-born will be honored above the first-born," which was contrary to custom. ¹³That's what God wants us to understand when in the Scriptures He says, "I have chosen Jacob, the younger one, not Esau, the older one."

God's Justice

¹⁴What should we say to that? Was God being unfair? Was God playing favorites? That's absurd! ¹⁵God even told Moses, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful." ¹⁶God is not obligated to anyone. His decisions are freely and lovingly made, neither based on what man wants nor on his performance, but on God's choice. ¹⁷Notice what God said about Pharaoh, "I have permitted you to become king in order to show others my power and to spread my name throughout the world." ¹⁸We see from this that God is in charge of everything and that He decides when to display His mercy and when to show His power against someone like Pharaoh who hardens his heart.

¹⁹You're going to say to me, "Why then is God finding fault with us if He's chosen us to be His people? He's going to do what He wants anyway. Who can resist His will?" ²⁰That's not the way to respond to what God does. A clay jar doesn't become angry with the master potter and say, "Why did you choose to make me like this?" ²¹Doesn't the one who makes the jar have the right to

choose what kind to make? Doesn't he make some jars for special use and others for everyday use, whatever is needed? ²²Whether God chooses to show His power or His mercy, He isn't obligated to get our consent before He does so. Can't God choose to demonstrate His infinite patience with those who are fit to be destroyed? ²³Can't He choose to reveal His abundant mercy to those who love Him and prepare them in advance to share His glory? Isn't that His right? ²⁴He doesn't restrict His mercy to the Jews only, but extends it to the Gentiles as well.

²⁵As He said through the prophet Hosea, "I will invite others to be my people, even though they were not my people. I will call those who were not loved, My Beloved." ²⁶This will happen again. Where it said, "You are not God's people," it later said, "You will be called the children of the living God."

²⁷Notice what Isaiah said about us, "Even though the Lord Almighty gave us descendants and promised that we would be as numerous as the sands of the sea, only a remnant of us will be saved. ²⁸God will finish His work quickly and carry out His sentence with speed and finality."

²⁹As Isaiah points out in another place, "If God had not performed a miracle to provide Abraham some descendants, our future would look no different than Sodom and Gomorrah's."

The Stone Over Which Israel Stumbles

³⁰What do we conclude from all of this? The Gentiles, who have not been living by our moral standards, have been accepted by God, because when they learned about Him, they put their faith in Him as Abraham did. ³¹But the descendants of Abraham who tried to live by the law to make themselves acceptable to God never did reach the point of His acceptance. ³²Why not? Because they stumbled over the One who had come to help them. ³³As the Scriptures say, "I am

placing in the streets of Zion a Stone over which men will stumble and a Rock over which they will fall. But whoever puts his faith in this Rock and trusts in Him who died for us will not be disappointed."

Israel Needs the Gospel

10 Brothers, my most earnest desire and constant prayer to God is that all Israel be saved. ²I'm the first to acknowledge that they are very zealous for God, but it is not based on true knowledge and insight. ³They don't seem to understand what God has done to put them right with Him. Too many people are trying to earn their way into heaven instead of depending on what God has already done for them. ⁴Christ's sacrifice should make it evident that law-keeping is not a means of salvation. Righteousness comes from faith in Christ, not from keeping the law.

⁵Moses said, "The man whose righteousness is rooted in the law will have to live or die on the basis of what the law says." ⁶Our righteousness comes by faith, not in what we can do for ourselves, but in what God has already done for us. That's why Moses also said, "Don't be tempted in your heart to think that your right-doing will bring Christ down from heaven. ⁷Or, don't be tempted to think that your right-doing will have anything to do with raising Christ up from the dead." ⁸Then he said, "God's message of salvation is right here with you. He's written His law in your hearts and put His word in your mouths." That's the same faith that I'm proclaiming. ⁹If you confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is your Savior and Lord and in your heart believe that God raised Him from the dead, you will have the kind of relationship with God that you need. ¹⁰Faith is a matter of the heart. It is by faith that we come to Christ and are justified. So we live for God, not in order to be saved, but because we are saved. ¹¹As the Scriptures

say, "Anyone who believes in Him will never be disappointed." ¹²There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. The same God is Lord of all and responds to anyone who calls on Him for help." ¹³The Scriptures also say, "Whoever calls on the Lord will be saved."

Israel's Stubbornness

¹⁴How can anyone call on God if he doesn't believe that He exists? How can anyone put his faith in Christ if he's never even heard about Him? And how can he hear about Him if no one tells him? ¹⁵And how can someone go and preach to others unless he is sent? That's why Isaiah said, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring us good news from the Lord and tell us about His plan of salvation." ¹⁶But not everyone in Israel has accepted this good news. Isaiah also said, "Lord, no one believes what we're telling them." ¹⁷So faith comes from listening to what God says, including His word about the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁸Let me ask you, Didn't they hear God's message? Yes, they heard it. It is written, "The voice of God through His creation reaches to the ends of the earth; its word sounds throughout the world." ¹⁹Let me ask again, Did Israel really not understand? No, they knew and understood. Moses spoke for God, saying, "I will make you jealous by what I do for others, for those who have not been called as a nation as you have. I will disturb your complacency by speaking to those who do not know and understand."

²⁰This message was confirmed by Isaiah when he wrote boldly for God, "I will be found by those who haven't looked for me. I will reveal myself to those who haven't asked about me." ²¹About Israel, He said, "Every day I have stretched out my hands of love to a disobedient and stubborn people."

God Has Not Forsaken His People

11 Does this mean that God has forsaken His people and left them to

themselves? Of course not! I'm living evidence that this is not so! I'm an Israelite, a direct descendant of Abraham through his great-grandson Benjamin. ²God hasn't turned His back on the people whom He foresaw would be His own. Haven't you read what the Scriptures say about Elijah when he cried out to God against Israel? He said, ³"Lord, these people have killed your prophets and smashed your altars. It looks as if I'm the only one left and now they're after me!" ⁴What did God say to him? "I still have seven thousand followers scattered throughout Israel who are loyal to me, who have not been taken in by the worship of Baal." ⁵That's how it is today. In spite of many in Israel who reject Christ, some accept Him and by grace they become God's remnant people. ⁶If the remnant are such by grace, then it is not because of their works. If they could be made God's remnant by what they do, then God's gift of grace would not be a gift.

⁷Through the centuries Israel as a nation tried to be right with God but did not succeed. However, those who accepted God's gift of grace were made right with Him through faith, while others hardened their hearts. ⁸As Moses said, "God will withdraw His grace from those who set their minds against Him, who close their eyes to truth and their ears to what God says. And so it is to this day." ⁹David said, "May their prosperity work against them, may all their plans to get rich fail, may they reap the consequences of their actions, ¹⁰may it affect their health, making them prematurely old, may they taste poverty and may all this happen to them with the hope that they will wake up to their need of grace."

¹¹Does this mean that all Israelites are lost because as a nation they stumbled and fell? Certainly not! But, because they rejected Jesus Christ, the knowledge of God's salvation is being spread among the Gentiles, and hopefully it will make Israel envious, so they, too, will accept Christ as their Savior and become part of spiritual Israel. ¹²Yet Israel's stubborn-

ness has been the means of bringing the knowledge of God's salvation through Christ to the Gentiles sooner than we thought. But just think what would have happened if Israel had accepted God's salvation and taken the riches of His grace to the whole world!

¹³Now let me say a word to those of you who are not Jews since I've been appointed to be your apostle and I want to take full advantage of it. ¹⁴I'm committed to doing everything possible to get my own people to accept Christ. Perhaps they will become envious when they see you rejoicing in God's grace and will want to have that experience themselves. ¹⁵If their rejection of God's grace has brought such reconciling power to all, what would have happened if they had accepted Christ? What a spiritual awakening would have swept the world! ¹⁶If part of the bread the priest offers to God as first-fruits of the harvest is holy, then so is the rest of the bread. If the roots of a tree are good, the branches will be good too.

Gentiles Grafted Into Israel

¹⁷Israel is like an olive tree. Some branches from it have been broken off, and some of you Gentiles, like wild olive branches, have been grafted in and are now flourishing. But aren't you flourishing because you're being nourished from the same roots as the original branches? ¹⁸Don't say that you're better than the original branches. If you start boasting about your own spirituality, don't forget that it's the roots which give you life, not the other way around. ¹⁹You might argue that the old branches were broken off to make room for you. ²⁰But wait. Why were they broken off? Because they didn't believe God, but put their faith in themselves. The only way you're different is that you've put your faith in God and not in yourself. So don't become overconfident and proud, but maintain a healthy fear. ²¹For if God had to cut off some of the original branches because they didn't produce acceptable fruit, He

will do the same to you. ²²Consider not only God's kindness, but also His justice. He was fair in what He did to the original branches, and He was loving and gracious to you by grafting you into His tree. But you'll stay grafted in only if you continue in His kindness and are kind yourself; otherwise, you'll have to be cut off. ²³If the old branches which were cut off would turn from their unbelief and accept God's gift of grace, He would graft them back in. ²⁴If you could be taken from a wild olive tree whose roots are bad and be grafted into an olive tree whose roots are good, how much easier it would be for the original branches to be grafted back into the tree from which they were taken.

Spiritual Israel Includes Gentiles

²⁵I'm telling you this, my brothers, so you will understand the mystery of God's plan and not become conceited about your salvation. Since part of Israel has hardened her heart, God's plan for her will not be complete until the full number of Gentiles wanting to be saved is reached. ²⁶All true Israelites will be saved, whether they are Jew or Gentile. As the Lord says, "Out of Zion will the Deliverer come and He will take away all evil from Jacob's family. ²⁷This is the covenant that I made with them when I promised to take away their sins." ²⁸Because Israel didn't accept the gospel, they are seen as enemies of God's grace, but He loves them very much, just as He did the patriarchs. ²⁹God has never changed His mind about His gift of grace and His call for us to accept it. ³⁰Just as you were once disobedient to God but now have received mercy as a result of the disobedience of Israel, ³¹so the same thing can happen to them. They can receive God's mercy in spite of having been disobedient, because God wants to do for them what He has done for you. ³²All of us have at some time refused to obey God and He has allowed us to be stubborn, yet He extends His

mercy to us so that His love may be seen.

³³Oh, the depth and richness of the unsearchable wisdom and knowledge of God! How far beyond our human understanding are His gracious decisions and His ways of carrying them out! ³⁴As Isaiah says, "Who can explain the way God thinks? Or, who can counsel Him how to do things?" ³⁵And Job says, "Who has given anything to God that God should repay Him?" ³⁶God has made all things. Everything begins with Him, comes to us because of Him and is used by Him to work out His purposes. To such a God be glory and honor forever. Amen!

Grateful and Reasonable Service

12 Therefore I plead with you, my brothers, because of God's kindness and mercy toward you, offer your lives as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to Him. This is both reasonable and the spiritual way to worship God. ²Don't pattern your life after this world, but let God transform you from the inside out and give you a new way of thinking. Then you will know what is good and pleasing to Him and what is not.

Spiritual Gifts

³By the grace God has given me, I urge you not to think that you are better than anyone else. Think and judge soberly, using the amount of faith God has given you. ⁴The church is something like your own body. It has numerous parts and each part has to carry out its particular function. ⁵So in Christ all of us make up one body. And in that way we all belong to each other and need to work together just as the different parts of our bodies do. ⁶In the church we have different responsibilities, depending on our natural talents and the spiritual gifts God gave us. If you've been given the gift of prophecy, then confidently carry out your responsibility, exercising faith and depending on God to help you. ⁷If you've received the gift of pastoral concern, then do that. Or, if you have the gift of teaching, then con-

centrate on that. ⁸If God has given you the gift to counsel and encourage others, do it. If you've been blessed monetarily, then feed the poor and help support God's cause, but do it without display. If you have the gift of leadership, do so diligently and with care. If you've been given the capacity to show kindness and compassion, do it joyfully.

Live Like a Christian

⁹Love each other sincerely, not hypocritically. Turn away from everything evil and hold on to everything good. ¹⁰Be kind and courteous to one another as true brothers and sisters in the family of Christ, honoring each other above yourselves. ¹¹Don't be lazy; do your work enthusiastically, just as if you were working for the Lord Himself. ¹²Rejoice in the hope you have, hold on to your faith and never stop praying. ¹³Take care of your brothers and sisters in Christ who have lost their jobs because of their faith; open your home to them. But don't restrict your kindness only to church members; be ready to help everyone in need.

¹⁴Ask God to bless those who persecute you. Bless them; don't curse them. ¹⁵Be joyful with those who are happy and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Show the same concern for everyone, member and nonmember alike. Don't be proud and favor the rich but associate with the poor and respect them. Don't keep thinking about how great you are. ¹⁷Don't get even with someone who does you wrong. You do what is right. ¹⁸As far as is humanly possible, try to get along with everyone. ¹⁹Dear friends, never take revenge but turn your hostility over to God. The Scriptures make it clear. "I will see that justice is done. I will take care of it," says the Lord. ²⁰"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he's thirsty, give him something to drink." By doing this, you're placing him in the hands of God for judgment. ²¹So don't let wicked people get to you; counteract the bad things they

do to you by doing good things for them.

Obey the Government

13 Obey your government. Even though you may not always agree with those in power, human governments do have a part in God's overall plan. They would have no such power if God did not allow it. ²Anyone who is against law and order is against what God has established. If you resist laws, you may not only find yourself opposing God, but being arrested as a lawbreaker as well. ³Generally speaking, rulers don't arrest and punish people who are good, but those who are bad. You don't have to be afraid of those who rule over you unless you do evil. So do what's good, and you will be honored. ⁴In this sense, law enforcement officers are serving God because they are put there to arrest and punish those who do evil. So, if you do evil, then you're contributing to the breakdown of society, and you have good reason to be afraid. Human government is God's agent of justice to punish those who do wrong. ⁵That's why you should be a good citizen, not only to avoid God's displeasure, but in order to maintain a good conscience. ⁶This is the same reason we pay taxes, because those who enforce the law are serving God by maintaining law and order and keeping the peace. ⁷So give to everyone what rightfully belongs to him, taxes to the tax collectors, custom fees to the custom officials, respect to those in authority and honor to whom honor is due.

Love Your Neighbor

⁸Pay as you go, and stay out of debt, except the debt of loving each other. He who loves is fulfilling God's law. ⁹God's law also says, "Don't commit adultery, don't kill, don't steal, don't lie and don't covet." These and the other commandments can be summarized in one statement: Love your neighbor as you love yourself. ¹⁰Love doesn't do things to hurt others. That's why love ful-

fills all the requirements of God's law.

Be Honest

¹¹Considering the times we're living in, it's high time to wake up, because our lives might end sooner than we think. If it was important for us to have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ when we first became believers, it's much more important now. ¹²The night of sin is coming to an end and the dawn of God's eternal morning will follow. So throw away everything belonging to the darkness of this world and take up the armor of light. ¹³Conduct yourselves honestly, as people do in the daytime. Don't get involved in those things that people like to do in the dark, such as carousing, drunkenness, sensuality of all kinds, sexual orgies, fighting and jealousies. ¹⁴Put on the robe of Christ's righteousness and don't do as others whose constant effort in life is to satisfy the cravings of their sinful human nature.

Nonessentials

14 Accept as brothers those who don't know as much as you do regarding their newly found faith, and don't argue over nonessentials. ²Some get hung up on the idea that what they eat will affect God's love for them, so they eat nothing but vegetables. Others think their salvation isn't affected at all by what they eat, so they eat anything. ³Don't let those who think they can eat anything look down on those who are careful about what they eat. The reverse is also true. Don't let those who are careful about what they eat stand in judgment on the eating habits of those who eat anything, because God accepts both. ⁴Don't judge other people's employees. Each employee is responsible to the people he works for, not to you. God will help him know what's right and do it.

⁵The same thing applies to religious festivals. One person thinks he has to keep every Jewish festival, while another thinks those days are no different from

other days. About nonessentials like these, everyone needs to make up his own mind. ⁶The main point in all this is to honor God and be grateful for what God has done for you. The same thing applies to what we eat or don't eat. One person eats meat and is grateful to God for what he has. Another person does not eat meat and is also grateful to the Lord for what he has. There is no reason to judge either of them, for they are both honoring God and are grateful, and that's what really matters. ⁷On the other hand, we should not think that as long as we're not hurting anyone, it doesn't matter what we do. Everything we do in life affects others; even the way we accept death. ⁸While we live, we should live for the Lord, and when the time comes to die, we should do it in such a way as to honor Him again. Then people will know that, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹Christ lived a righteous life and then died and rose to life again, which makes Him Lord of both the living and the dead.

¹⁰We're all saved because of Christ. So why judge someone because his Christian experience is not exactly like yours? Why turn against him? Isn't he your brother? One day all of us will have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ¹¹It is written, "'As I live,' says the Lord, 'one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that I am God and there is none else.'" ¹²So each one of us has to give account of himself to God.

¹³Therefore, let's not pass judgment on each other. And let's not put a stumbling block or any other hindrance in the way of a brother and cause him to sin.

Don't Destroy a Believer's Faith

¹⁴As one who has been enlightened by Jesus Christ, I am convinced that nothing which He created to be food for man is unclean within itself, but if some consider clean foods to be unclean, then it's wrong for them to eat them. ¹⁵On the other hand, if a brother gets upset when

he sees you eating what he thinks is unfit to eat, then, out of love for your brother, stop it. Don't destroy his faith in what he thinks is right because of food. Christ died for him too, you know. ¹⁶Don't spoil the good news of the gospel by making an issue over this with your brother. ¹⁷God's kingdom doesn't center in what we eat or drink, but it has to do with doing what's right and with peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸The person who serves Christ in this way pleases God and wins the approval of others. ¹⁹Let's talk about things that bring peace and joy, especially those things that build up people's faith in the Lord. ²⁰To make an issue over food destroys what God is trying to do. Even if certain foods are all right to eat, it's still wrong for anyone to show off his freedom in Christ by eating what offends others. ²¹It's better not to eat or drink or do anything that will make your brother stumble by questioning his relationship with Jesus Christ. ²²Whatever you believe about these things, keep it to yourself. Eat what you feel you can eat, but do it in your own house. If your conscience doesn't convict you about what you're eating, be grateful and enjoy it. ²³Now if a man publicly states that eating certain foods is wrong, then turns around and eats them, his inconsistency will destroy his brother's faith. And whatever destroys faith is sinful.

Help One Another

15 If you think you're spiritually strong, then you ought to help those you think are spiritually weak and not use all of your time and energy to please yourself. ²All of us should be encouraging one another as true brothers and sisters do, building up each other's faith. ³Even Christ didn't live for Himself. As the Scriptures say, "The insults they hurl at you, they hurl at me." ⁴Whatever was written for our forefathers was also written for us. Our endurance comes from the encouragement we receive from Scripture which gives us hope. ⁵May the

God of patience and comfort give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as is fitting for those who follow Jesus Christ. ⁶Then with one mind and voice we can glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and tell each other how good He is.

Accept One Another

⁷Accept each other in the Lord the same way Christ accepted you, and do it for the glory of God. ⁸Christ came to minister to the people of Israel, to show that God's promises to our ancestors were true. ⁹He also came so the Gentiles may praise God for His mercy. As it is written, "I will bring honor to your name among the Gentiles so they, too, will sing your praise." ¹⁰In another place the Scriptures say, "Rejoice, you Gentiles. You are part of God's people." ¹¹In still another place the Scriptures say, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles. Praise Him, all you peoples!" ¹²Isaiah is even more pointed when he says, "The root of God's tree is in Israel, but the branches will reach out to the Gentiles. He will rule over them, and they, too, will learn to put their trust in God." ¹³May the God of hope fill your hearts with joy and peace so that your lives will overflow with hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's Mission to the Gentiles

¹⁴I am fully convinced, my brothers, that you are full of goodness and quite capable of instructing and encouraging each other. ¹⁵In some ways, I've written more boldly to you on these points than I normally like to do, but only because of the special gift of grace God gave me. ¹⁶God has called me to be an apostle to the Gentiles. In this sense I'm like a priest bringing offerings to God, which offerings you are, made acceptable by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷Therefore, I have a right to rejoice both in what God has done for me as well as in what He has done for you. ¹⁸I would not dare speak about anything that I have done myself, only what Christ

has done through me to help the Gentiles obey Him. ¹⁹Everything I said was accompanied by mighty signs and miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit. I have preached the good news about Jesus Christ from Jerusalem to Illyricum. ²⁰Ever since the Lord called me to take the gospel to the Gentiles, it has been my set purpose to preach where no one else has preached and where people have not yet heard about Christ. This way no one could accuse me of building on what someone else had started. ²¹As the Scriptures say, "The gospel will be given to those who have been spiritually blind, and those who have never heard of Him will understand."

Paul Plans to Go to Visit Spain

²²Many times I've been prevented from coming to you. ²³But now that I've completed my missionary journeys in this part of the empire, I really want to meet you and fellowship with you also. I've been longing to do this for some time. ²⁴I plan to go to Spain and on the way I would like to stop over in Rome to enjoy your company, even if it's just for a little while. I hope you can assist me on my way through and help make the work there successful. ²⁵But first I have to go to Jerusalem with the relief offerings for our believers there. ²⁶Believers in Macedonia and southern Greece have donated funds to help provide some of the necessities for our members in Palestine. ²⁷These people were more than happy to do this because they feel indebted to believers there for sharing with them the good news about Jesus Christ. They decided that the least they could do in turn was to share with them their material blessings. ²⁸After I take their gifts to Jerusalem and make sure the believers there understand the great love behind these gifts, I will stop by to see you on the way to Spain. ²⁹When I come, I will share with you the many spiritual blessings that the gospel of Jesus Christ has brought us.

³⁰In the meantime, my brothers, I appeal to you, out of love for the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, that you pray for me as I visit Jerusalem. ³¹Pray that I'll be able to face the hostility of those in Israel who do not believe in the Lord and that the believers there will gratefully accept the love offerings from the Gentiles without embarrassment or misunderstanding. ³²Also pray that I will have a safe journey and can come to you with joy and together we'll be spiritually refreshed. ³³Meanwhile, may the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Greetings to Everyone

16 When Phoebe comes, receive her as your sister in the faith. She's a member of the church here in Cenchrea, and I highly recommend her to you. ²Accept her in the Lord, and help her in whatever way you can with what she needs. She has been a great help to us, always encouraging people, including me. ³Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ. ⁴They've risked their lives to save me. I'm grateful for believers like that, including many we now have among the Gentiles. ⁵Also, greetings to the little group meeting in their house. Give special greetings to Epenetus, whom I love dearly because he was my first convert in Asia Minor. ⁶Greetings to Mary who has worked so hard to help us. ⁷Give our greetings to Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who were also imprisoned for Christ's sake just as I was. They are well known by the apostles and, in fact, accepted Christ before I did. ⁸Greetings to Ampliatus, whom I dearly love in the Lord. ⁹Greet Urbanus, a fellow worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. ¹⁰Greetings to Apelles, whose faith was tested and who proved to be loyal, and to Aristobulus and his family. ¹¹Greet Herodion, who is also one of my relatives, and the family of Narcissus who are all in the Lord. ¹²Greetings to Tryphena and Tryphosa, two women who never stop working for Christ, and to

Persis, another woman who works hard for the Lord. ¹³Greet Rufus for me, a chosen disciple in the Lord, and also his mother who has treated me like her own son. ¹⁴Greetings to Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and all the believers who worship with them. ¹⁵Finally, give my greetings to Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, to Olympas, and to all the believers who live with them. ¹⁶When you see these people, give them a brotherly kiss. All the churches who are in Christ send their greetings to you.

Avoid Those Who Oppose Basic Doctrines

¹⁷I beg you, my brothers, watch out for those who criticize and create problems and oppose the basic doctrines you've been taught. It is best for you to avoid them. ¹⁸These kinds of people are not really serving the Lord Jesus Christ but are serving their own interests. They speak kindly and acceptably to everyone and go around deceiving members who don't know the Scriptures as they do. ¹⁹But you have a reputation for obedience and it has spread everywhere. I'm glad for what I hear about you. Still, I want you to be careful to whom you listen. Stay away from evil and keep living good, honest lives. ²⁰The God of peace will help you

triumph over the Satanic forces in Rome. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ continue to be with you.

Greetings from Paul and Others

²¹Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives. ²²I'm Tertius, the one writing all these things down for Paul. I want to add my greetings in the Lord also. ²³Gaius, whose hospitality we all enjoy, sends his greetings. Erastus, the city's director of public works, and our good Christian brother, Quartus, also send their greetings. ²⁴The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you. Amen.

Concluding Prayer

²⁵Glory be to God, who has the power to establish your faith in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ which I preach. For centuries it was hidden in symbols not fully understood. ²⁶But now it has been made clear and is openly preached, based on the prophetic writings and the command of God, so that people everywhere might believe and obey Him. ²⁷To our all-wise God be honor, glory and praise through Jesus Christ, both now and forever. Amen.

1 CORINTHIANS

Paul Set Apart by Christ

1 This letter is from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ called by the will of God, and from our brother Sosthenes, ²to the church in Corinth which is made up of people set apart by Jesus Christ, called to be saints, together with believers everywhere who accept Christ as Lord. ³Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from His Son Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Gifts

⁴I thank God every time I think about you, particularly for the grace of God which has been given to you in Jesus Christ. ⁵God has enriched your congregation with many spiritual gifts to help you understand the gospel better and to tell others about God's great plan of salvation. ⁶Through the Holy Spirit you even have the testimony of Jesus in your midst, which is the gift of prophecy, confirmed as genuine while we were still in Corinth with you. ⁷You lack no spiritual gift as you look forward to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸He will keep you strong to the end, and when He comes, you'll be able to stand before the universe totally blameless. ⁹You can always depend on what God says. When He called you into His grace, He called you into fellowship with His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Plea for Unity

¹⁰I plead with you, my brothers, in the name of Christ, agree with each other and hold to the core of our faith so you don't end up splitting the church. You need to function as one body, having the same values, moral standards and objective to live for Christ. ¹¹The Chloe family has told me about some of the differences you're having. ¹²Apparently, some of you are saying, "I'm committed to what Paul says," and others, "I'm committed to what Apollos says." Still others say, "I'm committed to what Peter says,"

and there are some who say, "I'm committed to what Christ says." ¹³Now let me ask you: Can Christ be divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴If that's what you think, then I'm glad I didn't baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius. ¹⁵Otherwise, I would be accused of baptizing people in my name. ¹⁶Oh, yes, I did baptize the family of Stephanas, but besides them, I don't remember anyone else. ¹⁷Christ didn't call me to baptize (although I can do that too), but to preach the good news of salvation. Big words and complicated theological terms are not what win people to Christ. If I preached that way, the cross of Christ would lose its power.

Wisdom of Man Inadequate

¹⁸Those who have bought into this world's philosophy see the preaching of the cross as foolishness. But for those of us who are being saved, there is no doubt that it is the power of God. ¹⁹As it is written: "I will reject the wisdom of man as a means of attaining salvation and frustrate the attempts of scholars to solve it by human reason."

²⁰If that is so, then where does that leave those who are wise? What does that do to these scholars? God's plan of salvation has made their intellectual gymnastics look rather foolish. ²¹The world never did come to know God through human wisdom. It was God's purpose that people should be saved by believing what may sound intellectually foolish. ²²The Jews look for miracles as proof before they believe, and the Greeks look to logic and think that everything has to make sense before they believe. ²³But we keep right on preaching Christ crucified. The Jews are offended because they still look for the Messiah, and the Greeks think God dying on a cross is nonsense. ²⁴But to those who have responded to God's call, whether they are

Jews or Greeks, the crucified and risen Christ is the power and wisdom of God. ²⁵The so-called foolishness of God is wiser than man, and the weakness of God, Christ hanging on the cross, is stronger than man.

²⁶Brothers, think of what you were before. Not many of you were wise, politically powerful or of noble birth. ²⁷God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. He uses the meek and teachable people of this world to put to shame those who think they have all the answers. ²⁸God uses methods which some think are foolish and does so to stop those who think they know it all. ²⁹This way, no one can boast before God about his own wisdom and strength. ³⁰It is because of God's plan that we are in Christ, who is our wisdom. He is our substitute for righteousness and our redemption and sanctification. ³¹As the Scriptures say, "If anyone wants to boast, let him boast about the Lord."

1 Preach Christ Crucified

2 My brothers, when I came to your city, I didn't come to attract you by my oratory or intellect as I shared with you the mystery of God's plan of salvation. ²I determined not to talk about anything with you except Jesus Christ and the meaning of His crucifixion. ³I came to you as one who was weak because I was afraid that if I came on strong you would focus on me and not on Jesus Christ. ⁴So I didn't use flowery words or persuasiveness of wisdom, but allowed the Holy Spirit to do His mighty work, so no one could say it was my influence that did it. ⁵That way your faith was not anchored in the logic of men but in the power of God.

Spiritual Things

Are Spiritually Understood

⁶Those who are spiritually mature see wisdom in what I'm saying. This is not the wisdom of this world or of its rulers whose kingdoms will one day pass away. ⁷God's wisdom sounds strange and illogi-

cal to the human mind. Before time began, God conceived this plan of redemption to give us a share in Christ's glory. ⁸This is the wisdom that the rulers of this world didn't understand. If they had, they wouldn't have crucified the Lord of glory as they did. ⁹That's why the Scriptures say, "The eyes of man can't see, his ears can't hear and his mind can't imagine what God has in mind to do for those who love Him."

¹⁰God has revealed His plans for us in the Scriptures. And if anyone can read the mind of God or know the way He thinks, it's the Holy Spirit who gave us the Scriptures. ¹¹Which one of us can know what another man is thinking? Only the man himself knows that. No one can know what God is thinking or the way He thinks except God Himself. But the Holy Spirit, also being God, knows how God thinks. ¹²What we have shared with you is not based on worldly wisdom but on what the Holy Spirit said, that we might know and appreciate all that God has so freely given us. ¹³When we spoke to you, we didn't share with you ideas based on man's wisdom, but on what the Holy Spirit told us. We used words with meanings that the Holy Spirit gave us to explain spiritual things.

¹⁴Without the Holy Spirit, man can't understand what God is trying to tell him. It seems foolish to him because spiritual things can only be understood spiritually. ¹⁵Those who are spiritual understand and are able to evaluate spiritual things. They are not subject to the judgment of critics. ¹⁶As the Scriptures say, "Who can know the mind of the Lord to evaluate Him?" No one! Yet the Holy Spirit has helped us to know the will of God and to have the mind of Christ.

Partisanship Is Sin

3 My brothers, when I first came to you, I couldn't talk to you as men accustomed to speaking about spiritual things. I first had to talk to you as men of the world. Even after you were born

again, I could only talk to you as infants in Christ. ²So I fed you with spiritual milk and not with heavy biblical meat because you weren't able to digest it. I'm still not sure that you can. ³Your thinking and values are still a lot like the thinking and values of the world. You're jealous of each other, constantly arguing about nonessentials. Now you've brought into the church a partisan spirit by rallying around your favorite preacher. Aren't these the actions of men of the world? ⁴One person says, "Paul's my man!" Someone else says, "My man is Apollos!" When you do that, aren't you acting like men of the world?

Every Preacher's Work Tested

⁵What's so important about Paul? What's so important about Apollos? Are we not both ministering to build up your faith and confidence in what God has said according to the task He assigned us? ⁶I've helped plant the seed of faith and Apollos has helped water it, but God gave us the seed to begin with and He's the One who made it grow. ⁷So the man who plants the seed isn't anyone special, nor is the man who waters it. But God is the One who does everything, because His power gives the seed its life. ⁸This means that the person who plants and the one who waters are merely workers. Every man will be rewarded according to the way he does his job. ⁹Apollos and I are laborers together with God. You're like God's field or like His building.

¹⁰In harmony with the grace God has given, I have, as a wise master builder, carefully laid a solid foundation for others to build on. But everyone who builds needs to be careful how he builds. ¹¹There is only one solid foundation, and that foundation is Jesus Christ. No man can lay another. ¹²Some spiritual builders, as they build on Christ, use valuable materials which can be compared to gold, silver and precious stones, while others use less valuable materials which are more like wood, hay

and straw. ¹³Every builder's work will be tested; the day will come when the fires of persecution will sweep through the whole building, then we'll see whose building materials will last. ¹⁴If the spiritual structure he built survives, he'll be rewarded. ¹⁵But if the structure burns up, his work will be lost. He may be saved, but only as escaping from the flames of a burning building.

¹⁶Don't you know that as a congregation you are a living temple of God because the Holy Spirit lives among you? ¹⁷If anyone corrupts the church, God will destroy him because God's temple is holy, and His people are His temple.

Worldly Wisdom Is Foolishness

¹⁸Don't be swept off your feet by someone's brilliant mind. The standards the world sets are not a reliable measure of spiritual things. If someone is really wise, he'll be willing to be thought of as a fool in order to become wise in the things of God. ¹⁹The wisdom of the world is foolishness to God. As the Scriptures say, "God traps the wise in the nets of their own cleverness." ²⁰The Scriptures further say, "The Lord knows the thoughts of those who think they are wise, but their schemes are nothing but a puff of wind." ²¹Let no one boast about man's intelligence or cleverness. Your worth is rooted in Jesus Christ, and all the blessings of God are yours. ²²Paul, Apollos and Peter are all for you. We're not competitors, but each one is working in his own way for your good. This world with its past, present and future—even life and death—all work together for your benefit. ²³You belong to Jesus Christ and Jesus belongs to God.

Entrusted With the Mysteries of God

4 You should think of us as servants of Christ and as those who have been entrusted with the mysteries of God. ²The one thing required of those who have been entrusted with something is to show that they can be trusted. ³It doesn't

matter to me what you think of me or how the church there judges me. I don't even try to judge myself. ⁴As far as I know, my labors have been without fault, but I'll let God decide that. A man's conscience isn't always a good guide. ⁵So don't judge others before God's appointed time. Wait until the Lord comes, and let Him decide. He'll bring to light what is done in darkness, including a man's motives. In that day every worker will receive his praise from God, and that's what really counts.

Willing to Be Fools for Christ

⁶Apollos and I are your servants to minister to your spiritual needs. You need to listen to us, but not beyond what is written in the Scriptures. If you keep comparing us with each other, you'll end up taking pride in one man and hating the other. ⁷Let me ask you: Who made you stand apart from the world? What spiritual riches do you have that weren't given to you? If they were given to you, then why are you acting as if you didn't receive them but got them on your own?

⁸You feel that you have all the spiritual food you need and think you're rich. So you walk around acting like kings. I wish under God that all of you were kings, the right kind, of course, so you could share your blessings with others. ⁹Sometimes I think God purposely put us apostles at the end of the show as they do in the Roman arena when captives are brought in to fight to the death. In a spiritual sense we're God's captives, on display to the world and the universe. ¹⁰Preaching the simple gospel makes us seem foolish, but you think you're wise; we are weak, but you think you're strong; you receive honor, while we are dishonored. ¹¹For years we have suffered from hunger, thirst, lack of clothing, beatings and exposure. ¹²We have worked hard with our own hands to support ourselves. When we were cursed, we blessed, and when we were persecuted, we endured it without complaint. ¹³When people insulted us, we

answered with kind words. To this day we are treated like garbage or the scum of the earth.

Paul's Concern

¹⁴I'm telling you these things, not to make you feel bad or to shame you, but, as my own sons and daughters, to warn you and bring you back to your senses. ¹⁵You may have ten thousand teachers in Christ that you can point to, but how many spiritual fathers do you have? I was the one who was sent by God to bring you to Christ. ¹⁶So if you need to look to someone as your spiritual father, you should follow my example. ¹⁷That's why I'm sending Timothy to you. He's like my son, faithful to the Lord. He will review with you the principles of living for Christ which I teach in all the churches where I go. ¹⁸Some of you have become proud and will feel offended because I'm sending Timothy. You will think I don't want to see you again. ¹⁹But I'll come as soon as I can, unless the Lord directs otherwise. Then I'll not only challenge what these arrogant people are saying to undermine my ministry, but will find out who started all this. ²⁰The kingdom of God is not simply talk, but power. Talk is cheap! ²¹So what do you prefer? Do you want me to come with a verbal whip or with love and gentleness?

Incest in the Church

5 It's reported that one of your members is having sex with his stepmother. That's something even the unconverted Gentiles don't allow. ²And you pride yourselves on being wise? You ought to be weeping and praying that the one doing this will stop or he'll have to be removed as a member of your congregation.

³Even though I'm not there, I don't have to think twice to tell you what to do in this situation. ⁴In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when you meet again, do what I've already decided should be done, for I will be with you in spirit, and the power of Christ will be present. ⁵You

need to condemn this man's actions because they are instigated by Satan, and in doing so, you may be able to wake him up, turn his life around and save his soul.

⁶Just feeling good about your great tolerance isn't enough. Don't you know that it takes only a little yeast to permeate a whole batch of bread? ⁷Get rid of this yeast in your congregation so you can be the unleavened batch of dough that you were when you first accepted Christ. That's why we use unleavened bread at Communion, to remind us that Christ, the innocent Lamb of God, died for our sins. ⁸The next time you celebrate the Lord's Supper, do it without this awful wickedness, this yeast of sin and wickedness in your congregation, but do it without hostility toward this man. You need to celebrate the Lord's Supper with the bread of sincerity and truth.

Church Must Take Action Against Open Sin

⁹I wrote to you previously, reminding you not to socialize with believers who blatantly continue to live in open sin or it will look like you approve of what they're doing. ¹⁰I'm not talking about nonbelievers, because if you want to stay away from adulterers, crooks, greedy people or those who worship false gods, then you'd better live on another planet. ¹¹When I wrote you before, I advised you not to socialize with anyone who calls himself a believer but is known to be immoral, greedy, an idol worshiper, a slanderer, a drunkard or a cheater. Don't keep inviting him to your house, or your neighbors will get the idea that it's all right for Christians to do such things. ¹²It is none of our business to judge those who are not believers, but as a church, we do have a responsibility to discipline our own. ¹³God will judge those outside the church, but you're responsible for disciplining members who are openly disgracing Christ.

Don't Turn Everything Into a Lawsuit

6 Do you dare, when you have a dispute with another member, go to a heathen judge to arbitrate between you instead of taking the problem to fellow believers? ²Don't you know that God's people will one day judge the world? If you will sit in judgment on the whole world, don't you think you should take care of the problems within your own congregation? ³Do you realize that someday you'll be asked to judge angels? So surely you can judge things in this life. ⁴If you have problems, why do you depend on nonmembers who know nothing about what we believe or on judges of ill repute to settle disputes for you? ⁵If you think I'm trying to shame you, you're right. Surely there is at least one person in your congregation wise enough to judge such matters. ⁶Why should brothers go to court to have their little differences settled by a heathen judge?

⁷What you're doing isn't right, turning everything into a lawsuit. Even if a fellow church member defrauds you, try to settle it among yourselves. It is better to suffer wrong as the Lord did rather than making the problem public, thus shaming the name of Christ. ⁸Some of you are quick to judge a brother when he's caught doing wrong and love to expose what he did so you can feel righteous. Yet, you yourselves cheat and wrong your brothers.

⁹Don't you know that evildoers will not inherit the kingdom? Don't be fooled. Those who are immoral, who worship idols, commit adultery, practice homosexuality, abuse themselves or others sexually, ¹⁰who steal, lie, cheat, get drunk, slander and defraud others—none of these will have a part in God's kingdom. ¹¹Some of you were like that before you heard the gospel, but through Christ you have been washed, sanctified and made right with God. And by the power of the Holy Spirit you have started a whole new life.

Honor God With Your Body

¹²Some say, "I'm free, and all things are

lawful for me.” In one sense, that may be true, but while I’m free to do all things, I will not be mastered by anything except Jesus Christ. ¹³Some say, “Eating is part of life; that’s what the stomach was made for.” Or, “Sex is part of life; that’s what our sexual organs were made for.” But if all you think about is food and sex, God will destroy you. The body was not made for over-indulgence in food or sex, but to honor and serve the Lord. It belongs to Him. ¹⁴Just as God honored Christ by resurrecting Him and giving Him a glorified body, He has the same plan for you. ¹⁵Don’t you know that your bodies are part of Christ’s body in this world? Should I take parts of Christ’s body and join them to a prostitute? God forbid! ¹⁶Don’t you know that when someone has sex with a prostitute, part of him becomes part of her? That’s what God meant when He created the two sexes in the beginning and said, “The two will become one body.” ¹⁷When you were baptized, you became part of the body of Christ—spiritually one with Him. ¹⁸So stop this immorality in your midst. Every sin that a man commits is done outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body, which was made to honor God. ¹⁹Do you realize that when you became a Christian, your body became a temple for the Holy Spirit to live in? His presence in you is a gift to you from God! So your body belongs to Him. ²⁰You’ve been bought with a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.

Marriage

7 Now to answer the specific questions you asked. You said, “It’s not good for a man to get married. It’s best to stay single.” Under the present political circumstances, I would agree. For Christians to take on the responsibilities of marriage now just doesn’t seem best. ²However, because of the prevalence of immorality and to avoid falling into sin, a man should not feel that it’s wrong to have his own wife, and a woman should not feel that it’s

wrong to have her own husband. ³And those who are married should not feel that it’s wrong to have sexual relations with their wives or husbands.

⁴The wife should not act as if she were still single. She now belongs to her husband and should strive to make him happy. The same holds true for the man. He’s no longer single but belongs to his wife and should strive to make her happy. ⁵When you’re married, you should not overlook each other’s sexual needs, unless you both agree to do so for a while to devote yourselves to fasting and prayer. But when that time is over, you need to resume your sexual relationship lest Satan tempt one or the other of you to have sex with someone else. ⁶This advice on marriage is not something the Lord has commanded in the Scriptures nor shown me in vision, but it comes from the conviction of the Holy Spirit and from years of experience and insight into God’s will. ⁷Actually, I wish that all of you were not tied down with family responsibilities so you could come and go as I do. It would be easier for you to help spread the good news about Jesus Christ. But everyone has his own talents and gifts which God has given him, and each talent and gift is different.

⁸My advice is that those of you who are unmarried or who are widows or widowers should stay that way and be as I am. Under the present circumstances, with the threat of persecution hanging over our heads, that’s the only sensible thing to do. ⁹If a couple is in love and can’t manage their desires and emotions, let them go ahead and get married, even under these adverse circumstances. It’s better to do that than to feel you are burning up from unexpressed love.

Marriage to an Unbeliever

¹⁰To those who are married I say (and this is from the Lord), that a wife should not leave her husband just because she thinks that under the present circumstances it’s better to live alone. ¹¹But if

she does, she must not change her mind and marry someone else. If she can't stand living alone, let her be reconciled to her husband. This same advice applies to the husband. It's wrong to use the impending distress as an excuse to leave each other, then marry someone else.

¹²To the rest of you I would say (and on this point it's again from the conviction God gave me and not a direct vision), if a man has a wife who has never accepted the Lord Jesus Christ, but she loves him and wants to stay with him, he should not leave her. ¹³And if a woman has an unbelieving husband who loves her and wants to stay with her, she should not leave him. ¹⁴The non-Christian husband who loves his Christian wife is considered by the Lord as set apart from the world just as his wife is, because they are one. The same applies to the non-Christian wife who loves her Christian husband. Otherwise your children would be raised like pagans. But now they are set apart because of their parents. Wherever a loving atmosphere exists and the children are taught to love Christ, the whole family is considered by God as His. ¹⁵If a non-Christian husband or wife wants to leave you because of your religion, then it's best to let him or her go. Under those circumstances you are not obligated to stay together. God calls us to live in peace. ¹⁶None of you know what impact you're having on your non-Christian spouse. There is no way to know in advance whether a wife's love and care will be a factor in her husband's conversion or not, or whether a husband's kindness and tenderness toward his unbelieving wife will be a factor in saving her.

Advice for Times of Persecution

¹⁷But for the present, my advice is to remain married or single, just as you were when you gave your heart to the Lord, unless some unusual circumstances dictate otherwise. This is what I recommend in all the churches. ¹⁸If you

were circumcised when the Lord found you and called you to become a Christian, don't feel bad and wish you had never been circumcised. If anyone became a Christian who was not circumcised, he shouldn't do so now. ¹⁹In our relationship with Christ, whether we're circumcised or not doesn't make any difference. What really matters is whether or not we love Him and obey His commandments. ²⁰We don't have to cut our bodies or change our circumstances before God can accept us. When you became a Christian, God accepted you just as you were.

²¹You asked about some of our believers who are slaves. If you became a Christian while you were a slave, that doesn't make you inferior. If you have a choice to gain your freedom, by all means do so. ²²If you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior while you were a slave, the moment you did this, your spirit was free! If you accepted Christ as a free person, you became a slave, willingly doing whatever your Lord asks you to do. ²³Christ paid the price for each of you. Don't become a slave to anyone or anything. ²⁴In whatever place in life Christ found you, stay there for now, for God is with you.

Questions About Getting Married

²⁵Your next question had to do with virgins. Again, I have no direct instructions from the Lord on this, but am giving you advice as someone who is guided by the Holy Spirit and by the mercy of the Lord can be trusted. ²⁶Considering the possibility of persecution and some of the hard circumstances Christians already find themselves in, I can't give any other advice except to stay single. ²⁷However, if you're already engaged to be married, don't break up. If you're not yet engaged, don't go out looking for a husband. ²⁸But if you get married, you haven't sinned. The only thing is that those of you who do get married will have the usual problems of marriage on

top of everything else that we presently have to face. This is what I want to spare you from.

²⁹What I mean is, soon we could face persecution, and when that happens, those who are married might find themselves painfully torn apart. So it's not best to make plans too far into the future, because you might not be together that long. Use the time you have to serve the Lord. ³⁰If bad things happen to you, don't be overcome with grief. If good things happen to you, don't become too elated. If you recently bought things, don't become too attached to them. ³¹Those who own a business, don't become too caught up in it, for the relative peace we have will not last much longer.

³²My concern is that you be as free from worry and problems as possible. When a man is single, he only has to worry about himself and can serve the Lord more easily in these troubled times than can the man who is married. ³³When he is married, a man must take many more things into consideration, because he needs to watch out for the welfare of his wife and children and care for them. ³⁴This holds true for a woman as well. The unmarried woman can give more time to the Lord. But the woman who is married must divide her time the best she can between spiritual things and family responsibilities. ³⁵I'm telling you this for your own good, not to create more problems for you. You need to give undivided attention to the Lord's cause.

³⁶In the case of a man who is engaged but thinks that getting married might be wrong, though he has a hard time keeping his love for his fiancée under control, or if he's already past the best age to marry, let him marry. It is not a sin. ³⁷Another man might decide to break his engagement and not get married. If he has his passion under control, he hasn't sinned by not going ahead with the marriage. ³⁸So the man who gets married does what's right, but the man who does not get married, considering the

present circumstances, does better.

³⁹Remember that once a woman gets married, she's legally bound to her husband as long as he lives. Only after he dies is she free to marry whom she chooses as long as he belongs to the Lord. ⁴⁰But considering the impending distress, if she decides to stay single, she'll be glad she did. This is my judgment which the Holy Spirit convicted me to tell you.

Don't Teach Someone to Ignore Conscience

8 You also wrote and said, "We're all intelligent enough to know that eating food offered to idols means nothing." But being intelligent doesn't necessarily mean you're always right. Knowledge alone leads to pride, but love understands and reaches out to others. ²The fact that someone thinks he has all the answers shows that he doesn't really know much. ³The most important thing in life is to love God. That's even more important than being educated. God knows who loves Him and who doesn't.

⁴Now about this business of eating food offered to idols. We all know that an idol is just a piece of stone or wood. It doesn't know what's going on nor can it influence anyone's life. We also know that there is only one God, and He governs all things in this world and throughout the universe. ⁵People talk about the power of their idols who supposedly are in heaven or somewhere on earth. And they keep inventing more and more idols to help them. ⁶We know that there is only one God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He made all things and it is through His power that we live. There is only one Jesus Christ through whom all things were created and through whom we are saved.

⁷However, some in your congregation still believe that idols can influence their lives for good or bad. It takes time to get over this. So naturally they'll hesitate to eat food offered to idols because when

they do so, they feel that the idol will control them. ⁸We know that isn't so, and eating that kind of meat or not eating it has nothing to do with our relationship to God one way or the other. ⁹What you really need to be concerned about is not to abuse the freedom you have in Christ or end up hurting others who feel differently about this than you do.

¹⁰If a new convert sees you accepting an invitation to a community function held in an idol's temple, you're not helping him. By your example, you're teaching him to do what he feels is wrong. ¹¹If you use your freedom and knowledge to teach your brother to ignore his conscience, and he does so, you're weakening his faith. You may destroy his walk with Christ who died to save him. ¹²By doing this to your brother and hurting his conscience, you have sinned against him and against Christ. ¹³If I know that eating food offered to idols offends someone, I will not eat it as long as I live. I will not hurt my brother, nor will I teach him to ignore his conscience.

Paul's Apostleship

9 Let me ask you something. Am I not an apostle? Haven't I personally seen and talked with Jesus Christ? Aren't you the fruits of my work in the Lord? ²Even if others don't accept me as an apostle, your conversion is the seal that authenticates my apostleship.

³To those who would question my calling, this is my answer. ⁴Don't apostles have a right to eat and drink at your expense? ⁵Don't we have a right to bring along a wife in order to have some kind of family life as others do? Don't we have the same right as Peter, the other apostles and the Lord's stepbrothers to be supported by you? ⁶Don't Barnabas and I have a right to be paid for what we have done for you so we don't have to keep mending tents to support ourselves? ⁷Whoever heard of soldiers going to war without being paid by those they defend? Who plants a vineyard and then isn't al-

lowed to eat the grapes? Who feeds a herd of cows and doesn't let his family drink their milk?

⁸Am I saying this to prove something to my own advantage, or is what I'm saying based on the Scriptures? ⁹God said to Moses, "Tell the people not to muzzle an ox who is pulling the threshing sledge to keep him from eating the grain." Did God say this only because He's concerned about the animal? ¹⁰Or is there a message in it for us as well? Yes, it was written so that a man who plows and plants can do it in the hope that he'll get something from his work. And the man who threshes out the grain can do it in the hope of getting his share of the harvest. ¹¹So if we have sowed spiritual seed and worked to reap a harvest for the Lord, is it wrong for us to get paid for what we're doing so we don't have to live like beggars?

¹²If others claim their right to be fed by you and you're willing to pay them, don't we have the right to a similar payment? But we haven't requested it. Instead, we have chosen to suffer and go hungry. Why? For the sake of the gospel and so no one can say that we're in the ministry to get rich. ¹³Don't you know that in any religion, priests who work in the temple get paid from the money donated and that even the caretakers share in the food that people bring to the altar? ¹⁴The Lord told us that the same thing applies to those who go from place to place preaching the gospel.

¹⁵Now I have never asked to be paid for my work. Nor am I writing this letter to ask you to support me. I would rather die than have any of you think that I'm preaching the gospel for money. ¹⁶I preach the gospel because I'm compelled to do so. Woe is me if I don't preach the gospel and take the good news to all who are ready to listen! ¹⁷If I chose to preach the gospel to make a living, I would expect to get paid for it. But I preach because I've been commissioned by Jesus Christ to do so, and the only pay I need is to see you accept Him as your Savior and

Lord. ¹⁸I preach without pay, because the gospel can then be seen more clearly to be a gift. So I will not use my right to get paid for my ministry.

Free but Obligated

¹⁹Even though I am a free man and obligated to no one, I'm a slave to everyone to win as many people to Christ as I possibly can. ²⁰When I preach to the Jews, I try to live as a Jew in order to win them to Christ. When I preach to Pharisees who are very law-conscious, I try to live just as carefully and scrupulously as they do in order to win them. ²¹To the non-Jews I try as much as possible to live as they do, even though I can't be quite as free-living as they are, because I'm still under God's law, and even more under the law of Christ. But I do live as close to their way as possible in order to win them. ²²And to those who are sensitive about certain issues, I try to be sensitive about the same issues. I try to fit into the social and cultural patterns of people as much as I can in order to win them to Christ. ²³I do this for the sake of the gospel so together we can share in its blessings.

The Gospel Race

²⁴Everyone who runs in the Olympics gives it all he has, but only one person wins the laurel wreath. That's how you should run the gospel race, giving it everything you've got. But in the gospel race, everyone who runs faithfully and finishes is a winner. ²⁵Now those who compete in these games train their bodies and abstain from anything that would be harmful. They do it to win that laurel wreath which will soon fade and die, while the prize we receive is the crown of eternal life which will last forever. ²⁶I don't run the gospel race aimlessly as if I don't know where the finish line is. I don't fight by boxing at shadows; I try to make every punch count. ²⁷It's my own body that I hit to keep it under control, so that after preaching to others, I myself won't be disqualified.

Old Testament Examples

10 Now I don't want you to be uninformed or forget certain parts of our Jewish history that have meaning. All our ancestors were led by Christ in a pillar of cloud and brought by Him through the Red Sea. ²The sea parted and they walked over on dry ground. As they went through the waters, they were figuratively baptized by Moses in the presence of Christ who was in the cloud. ³Furthermore, they all ate the same supernatural food from heaven ⁴and drank the same water supernaturally provided by the Rock that was with them, and that Rock was Christ. ⁵In spite of this, most of them rebelled, so God let them die in the wilderness, except for a few.

⁶These things were recorded to teach us not to set our hearts on wanting our own way as they did. ⁷Don't slip into worshipping a god of your own making as some of them did while Moses was up in the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments. As the Scriptures say, "The people ate and drank and got up to indulge in a pagan orgy." ⁸Let's not indulge in sexual sins as some of them did with the Moabites. God showed His disapproval of what they had done, and twenty-three thousand died in a single day, plus more a few days later. ⁹Don't presume on the goodness of God as they did. The Lord could not protect them in their sinning, so He let serpents bite them, and they died.

¹⁰Don't grumble and complain as Korah and others did, sinning against God. They were destroyed by the same angel who killed the firstborn in Egypt. ¹¹All these things are recorded as examples and warnings to us so we won't do the same things they did, especially since we are living at the end of that age. You have more light than they did and are now part of God's people. ¹²But don't become overly confident and think of yourselves as standing so firm that you can't fall or that you can do anything you want and it won't affect your salvation. ¹³Also remember that you haven't had

any temptation that others haven't had. God is faithful and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength but will provide a way of escape so you'll be able to stand up against it.

We Belong to Christ

¹⁴Finally, my dear people, stay away from anything or anyone you might be tempted to worship or idolize. ¹⁵I'm speaking to you as sensible people. Judge what I say for yourselves. ¹⁶Doesn't the grape juice that you pray over and drink at the Lord's Supper represent the blood of Christ? And doesn't the bread which you break and eat represent the body of Christ? ¹⁷Now there is only one bread and if we all eat of it, aren't we saying that we are one people and all belong to Christ because we ate the same bread?

¹⁸Consider the people of Israel. When they ate part of one sacrifice, weren't they considered united in worshiping one God? ¹⁹Am I saying that if you eat food sacrificed to an idol that you're worshiping that idol, or, on the other hand, that you should publicly eat of it if you want to because it doesn't mean anything? ²⁰No! What I'm saying is that food offered to idols is sacrificed to demons. So I don't want people to associate you with such worship. ²¹You can't drink the Lord's grape juice and eat bread at His table and also go and eat at the table of pagan gods. ²²Are you trying to make the Lord jealous and have Him do something He normally wouldn't do? Do you think that you are stronger than the Lord or that you can stop Him from disciplining you?

How to Use Your Christian Freedom

²³Now let's talk about Christian freedom. As a Christian I'm a free man, and in one sense I have a right to do what I want, but some things are not beneficial. In other words, things may be permissible but not useful for building faith. ²⁴Don't be as concerned about your own freedom as much as with your brother's. ²⁵You're free to go to the market to buy

food that has been offered to idols and take it home to eat it. If it doesn't bother your conscience, that's fine. ²⁶Ask the Lord to bless your meal and thank Him for it, because everything we have comes from Him.

²⁷If unbelievers invite you out to dinner and you want to go, go ahead. Select what to eat from what they serve you, and don't worry whether or not it was offered to idols. ²⁸But if the unbelieving host says to you that this or that item of food has been offered to idols, he's showing respect for what you believe. Then for his sake, don't eat those items or he'll think that you don't take your faith seriously. ²⁹I'm not thinking so much about your conscience but about his conscience and his sensitivity to your faith. Don't eat those items. You say, "Why should I let another man's interest in what I believe curb my freedom?" ³⁰If I accept an invitation to dinner and thank God for my food, why should I be criticized because of what I eat?"

³¹Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do everything to bring honor to God. ³²Don't offend people, whether they're Jews, Gentiles, church members or non-church members. ³³I try not to offend anyone in anything I do. I want to be as sensitive to others as I possibly can, not just doing what's good for me but for others, so they may be drawn to Christ and be saved.

11 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Propriety in Worship

²I praise you for remembering me and the things that I have diligently taught you. ³There are some other things I want to tell you. Just as a man accepts Christ as his Lord and a woman accepts her husband as head of the family, so Christ accepts the authority of God. ⁴Because of the culture we live in, certain things we do make a statement about our relationship to God. For instance, if a man keeps

his hat on when he's praying or preaching, he's understood as showing disrespect for God. ⁵It's opposite for a woman. If she prays or speaks without wearing something on her head, she's understood as showing disrespect for her husband and for God as much as if she had shaved her head. ⁶If she doesn't cover her head, then as far as visitors are concerned, she might as well have a shaved head. Just as it's considered undignified and disgraceful for a woman to purposefully shave her head, so it's considered disgraceful for her not to wear something on her head while worshiping God.

⁷A man ought not to cover his head when he worships as some are starting to do, because he was created in the image of God and is God's glory. The woman, on the other hand, came from man and is man's glory. ⁸Adam didn't come from Eve, but Eve came from Adam. ⁹Man was created first, indicating that man should assume the role of head of his family. Woman was created as a companion for the man. ¹⁰Because of this and out of respect for the heavenly angels who are in attendance at worship, women ought to wear something on their heads.

¹¹Nevertheless, in the Lord, men and woman are equal and mutually dependent on each other. ¹²While woman came from man, no man is born without a woman. This arrangement comes from God. ¹³Judge for yourselves. Do you think it's right in our present culture for a woman to pray with her head uncovered?

¹⁴Doesn't nature teach us something about the symbolism of hair? Isn't it harder for a man to grow long hair than for a woman? ¹⁵But a woman grows long hair easily, and it's very becoming to her. Her long hair is a natural covering given her by God. ¹⁶If anyone wants to argue the point, we have no such custom in any of our churches as you're trying to introduce, of women worshiping without a head-covering.

The Common Meal

¹⁷Next, I want to mention something that's not easy for me to say. It's not something I can praise you for. The common agape meal you have preceding the Lord's Supper is doing more harm than good. ¹⁸I hear that when you come together like this, you separate into groups and eat and criticize those in other groups, and I believe it. ¹⁹I know there are differences among you because some know God better than others. He wants those who know Him better to set an example. ²⁰But the way you're acting, how can you then eat the Lord's Supper together?

²¹Some bring food to this common meal and start eating before everyone is served. Soon the whole meal turns into a gluttonous feast. Some even bring in drinks and get drunk, while the poor go home hungry. ²²If you only come together to feast, can't you do that at home? Don't you have any concern for the church as a whole? Why humiliate those who are poor? What do you want me to say about this? Do you expect me to praise you? I cannot.

The Lord's Supper

²³I've received direct instructions from the Lord on how to celebrate Communion, which I want to again pass on to you. The night before Christ was crucified, He took some unleavened bread, ²⁴and after He had blessed it, He broke it, passed it to His disciples and said, "Break off a piece for yourself, and as you eat, think of it as my body which will soon be broken for you. When I'm gone, this will remind you of me." ²⁵Then He took the cup of grape juice, blessed it, passed it to His disciples and said, "This pure juice represents the fulfillment of God's covenant through my blood. When you drink it, remember what I've done for you. ²⁶Every time you get together to eat this bread and drink this juice, you should recall the last days of my life until I come."

Examine Your Heart

²⁷Anyone who celebrates the Lord's Supper the way you're doing is eating and drinking contrary to its purpose and is sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸The way to eat the Lord's Supper is for everyone to stop criticizing others and examine himself. He should confess his sins to God and if need be, his faults to his brothers. Then, in a spirit of gratefulness and joy for what Christ has done for him, he ought to sit down to eat the bread and drink the juice. ²⁹For anyone who eats and drinks without respecting these symbols, knowing that they represent the body of Christ, is bringing judgment on himself. ³⁰Because of your gluttony, you are weak and sickly. It seems that all you think about is eating. Some have suffered heart attacks, and many have died because of this. ³¹If you would judge yourselves, the Lord wouldn't have to judge you. ³²When the Lord judges you, He also disciplines you so you won't be condemned and destroyed along with the world.

³³Listen to me, my brothers. When you get together for your agape dinners, be courteous and wait for each other. ³⁴If someone can't wait, let him first eat at home so God won't judge the whole church because of him. Now, about the other things you asked, I'll give you further instructions when I come.

Spiritual Gifts

12 Concerning spiritual gifts, I don't want you to be ignorant about why they've been given to us. ²Before you accepted Christ, remember how easily you were led to worship one idol after another, and how you became involved in vulgar practices? ³No one who is led by the Holy Spirit will curse Christ. And no one can lift up Christ as Lord without the Holy Spirit.

⁴It's true that there are different gifts, but they all come from the same Holy Spirit. ⁵There are different ministries, but we all serve the same Lord. ⁶People

have different natural abilities, but they all come from the same God. ⁷Each one should use his ability for the good of the church, which is an indication whether or not he has the Holy Spirit. ⁸Now to one person the Holy Spirit gives words of wisdom. To another, He gives words of knowledge. ⁹Someone else is given a special measure of faith; another is given the gift of healing; and so on—all are given by the same Holy Spirit. ¹⁰One person might be given the power to work miracles; another may be called to the office of a prophet; someone else can detect the slightest evidence of demonic forces; others can speak different languages in order to evangelize; and still others can translate those languages so people can understand what was said. ¹¹These gifts are all given by the same Holy Spirit, to whomever and whenever He decides.

Unity and Diversity

¹²The best illustration of this is the human body. Our bodies have many parts, but all the parts make up only one body. So the church, Christ's body on earth, also has many parts, but we function as one body. ¹³That's the purpose of the spiritual gifts which the Holy Spirit gives us. After we're baptized, He uses each of us as a part of the body of Christ. It doesn't make any difference whether we're Jews or Gentiles, free men or slaves, because we've all been given the same Holy Spirit.

¹⁴We know that the human body is not just one big foot, but many parts. ¹⁵Can you imagine my foot saying to me, "I'm going to stop walking because you don't give me the same recognition that you give to the hand. I'm no longer going to function as part of your body." Does that make the foot any less a part of my body? ¹⁶Imagine my ear saying, "I don't belong to your body any more because you haven't given me as important a function as the eye." Would that make the ear any less a part of my body? ¹⁷Suppose every part of the human body wanted to be an

eye, how would we hear? And if all parts of the body wanted to be an ear, how would we smell?

¹⁸God put together the various parts of my body so it can function in a way that will best serve Him. ¹⁹If my entire body were one big foot, then what would happen to me? Where would the rest of my body be? ²⁰In order to have a well-functioning body, you need all the necessary parts. Yet, it's still considered only one body. ²¹That's why the eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you. I can get along without you." Nor can the head say to the feet, "I can do without you, so be on your way."

²²If anything, the parts of our bodies which seem weak and delicate, like our eyes, are absolutely essential. ²³Our internal organs, which we don't normally talk about, we treat with great care, and our private parts we treat with still greater care and modesty. ²⁴Those parts of our bodies which are made to be more public do not require as much attention. God has composed the body in such a way that greater care is given to the parts which need special attention to function as they should. ²⁵This brings balance to the body so the various parts are not divided in their purpose, but every part works together with the other parts. ²⁶If one part of the body gets sick, the whole body feels it; if each part performs well, health and happiness flow through the entire body.

²⁷That's how the body of Christ, the whole church, should function. And each of you functions as one of its parts. ²⁸In His church some function as apostles, reaching out to new mission territory. Some might have the gift of prophecy to help guide the church. Others have the ability to teach. In addition to these three major functions, God has put other parts in the church, such as those who can work miracles, those who can heal, those who can administer and manage, and those who can speak in different languages. ²⁹Is everyone a leader? Has

everyone been called to prophesy? Do all members know how to teach? Can everyone perform miracles? ³⁰Is everyone able to heal? Can all speak in different languages or can all translate? ³¹No, we don't all have the same gifts. Now it's not wrong to want additional spiritual gifts as long as you use them to help the church.

But let me tell you about the very best gift of the Spirit.

Love Defined

13 If I had the gift of speaking any language, including the language of angels, but didn't have love, I would be like a noisy gong or clanging cymbals. ²If I had the gift of predicting the future and could understand all science and fathom all knowledge, or if I had so much faith that I could move mountains, but didn't have love, it would be worthless. ³If I gave everything I had to the church or used all my money to feed the poor, or if I became a martyr by being burned to death for Christ, but didn't have love, all such acts would count for nothing.

⁴Love is patient and kind. It doesn't envy or boast, nor is it puffed up with its own importance. ⁵Love is never rude nor does it behave disorderly. It's not interested in itself, does not become angry or keep a record of wrongs. ⁶Love doesn't enjoy evil, but is always happy with truth. ⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes for all things and endures all things.

⁸Love will not fail. One day prophecies will end, the gift of languages will cease, and our imperfect knowledge will vanish. ⁹We know so little, and prophecies give us only a glimpse of the future. ¹⁰But when the end comes, then that which is imperfect will pass away. ¹¹When I was a child, I spoke as a child, because I understood and thought as a child. But when I grew up, I put my childish ways of thinking behind me. ¹²Now we see things obscurely, as in a dark mirror, but then we will see things as they really are. Now I

know God through His word, but then I will know Him face to face, personally, as He knows me. ¹³There are three important things that will last forever: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

The Gift of Prophecy

14 So pursue a life of love and be eager for spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. ²Look at the practical side of things. If you speak in church in a language no one understands, you're talking to no one but yourself and God. If you're the only one who benefits from it, what good is it? ³But the person who has the gift of prophecy strengthens, encourages and comforts the people. ⁴If a person perverts his gift of tongues by speaking in a language the people don't understand, he's a blessing to no one but himself. The one who has the gift of prophecy can be a blessing to the entire church. ⁵All of you seem to want the gift of languages as a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. I would rather that you longed for the gift of prophecy, which is better than the gift of tongues because it helps the church to survive and grow. Speaking to the church in a different language is no help unless someone translates what is being said.

The Gift of Tongues

⁶If I came to you speaking in different languages, some of you would see it as a sign of Pentecost, but would I be helping the church? Not unless I spoke plainly and shared with you what God had revealed to me, some insight I had gained through study, some application of prophecy or some doctrine I could clarify. ⁷Musical instruments such as flutes or harps can only be appreciated if they give clear, distinct notes. If their notes don't harmonize, how will you know what tune is being played?

⁸On the battlefield, if the trumpet gives an unfamiliar sound, how will the soldiers know what to do? Should they advance or

retreat? ⁹The same applies to spiritual gifts. Unless you speak in a language people can understand, how will they know what you're talking about? All you'll be doing is talking to the air. ¹⁰There are many languages in the world and none are without meaning. ¹¹But if I can't understand a language, the speaker will be like a foreigner to me and I'll be like a foreigner to him. ¹²Since you're so zealous for spiritual gifts, why don't you pray for those gifts which will benefit the whole church? I can't understand why so many of you want to speak different languages to prove that you have the Holy Spirit.

¹³Why doesn't the one who claims to have the gift of tongues at least pray for the Holy Spirit to help the people understand what he's saying? ¹⁴If I pray publicly in a language that no one understands, my own heart may be uplifted, but it would be fruitless because it wouldn't do anyone any good. ¹⁵When I pray, I not only pray with my heart, but also with my mind. When I sing, I sing not only with my heart, but also with my mind. That is, I want to use words that people can understand.

¹⁶The same thing holds true for the gift of teaching. If someone tried to teach in a language no one had learned, how could those being taught say "Amen" to what he was saying? ¹⁷When some of you give your personal testimony and express gratitude to God, you may give a wonderful testimony, but if you say it in a language no one understands, how can those who are listening be blessed?

¹⁸Actually, I can speak more languages than any of you because God has given me that gift, and for that I'm thankful. ¹⁹But when I come to church to worship or to preach, I'd rather speak five intelligible words the church can understand than ten thousand words no one knows. (Some try to show that they have received the Holy Spirit by speaking other languages, and others try to show it by speaking ecstatic utterances as is done in pagan temples.)

²⁰So, my brothers, don't keep considering these things with the understanding of children. In evil things be as innocent as infants, but in spiritual things, think things through like mature adults. ²¹As the Lord said to the Israelites, "You won't listen to me when I speak to you through prophets in Hebrew, and even when I send foreigners into your land, you don't listen to them."

²²The gift of languages at Pentecost was given to reach unbelievers with the gospel, while the gift of prophecy was given to help the church. ²³If, when you come together to worship, each one who claims to have the gift of tongues speaks in a different language or in ecstatic utterances, unbelievers who come will think we're out of our minds.

²⁴But when those who have the gift of prophecy stand up and give members practical lessons on how to live the Christian life and a visitor comes in, he can understand what's going on. Who knows? He might be convicted of his sins and decide to become a Christian. ²⁵The secrets of his heart might be laid bare so that he will bow in worship, ask God to forgive him and say, "Surely God is here among you."

Orderliness

²⁶So my brothers, what should be done? When you come together, one will have the ability to sing, another to preach, another will have the gift of prophecy, another the gift of languages and another will be ready to interpret as necessary. ²⁷All these are legitimate gifts, but they should be used to strengthen the church, not to show off the gift. If some insist on speaking in another language, only two or three should speak and only one at a time. And someone should interpret what they say. ²⁸If no one can interpret, forget it. Let them talk to themselves and to God.

²⁹The same with those who claim to have the gift of prophecy. No more than two or three should speak and only one

at a time. Then let those in the congregation who really do have the gift of prophecy decide whether or not these messages are from God. ³⁰If one of them is speaking and another claims to have an urgent message from God, let the first speaker step aside so the congregation can hear what this one has to say. ³¹This way all speakers will have a chance to speak, and the people will be encouraged by what is being said. ³²If one of these speakers has the gift of prophecy as he claims, he'll be subject to the Holy Spirit and under His control as all true prophets are. ³³God is not the author of confusion but of orderliness and peace. This kind of orderliness is followed by God's people in all our churches.

³⁴Now women attending church should not shout and carry on like women do in pagan temples, but should be quiet and listen as the law says, so as not to disrupt the congregation. ³⁵If a woman wants to know more, she should not interrupt the speaker but wait until she gets home and discuss it with her husband. While pagan women shout and interrupt each other in their places of worship, it's disgraceful for a Christian woman to behave this way. ³⁶Let me ask you a question. Did you originate the gospel? Are you the only people to whom God has spoken? Don't think you can do as you please.

³⁷One way to test those who claim to have a message from the Lord is to see whether they acknowledge that what I'm writing to you is from God. ³⁸If someone doesn't want to listen to what I've said, then he isn't speaking for the Lord as he claims he is. ³⁹As I've said, you should be most eager to have the gift of prophecy among you. But don't stop others from using their gifts, whether they have the gift of languages or any other gift.

⁴⁰When you come together to worship, everything should be done orderly and in good taste.

Christ's Resurrection

15 My brothers, I now want to say something about the good news which I've shared with you, which you've accepted, and on which you have taken your stand. ²It is through the gospel of Jesus Christ that you are saved. There are some things that you need to keep in mind. If you don't, your faith has no meaning.

³What I've shared with you, I didn't originate. I received it just as you did. The fact remains and always will that Christ died for our sins according to Scripture. ⁴He was buried, and on the third day, He rose again, also according to Scripture. ⁵Afterward He appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. They all saw Him. ⁶Then more than five hundred believers saw Him at one time, and although some of them have died, many of them are still alive. ⁷Next, He appeared to James, His own stepbrother. And finally, just before He ascended, He appeared to all the apostles one more time. ⁸Last of all, He appeared to me. I saw Him with my own eyes and He taught me for three years just as He taught the apostles. As far as I know, I was the last one to have this privilege.

⁹I am the least of all the apostles and don't deserve to be called an apostle, because before I met Christ, I persecuted God's church unmercifully. ¹⁰Only by the grace of God am I what I am now. His grace was not given to me in vain, because since accepting His grace, I've worked harder than any of the apostles. Yet, I'm not the one who did the work, but God's grace which was with me. ¹¹The point is, whether I brought the truth of Christ to you or whether someone else did, it's this truth that's the foundation of what you believe.

Our Hope

¹²If we preach and you believe that Christ rose from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection? ¹³If there is no resurrection from the dead,

then Christ is still dead and He wasn't resurrected. ¹⁴And if Christ is still dead, then all our preaching is nonsense and our faith worthless. ¹⁵This would also make us liars because we preached that God raised Christ from the dead, which, according to you, God never did.

¹⁶Let me say it again. If what you say is true, that there is no resurrection, then Christ was never raised from the dead. ¹⁷And if Christ was not resurrected, then whatever else we told you about Him could be called in question. If He were still dead, it would mean He had been a sinner; the good news of salvation would be meaningless and we would still be in our sins. ¹⁸And those who have died and are sleeping in Christ waiting for the resurrection would be gone forever. ¹⁹If our hope in Christ has to do only with this life, then of all people, we're to be pitied the most.

²⁰But Christ was raised from the dead, being the firstfruit of the harvest to follow, the assurance that those who have fallen asleep will be resurrected. ²¹Through one man death came into the world, and through another Man came the resurrection. ²²As a result of Adam's sin, all of us die, but because of Christ, all who believe shall be brought back to life. ²³Everything had to be done in the right order. First Christ had to be raised, then, when He comes, those who belong to Him will be raised. ²⁴Then the end will come, when Christ will hand everything back to God after He has put down all human authority and power. ²⁵God has put Him in charge of all things until all His enemies are destroyed and sin is no more. ²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed will be death.

²⁷As the Scripture says, "God has put Christ in charge of everything." Now when it says "everything," God obviously did not include Himself, because He's the One who's ultimately in charge of everything. ²⁸So after Christ completes His mission and puts down all human authority and power, then He will once again be subject to God the Father as He was before He came. Once again, God will be all in all.

Some Deny the Resurrection

²⁹Why do you think people get baptized in the hope of seeing their dead loved ones, if there is no resurrection? If there is no hope, then being baptized in the name of Christ doesn't mean a thing.

³⁰Why do you think we're willing to face death almost every hour of our lives if there's nothing beyond this life? ³¹It's true, my brothers. Hardly a day goes by without my having to face death. Yet every day I rejoice over you in Jesus Christ. ³²Why would I preach the gospel here in Ephesus and expose myself to dangers comparable to fighting wild beasts, if the dead are not raised? What would I gain? "Let's just eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." ³³Don't be fooled into thinking that way. Remember your own Greek proverb, "Bad friends will ruin good character." ³⁴Don't believe those who say that there's no resurrection and all that matters is this life. Come to your senses and stop sinning. It is to your shame that some of you don't know God as you should.

Our Resurrection

³⁵Some are saying, "How can dead bodies be resurrected? Have you ever seen a dead body being raised?" ³⁶What fools they are! Nature teaches us that nothing can sprout to life unless it first dies. ³⁷When a farmer sows seed, doesn't he sow the same kind of seed which he expects to harvest, whether it's wheat or some other grain? ³⁸God makes the seed sprout and gives it the power to produce new seeds just like the seed that died. ³⁹And in the animal kingdom, there are different kinds of bodies. Yet each animal produces a body after its kind. Fish have one kind of body and birds another kind. The crowning work of earthly bodies is seen in the human family, and we also produce after our own kind. ⁴⁰Then there are heavenly beings with still different kinds of bodies. They resemble earthly bodies, yet they're different. Heavenly bodies have their own distinctiveness

just as earthly bodies do. ⁴¹Looking at the universe, we see the same principle at work. The sun has its own kind of beauty, as do the moon and stars, and throughout the universe each star has its own kind of brilliance.

⁴²On this earth we have bodies which are sinful, that deteriorate and die, but in the resurrection our bodies will be sinless and will never die. ⁴³A dead body has lost its honor and strength, but when it is raised, it will be full of strength and beauty. ⁴⁴Our bodies will be buried as physical bodies but they will be raised, not only as glorified physical bodies, but our bodies will also be spiritual and immortal, like Christ's body. ⁴⁵The Scriptures tell us, "Adam, the first man, was created out of the soil of the ground. God breathed into him life, and he became a living being." But Christ, the second and last Adam, has a body suited for heaven, with power to give life.

⁴⁶Notice the sequence of things. The spiritual body with its immortality was not given to us first, but the physical was given first, which will be followed by the spiritual, immortal body at the resurrection. ⁴⁷That is to say, Adam, the first man, had a body of dust, equipped to live only on earth, as we do. But Christ's body can live in heaven and on earth. That's the kind of glorified physical body we will someday have. ⁴⁸There are earthly bodies which are natural and sinful, and there are heavenly bodies which are glorious and sinless. As Adam was made of the earth, so are all of us; as Christ was born by the power of God, so are those of us who are born again. ⁴⁹Even though we bear the image of earthly Adam, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Adam, Jesus Christ.

The Final Victory

⁵⁰What I'm trying to tell you, my brothers, is that sinful human flesh and blood, as it is now, cannot be admitted into the kingdom of God. Sin cannot be admitted to a place that is pure, where there is no sin.

⁵¹Let me also tell you a wonderful mystery. Human bodies decay and die, but those who believe in Christ will be changed ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. When the trumpet sounds, the dead will be resurrected. Then those who are still living will be transformed, and all of us will be given glorious bodies that will never die. ⁵³Sinful bodies must be replaced with sinless ones, and mortal bodies must put on immortality.

⁵⁴So when these sinful bodies are exchanged for sinless ones and this mortality for immortality, then what is written will be fulfilled, "Death has been swallowed by victory!" ⁵⁵Oh, Death, where is your sting? Oh, Grave, where is your victory?" ⁵⁶The sting, or cause, of death is sin, and the power of sin comes from the moral demands of the law. ⁵⁷But thanks to God who gives us victory over sin and death as a gift through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

⁵⁸Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast and unmovable. Don't let anything change you. Do all you can for the Lord. Whatever you do for Him is never wasted.

An Offering for the Poor

16 Let's now talk about the immediate needs of the saints. I've been collecting funds from all the churches in the province of Galatia to take to the poor in Jerusalem. I would also like you to contribute to this fund. ²On the first day of every week, sit down at home and figure out how much you can give, depending, of course, on how God has prospered you. Then have someone pick up these donations so I won't have to go around collecting them when I come. ³When I get there, I'll write letters of introduction for the men you choose to take your generous gifts to Jerusalem, then we'll send them on their way. ⁴Whether the Lord wants me to go to Jerusalem too, remains to be seen. If He does, they can go with me.

Paul's Plan

⁵At present, my plan is to come to you after I go through Macedonia, because I want to see how you're doing. ⁶I hope to spend the winter with you and get some rest. Then you can send me on my way healthier and more energetic. ⁷I don't want to come now and then have to leave right away. I really want to stay with you for awhile, unless the Lord has something else in mind. ⁸The only other congregation I really need to spend some time with is the one in Ephesus. I hope to stay with them until Pentecost, then go to Macedonia and on to you. ⁹The doors for evangelism are really opening up in that city. That will give me another chance to preach the gospel to many new people, even though many there oppose me.

¹⁰If Timothy gets to Corinth before I do, don't give him any reason to be concerned about you. He loves the Lord and is doing the same kind of work among the churches that I am. ¹¹Don't let anyone look down on him. Accept him, love him, and send him on his way full of joy. Then when he comes to see me in Macedonia, he'll have peace and happiness in his heart instead of concern and sadness. I can't wait to see him and those who are with him.

¹²As for Apollos, I'm encouraging him and the other brothers who accompany him to stop and see you again. At first he didn't think it was best, but he finally agreed to come to see you as soon as he has an opportunity to do so.

A Final Word

¹³In the meantime, stay alert, be on guard, hold on to what you believe, be strong and full of courage. ¹⁴Whatever you do, do it with love.

¹⁵Be supportive of the laymen preaching the gospel. You know the family of Stephanas. They were the first ones in Greece to step out and become Christians. Since then, they have given all their time to building up the church wherever they go. ¹⁶I urge you, brothers, to listen to such men and others like

them and treat them with respect. ¹⁷I'm glad that Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus stopped by to see me. They did for me what you would have done if you had been here. ¹⁸They really cheered my soul as I'm sure they did yours. These men deserve to be recognized and honored because they're such a blessing.

Greetings

¹⁹The members here in Asia Minor send their greetings. Aquila and Priscilla and all those worshipping in their house

also send their greetings. ²⁰Everyone sends their love. Whenever you meet together, greet each other with Christian affection as fellow believers should.

²¹These greetings at the end of my letter I've written with my own hand. Yes, they're written by me, Paul. ²²If anyone doesn't love the Lord and wants to have his own way, don't try to force him to be one of us. Come, O Lord! Put an end to sin! ²³May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you. ²⁴I send my love to you, which in Jesus Christ is as strong as ever.

2 CORINTHIANS

Paul, an Apostle

1 Greetings from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and from Timothy, our brother in the ministry, to the church members in Corinth and to all God's saints scattered throughout Greece. ²Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's Sufferings

³Let's express our gratitude to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is most gracious and compassionate toward us and who is the God of all comfort. ⁴He comforts us in all our troubles so we, in turn, can comfort others in their troubles as we share with them the comfort we receive from God. ⁵Just as we have a share in Christ's suffering, so through Christ, our Father gives us the same comfort He gave Christ. ⁶If we have been afflicted, it was for you. If we have been comforted by God in our troubles, it was for your sake. We want you to draw strength and comfort from our experience as you face some of the same difficulties that we have. ⁷Our hope and confidence in you is firm. We know that if you're having the same troubles we're having, you'll receive the same comfort from God that we're receiving.

⁸My brothers, I want to let you know about some of the problems we've had in Asia Minor. We've had to face such hardships that our strength gave way and we wondered whether we'd make it through alive. ⁹We were so far gone, we felt certain we would die, but this only made us lean more on God who can raise the dead if He decides to do so. ¹⁰In the past He has saved us from being killed. This time He saved our bodies from giving way, and we have confidence that in the future He will continue to do for us what He thinks is best. ¹¹Do pray for us so that when our trials are all over, many will give thanks

to God for the strength He granted us because of you.

Paul's Sincerity

¹²It is by God's grace and not human wisdom that we have lived by the truths we have taught. Our conscience is clear that we conducted ourselves toward you and everyone else as we should. ¹³Don't try to read between the lines. What we wrote to you has no double meanings, but is clear and easy to read and understand. As time goes on, you'll understand even more of what we said. ¹⁴Some of you still don't fully understand us, but we hope that what we said will help you understand us better. If we don't see you again here, we will see you when the Lord Jesus comes back to take us home.

Paul's Confidence

¹⁵Because of the confidence I have in you, I was planning to see you twice. I thought that way we could get a double blessing from seeing each other again. ¹⁶Originally, my plan was to stop to see you on my way to Macedonia and then again on my return so you could help me get ready for my trip to Judea. ¹⁷Do you think I made these plans without thinking or flippantly changed my mind? I am not one to vacillate. Once I say Yes or No, I mean it. ¹⁸That's how God is. You can depend on His Yes and No, and you can depend on my word too. ¹⁹Remember when Silas, Timothy and I spoke to you about Jesus Christ, how we spoke with unwavering certainty? We didn't speak indecisively, but with a solid Yes in Christ.

²⁰This is the kind of assurance on which God's promises are based, a solid, unequivocal Yes, followed by a confirming Amen. That's how we preach, doing so by the power of Christ to the glory of God. ²¹God has rooted us with you in Christ and has anointed us to stand for Him. ²²He has put His seal of ownership on us by putting His Spirit in our hearts, assuring

us that we belong to Him and also as a down payment of what is to come.

²³God is my witness that the reason I didn't come to you the first time as I promised was not because I had changed my mind, but because I wanted to spare you some painful personal rebukes.

²⁴We're not trying to lord anything over you or stop you from thinking, but we want you to be rooted in God. We're working with you for your own happiness.

2 So I decided that I would not make another painful visit to you as I had to do once before. ²If I cause you pain and made you sad, I too would be sad. Then who would cheer me up?

Forgive and Restore

³That's one reason I wrote you the way I did. It hurts me to see people whom I love losing out on Christ. I want our next meeting to be a happy one. I feel sure that you will share my joy. ⁴It was with much pain, a troubled heart and many tears that I decided not to come to you after promising I would, but to write to you instead. I didn't write that first letter to you to make you sad but to let you know how much I love you.

⁵When you're hurt, I'm hurt too. So I'm not saying very much about the case of incest that we talked about before because I don't want to hurt you still more. You have disciplined him, and that's enough. ⁶He's felt the pain of your disapproval, as he should have. We can't expect to carry out our responsibility of disapproval of a member's public misconduct without hurting some feelings. ⁷But now that you've disciplined him, you should also show him that you've forgiven him and make him feel comfortable in your presence so he doesn't get discouraged and give up being a Christian altogether. ⁸That's why I'm asking you to show him that you love him. ⁹I wrote and told you what to do because I wanted to see if you would listen and be the kind of Christians you should be.

¹⁰Whomever you forgive, I'll forgive, and when I forgive anyone, I do so totally, because that's the way Christ forgave me.

¹¹Forgiving each other is important so Satan won't get a foothold among us, for we are quite aware of his schemes against us.

Spreading the Fragrance of Christ

¹²By the way, another reason I couldn't come to you as I promised was that the Lord had opened a door for me to go to Troas. After arriving there, I found that the time was just right to preach the good news about Jesus Christ. ¹³All the time I was there, I expected Titus to come. Finally, I got restless, said good-bye to the people and left for Macedonia.

¹⁴Thanks be to God who always gives us the victory in Christ and who enables us to spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ everywhere we go. ¹⁵As we spread Christ's love and grace, we think of it as an offering to God. We are the incense of Christ's presence among those who are being saved and those who are being lost. ¹⁶His fragrance is like incense at an army's victory parade. To the troops, the smell of incense means coming home to a new life, while to the captives it signals death. So for some, the fragrance of Christ means death, but for others it means eternal life. To fill the air with Christ's fragrance is an awesome responsibility. Who is up to it? ¹⁷We are not like many self-appointed preachers who peddle God's word as if it were some kind of merchandise. We handle it with awe and preach it with sincerity, being conscious of the fact that we are being supervised by God.

You Are Living Letters

3 Does this sound like we're trying to convince you how good we are or that we're trying to recommend ourselves to you or asking you to recommend us to others? ²You are our letters of recommendation and your changed

lives are all the evidence we need. God's message is written on your hearts which people can read and speak about wherever you go. ³You are living letters given to us by Christ, not letters written with ink or carved on stone, but letters written on human hearts by the Spirit of the living God.

⁴Such evidence is the basis of our confidence in God because of what Jesus Christ has done. ⁵We are not trying to tell you what great workers we are, nor are we qualified to assess our own work. Our strength and competence comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁶It is God who has made us ministers of the new covenant. He has helped us share the gospel with you, not as attorneys, but as ambassadors. The law can't give you life; it can only point out sin. It's the Holy Spirit who gives life.

The Radiance of the Cross

⁷At Sinai God wrote the law on tables of stone. The giving of the commandments was accompanied by such glory that when Moses came down from the mountain, the Israelites couldn't even look at him. But that glory had to pass away. ⁸When you think of the Holy Spirit writing the law on people's hearts, isn't that more glorious than God writing His law on tables of stone? ⁹If that system of religious services containing only promises of salvation was full of glory, how much more glorious is God's offer of salvation today now that those Old Testament promises have been fulfilled and ratified by Jesus Christ! ¹⁰Because of the unspeakably glorious act of God in giving His Son to die for us, the Old Testament services are now at an end. ¹¹If that which lasted for only a short time was so glorious, how much more glorious is that which lasts forever!

¹²That's why we can preach with such confidence and boldness, because the hope we have has been secured by Jesus Christ. ¹³The glory we proclaim is much more radiant than that of Moses. He had

to have a veil over his face to hide his glory when he talked to the people. But that glory faded away. It had to give way to the radiance of the cross. ¹⁴In one sense, the Israelites are wearing a veil over their faces today when they read the Old Testament and misapply what they read, because only in Christ can those Old Testament services be understood. ¹⁵Even when they read the writings of Moses every Sabbath, a veil of ignorance and misunderstanding continues to hang over their faces, keeping them in the dark. ¹⁶When they do open their hearts to the truth, as some of them have, and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, that veil of misunderstanding falls off and the significance of the Old Testament services are seen for what they truly were.

¹⁷The Lord is working through His Holy Spirit to remove this veil, and wherever the Holy Spirit is, there is freedom from salvation by works. ¹⁸Our faces are no longer covered, and as we look at the glory of the Lord, we're changed. We reflect more and more of His image by the power of the Spirit working on our hearts.

We Do Not Preach Ourselves but Christ

4 Therefore, since we have seen the mercy and graciousness of God and have been called to share the good news of Christ with others, by His grace we refuse to grow disheartened and give up. ²As ministers of the gospel, we are not dishonest; we don't play church politics or twist God's word to suit ourselves. We have nothing to be ashamed of, but we teach the truth openly and let others judge our lives as God looks on. ³If our preaching of the gospel is hard to understand, as some say, it's because they have closed their minds to it. ⁴Satan, the god of this world, has blinded people's eyes to keep the light of the gospel from shining into their hearts. He doesn't want men to see the glory of Christ, who is the visible presence of God. ⁵We are not preaching ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and we are your servants for His

sake. ⁶The same God, who in the beginning said, "Let there be light," also made His light shine in our hearts to give us knowledge of God's glory as seen in the face of Christ.

We Are Persecuted but Not Discouraged

⁷We are only jars of clay, filled with the treasures of the gospel to show that its power is from God and not from us. ⁸Everywhere we go, we have trouble, but we're not discouraged. We're perplexed, but not confused. ⁹We're persecuted, but never abandoned. We're struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰We have faced death for the Lord Jesus many times and the scars on our bodies show it, but we are still alive, which testifies to the power of Christ to deliver. ¹¹While we are constantly being persecuted and threatened with imprisonment and execution, the power of Christ can be seen sustaining our bodies. ¹²So while death stalks us everywhere, new life is working in you.

¹³The Scriptures say, "I believed; therefore, I have spoken." That's what we do. We speak because we believe. ¹⁴We know that if we're killed, God, who raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, will raise us to life as He did His Son and will present us as trophies of His love to the universe. ¹⁵So whatever we do is for your sakes, not ours. And as God's grace reaches more and more people, it overflows in still greater thanksgiving to His glory.

¹⁶Because of Him we never give up. Even though we grow weaker physically, our spiritual powers are renewed day by day. ¹⁷Compared to the glorious future that awaits us, our troubles are small. They gain for us eternal blessings that outweigh any present afflictions. ¹⁸We're not looking at things we can see, but at things unseen. What we see around us is temporary and will soon be destroyed, but that which we can't see will last forever.

We Long for the Vibrancy of New Bodies

5 We know that our earthly body is like a tent in which we now live, and

when it is taken down and folded, a house waits for us in heaven, a new body, not one shaped in a womb, but an immortal body crafted by the hand of God. ²We're tired of this body and long for the heavenly one. ³If we could put it on, then we would be fully clothed. ⁴But, since we're still living in our earthly bodies, we suffer and groan through life. Don't get the idea from this that we long to die. We groan because we wish our frail mortality could be exchanged for the vibrancy of immortality. ⁵God's original intention for mankind is still the same. And He gave us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that His original plan to give us immortality has not changed.

⁶That's why we can speak with such confidence, even though we're still living in our mortal bodies and away from the Lord. ⁷Actually, we are not away from the Lord. He's here with us, not by sight, but by faith. ⁸That's what faith is all about. We long to lay aside our bodies, to leave this present world, and to be at home with the Lord.

All Are Judged by Christ

⁹But whether we are here or there isn't the point. Our only goal is to please God and to show Him how much we love Him by obeying Him. ¹⁰We will all be judged by Christ and He will hold us accountable for what we have done in this body of ours, whether it was good or bad.

God's Offer of Reconciliation

¹¹Therefore knowing what lies ahead for each of us, we try to persuade men and women to do what is right. God knows the kind of people we are, and we hope that you too will see us the way He does. ¹²We're not saying this to tell you how good we are but for you to have some answers for those critics who judge us by how we look instead of looking at our hearts. ¹³If we are out of our minds, that is for God to judge. We're working for Him. If we're in our right minds and speak the truth, we do so to

serve you. ¹⁴The love Christ has for us compels us to love Him. He died for all of us, because we all have sinned and are doomed to die. ¹⁵And He died that we should no longer live for ourselves, but for Him, because He was raised from the dead and lives for us.

¹⁶So we no longer look at people the way the world does, judging them by their outward appearance. That's the way we once judged Christ, but not now.

¹⁷Anyone who is born again in Christ is a new creation. Old values have passed away and new values have taken over.

¹⁸All this was done for us by God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and changed us from His enemies into His friends. He has now given us the ministry of reconciliation and the privilege of inviting others to become His friends.

¹⁹It was through Christ that God reconciled the world to Himself by not holding our sins against us, but committing to us this message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are God's ambassadors, so we speak to you on His behalf, asking you to receive God's offer of reconciliation. ²¹For God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that we might become right with God.

Paul's Hardships

6 As workers together with God, we plead with you most earnestly; now that you have accepted His gracious act for you in Christ, don't let it be for nothing. ²For God said through the prophet, "In the time of favor I've answered your prayers; in the day of salvation I've helped you." I tell you, this is the time to be saved. Now is the day of salvation. ³We don't want to do anything to offend you in any way, and we don't want our ministry to be a stumbling block to anyone. ⁴Whatever we do, we want to be servants of God. We're willing to endure all kinds of troubles and face all kinds of difficulties and hardships for your sake so you can be saved. ⁵We have been whipped, imprisoned and mobbed. We

have worked to exhaustion, suffered many sleepless nights and often gone without food. ⁶We have shown you that we are servants of God by living pure lives, by preaching the gospel, by being patient and kind and by loving people everywhere, all through the power of the Holy Spirit.

⁷Our message about Christ is true, as evidenced by what God has done in you. We have weapons of righteousness supplied by God in our right hand and in our left, for attack and for defense. ⁸We've been honored and disgraced, insulted and praised, and accused of lying when we were telling the truth. ⁹We've been treated as foreigners and again as friends; we've been close to death, yet we're still alive; we've been badly beaten, yet we've survived. ¹⁰We've experienced deep sadness, yet we're always rejoicing; we are poor, yet we make many rich; we have nothing, yet in Christ everything is ours. ¹¹My friends, we have opened our hearts to you in Corinth as to no other congregation and we've spoken frankly to you. ¹²We have not shut you out of our love, but you seem to have shut us out of your love. ¹³I'm talking to you as if you were my own children. Why can't you open your hearts to us as we have to you?

Come Out From the World

¹⁴You're different from unbelievers. Don't join yourself to them. How can what is right have fellowship with what is wrong? What does light have in common with darkness? ¹⁵What does Christ have in common with Satan? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶Is there no difference between the Temple of God and the temple of idols? You are God's living temple. Just as God said, "I will live in them and walk with them. I will be their God and they will be my people."

¹⁷In another place He said: "Come out from the world and separate yourselves from those people. Touch nothing that is

unclean, and I will take you in. ¹⁸I want you to be part of my family. I will be your Father and you will be my sons and daughters." This invitation is extended to you by the Almighty God Himself!

7 Dear friends, since we have these promises from God, let's purify ourselves by staying away from anything that contaminates our bodies and souls, and let's try to live more perfect lives for Him.

Paul's Joy

²Why not open your hearts to us? We haven't wronged anyone, corrupted anyone's morals or cheated anyone out of his money. ³I'm not saying this to find fault with you. As I told you before, you're very much on our hearts. We are willing to live for you and to die for you. ⁴I have great confidence in you and feel proud of you. In all the troubles I go through, I'm always comforted whenever I think of you.

⁵Since we arrived in Macedonia, we have had no rest or peace. Besides being concerned about you, we've had to face all kinds of troubles, opposition from the Jews and threats of violence from the Gentiles. ⁶But God didn't forget us. He always finds ways to comfort and encourage us. And He did just that by the unexpected arrival of Titus. ⁷It wasn't only because of seeing Titus that we were encouraged, but even more because of his report about you, how kindly you treated him and how many of you have changed. He said you wish to see me, that you're sorry for what you did and are eager to stand with me. This gave me new courage and lifted my spirits.

⁸So even though the earlier letter of mine made you feel bad, now I'm no longer sorry that I wrote it. At the time, I was sorry about what I said, because I knew it would hurt you. ⁹I'm happy now, not because you felt guilty, but because the Holy Spirit led you to repent and come back to God. So in all this you weren't hurt by us but helped. ¹⁰When

people are genuinely sorry for what they've done, it generates a repentance that leads to salvation. But repentance which doesn't lead to conviction of sin and turning away from it is not from heaven and ends in eternal death.

¹¹Look at what your repentance has done for you! How sorry it made you feel that you had sinned and yet how afraid that you might sin again. Look at the desire you now have: what zeal to do right, what resentment toward sin, what concern, what earnest desire to be honest and to punish wrong-doing. You have cleared yourselves in this matter. ¹²When I wrote to you before, I asked you to discipline the one who was living in open sin and to comfort those who were injured. In doing this, you revealed your earnestness and showed in God's sight how devoted you really are.

¹³This greatly encouraged us. We were even more encouraged when Titus brought us this good report about you and even more so when we saw how happy he was after you received him so graciously. ¹⁴When he first asked me about our believers in Corinth, I really boasted about you, and you didn't let me down. Everything I said to him about you proved true. ¹⁵As a result of the experience he had with you, his devotion to you is that much greater. He tells us how eager you were to carry out his suggestions. He remembers how you greeted him with fear and trembling, yet desiring to do what was right for the church. ¹⁶How happy I am that once again you have verified my confidence in you.

Giving to Help Other Believers

8 My brothers, let me now share with you what God's grace has accomplished in the churches of Macedonia. ²The members here have had their faith severely tested by the trials they've gone through, yet they are overflowing with joy in the Lord. Even though they are very poor, they are extremely generous in their giving. ³I can personally testify to

the fact that of their own free will they have given more than they could afford to give. ⁴They even begged us to accept their donations because they wanted to have a part in helping their impoverished brothers and sisters in Judea. ⁵This is more than we had hoped for. First they gave their hearts to the Lord all over again, and then they gave what they had for the believers in Israel. This kind of love is what God likes to see.

⁶So we urged Titus, since he initiated this collection for the poor, to contact you and give you, too, opportunity to take part in this gracious love offering. ⁷You're a privileged congregation, rich in faith, knowledge, enthusiasm, ability to speak for the Lord and in our love for you. So we want you also to be rich in the grace of giving.

⁸This is not a command for you to do this, but others are so eager to help, it would be a good time for you to show how sincere your love for others is. ⁹We've told you how gracious and kind the Lord Jesus Christ is. Even though He owned the whole world and had all riches at His disposal, yet for our sakes, He became poor so that you, through His poverty, might become rich. ¹⁰I'm suggesting that you take advantage of this opportunity to share with others what you have. You started to do this a year ago but never followed through. ¹¹Why not finish what you began? This time be as eager and willing to finish the project as you were before. Begin with the funds you have on hand and go on from there. ¹²If you willingly give whatever you have, God will graciously accept it as a gift of love, not because you gave much, but because you gave what you had. ¹³My intention is not to weigh you down in order to lighten the financial burden of others. That's not at all what I have in mind. ¹⁴But because you have more than most of our churches, we urge you, as we do all of our congregations, to share your blessings with your brothers and sisters in need. If the time ever comes when you

are in need and they have more than you, then they will help you. In that way every congregation is treated equally according to need. ¹⁵This is the same principle we find in the Scriptures, "The one who gathered much could not hoard it and the one who could gather only little had all he needed."

Titus Sent to Corinth

¹⁶How thankful we are to God that He put into Titus' heart the same love and concern for you that we have. ¹⁷Not only did Titus agree with our suggestion to include you in our final offering appeal, but it was his idea to go back to see you because he loves you. ¹⁸The Macedonian brother I'm sending with Titus has a reputation among all the churches for his boldness in preaching and for all the other things he does for the gospel. ¹⁹He was chosen by the churches to travel with us to help finish this project which will bring glory to God and show goodwill to our fellow believers. ²⁰We are very careful as we travel from place to place to avoid any criticism about why we're collecting this money. ²¹Everything has been done honestly in the sight of God and man.

²²In addition to these two men, I'm sending along another brother, who has proved diligent and honest in all things. Because of the good he has heard about you, he is eager to meet you. ²³As far as Titus is concerned, he's my partner in the Lord and will be there to help you. If people ask about the other two men, tell them that they were chosen to represent the Macedonian churches and are loyal believers committed to bringing glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴Their arrival will give you a chance to prove to these churches how genuine your Christian love is and that what we told them about you is true.

A Love Offering

9 I see no need to write you a detailed explanation about this love offering that's going to Judea. ²¹I know that you're

eager and ready to help. That's what I kept telling the members in Macedonia about you all last year. Your example of eagerness to give to this project has motivated them to give even more. ³We're sending these Macedonian representatives to you so they can see for themselves that what I told them about you is true. I told them you would be ready for them when they come. ⁴Then later, if some other Macedonians come with me to receive your donation in a lump sum, we won't be embarrassed to find that no collections were made or that you were not willing to help. That would embarrass you too because we've already told them about your giving. ⁵That's why I'm sending Titus and these men ahead, to give you a chance to finish collecting the donations you started a year ago. Then when we come, those who are with me will be able to see for themselves that you did all this not grudgingly, but willingly.

Be a Cheerful Giver

⁶Don't forget that a person who sows only a few seeds will harvest only a small crop, but a person who sows many seeds will reap a large harvest. ⁷Let each person think about how much he should give and make up his own mind. In that way, he will be more likely to give from his heart, not because he feels forced to give. God loves for people to give cheerfully, not grudgingly. ⁸He is able to give you back more than you need, either materially, spiritually or both, so that you will have enough of everything and may abundantly support every good work. ⁹As the Scriptures say, "He who gives generously and helps those in need, his right-doing never ends."

¹⁰The One who made seed for the sower is the same One who makes the seed grow so we can eat. He also is the One who will multiply your benevolence and increase the harvest of your kindness. ¹¹He will continue to bless you so you can continue to bless others. And your generosity will cause many others to give

thanks to God. ¹²Your donation will not only help our brothers and sisters who are poor, but will also produce a grateful spirit in others. ¹³And God will be glorified by your ministry. Your gift is evidence of your love for your brothers and sisters, and it is also evidence of your obedience to the gospel of Christ and of the oneness you have with all your fellow-believers. ¹⁴With deep affection, your brothers and sisters will pray for you and thank God for His grace which they see working in you. ¹⁵All of us thank God for His indescribable gift of grace so undeserved!

Paul Defends Himself

10 I want to speak to you with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Some of you say that when I'm away from you, I write strong, harsh letters, but when I'm there, I'm as meek as a lamb. ²My prayer is that you will not force me to take as strong a stand against you when I come as I had to in my letters. I will do that if I must, particularly against those who say we are acting from worldly motives. ³Though we are living in this world, we don't use the worldly methods they do.

⁴The weapons we use in our fight for right are not the weapons of the world. Our weapons come from God, against whom nothing can stand. ⁵We destroy all false arguments and every device used by men against the knowledge of God and capture every proud thought to bring it into obedience to Jesus Christ. ⁶We are ready to discipline any act of disobedience among you to help you make your obedience complete.

Paul's Authority and Mission

⁷Those who criticize me are looking at my physical appearance. Is that what makes them believe they can stand against me? They need to think again, because we belong to Christ just as much as they do. ⁸I could boast of the authority the Lord has given me, but it was given to me to build you up, not to

tear you down. Should I be ashamed of using it? ⁹I don't want you to think that I'm trying to scare you with my letters. ¹⁰Some say, "Paul's letters sound authoritative and powerful, but when you talk to him in person, he's quite unimpressive. He's not even a good orator." ¹¹Such people need to realize we can be just as forceful when we're with you as when we write to you.

¹²We're not going to fall into the trap of comparing ourselves with those who think they are better than others. They measure themselves by themselves and among themselves, which is not wise.

¹³We will not make outrageous claims for work we have not actually done, but will limit ourselves to talk about the work God gave us to do, which included sharing the gospel with you. ¹⁴We didn't move into someone else's territory when we brought to you the good news about Jesus Christ. We were there before these other people came. ¹⁵You've never heard us take credit for work done by others. But we do have a right to talk about the work we have done for you. And we have a right to expect you to grow in Christ and to develop such confidence and faith in God that you will be a mighty force in helping to spread the gospel.

¹⁶We would like to make your church a home base to carry the gospel to other cities and even to other countries. No one can look at our ministry and say that we're trying to expand our territory and glory in the work that others have done. ¹⁷The Scriptures make this very clear by stating, "If anyone wants to glory, let him not glory in himself, but in the Lord." ¹⁸It's not those who are constantly praising themselves who are approved by God, but those whom God praises.

Paul's Concern

11 At this point, I pray that you will allow me to be a little foolish. Bear with me as I tell you how I feel toward you. ²I'm very jealous over you. When you were baptized, I set you aside as a

pure virgin, promised in marriage to Christ, to be presented to Him when He returns. ³But I'm concerned that your mind is being turned away from your devotion to Christ by Satan in the same subtle way that Eve was deceived in the Garden of Eden. ⁴When someone comes to you preaching a different kind of Christ than the One we preached to you, when someone tells you about receiving a different Holy Spirit from the One you first received, or when someone gives you a different interpretation of the gospel from the one we gave you, you put up with it.

Paul and False Apostles

⁵I don't think I'm the least inferior to these "great" apostles of yours. ⁶In their eyes I may be an unskilled speaker, but I do know the Scriptures. We made this clear to you before.

⁷Did I make a mistake by humbling myself while helping you learn about the gospel of Christ without charging for it? ⁸Oh, yes, I did accept some support from other churches while I was serving you, and in that sense, I was robbing them to help you. ⁹But I had firmly decided not to ask you for help, even when I desperately needed money to buy a little food. When the church delegates from Macedonia arrived they brought me all I needed. So I didn't have to bother you with my problems and I don't intend to do so. ¹⁰No one will stop me from preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ free of charge, whether in Greece or anywhere else. ¹¹Why didn't I ask you to help me? Was it because I didn't want to be too closely tied to you? That's ridiculous—God knows how much I love you. Then why don't I ask you for help now? Let me tell you why.

¹²My motive is to stop those who are making such strong apostolic claims for themselves. They want to be recognized as our equals and then boast about it. They do this by telling you how much they love you and claim to be working for you for the same reasons we are. ¹³They rely on deceit to carry out their schemes.

They are not true workmen. They masquerade as apostles of Christ but they're not. ¹⁴It shouldn't surprise you that this could happen even among Christians. Satan was once an angel of light and he can still appear to be one. ¹⁵So it's no great thing for those who have allowed themselves to be influenced by the evil one to make themselves look like men of righteousness. But in the end, they'll reap the consequences of what they're doing.

Paul's Evidence of Apostleship

¹⁶I want to say it again: Don't let anyone get the idea that I don't know what I'm talking about. That may sound like boasting to you, but so be it. ¹⁷What I'm going to say will not sound like what the Lord would say, but more like a fool. ¹⁸Since so many of these people boast about what they've done, let me do a little boasting too. ¹⁹Since you listen to fools tell about their exploits for the Lord, let me tell you some of mine, then maybe you'll be able to tell the difference between those who pretend to be apostles and those who really are.

²⁰But here's one more question. If you're so wise, why do you put up with the arrogance of those who order you around, take advantage of you, trap you, look down on you and slap you in the face for disagreeing with them? ²¹Maybe my disposition was too mild when I was with you. Maybe I should have been bolder. How did I end up talking this way? But now that I've started, let me go on.

²²Are they of Hebrew descent? So am I. Are they heirs of God's promise to Israel? So am I. Are they descended from Abraham? So am I. ²³Have they accepted Christ as the Messiah and are they now His servants? I must be a real fool to say this, but I am more of a servant of Christ than they are. I have worked harder than any of them. I've been whipped for my faith. I've been imprisoned often. I've been near death more times than I would like to remember. ²⁴Five times I received thirty-nine lashes at the hands of my own

countrymen. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods by the Romans. Once I was dragged by a mob out of town, stoned and left for dead. I've been in three shipwrecks, and in one, I spent all day and night trying to stay afloat. ²⁶In my many travels, I've been in danger of losing my life from floods, robbers, fellow Jews, and many times from idol worshipers because I took away their business. I've had to face life-threatening situations in cities, in the country, on the high seas and even at the hands of false believers. ²⁷There have been endless hours of exhausting work. Often I've been bone-tired and yet had to go on without rest or sleep. I've been hungry more often than I can remember and my lips have cracked from thirst. Many times I've had no place to stay nor enough clothes to keep warm. ²⁸In addition to all these outward things, I've had the daily pressure of concern for all the members in my churches. ²⁹When someone is weak in the faith, don't you think I feel it? When someone is led back into sin, don't you think I feel upset?

³⁰Since I've talked so much about myself, I might as well share with you one incident which will give my enemies another chance to say how weak I am. ³¹God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, bless His name forever, He knows that I'm not lying when I tell you this. ³²When King Aretas was asked by the Romans to look after Damascus for them, he ordered the governor to arrest me. So he stationed guards outside the city and locked the gates. ³³At the suggestion of my fellow believers, I curled up in a basket and they lowered me to the ground from a small opening in the city wall so I could escape.

Lord Gives Paul a Vision of Paradise

12 I shouldn't continue talking about myself, but I will tell you about the visions and spiritual insights the Lord has given me. ²Fourteen years ago, Barnabas came to Tarsus to take me to Antioch. By then I had already been preaching the

gospel for almost seven years. One day I was taken up to the third heaven to where Christ is. Whether I was taken there bodily or just saw it all in vision, I can't tell you. To this day I still don't know, only God knows.

³Let me say that again: Whether I was taken to heaven bodily or just saw it all in vision, I don't know, only God knows. ⁴How it all happened is a mystery, but it did happen. The things I saw and heard while there in paradise are impossible to put into words. How I wish I had the language of heaven to tell you! But even if I could and you could understand that language, I'm not allowed to tell you everything I saw. ⁵Even though I could boast about my visions, I will not, except about how weak I really am. ⁶Even if I did boast about my visions, I wouldn't be a fool, because I would be telling the truth. If I did talk more about these visions, some would say that I'm proud, and others would set me up on a pedestal. I don't want people to think more of me than what they have seen me do or heard me say.

Paul's Prayer Not Answered

⁷God knows how naturally subject to pride I am, so He has allowed me to continue to have poor eyesight, like a thorn in the flesh that I can't escape. Satan uses every opportunity he can to discourage me and beat me down, yet those experiences keep me humble and dependent on the Lord. ⁸Three times I've pleaded with the Lord to heal me and return my full eyesight. I told Him I needed it to get around and could function better for Him. ⁹Each time He has said, "My grace is all you need. My power is seen best through you when you're weak. When you're weak, that's when you're strong." So now, I am thankful for poor eyesight, because when I'm weak, I depend more fully on Christ. ¹⁰As strange as it sounds, I'm thankful for the insults, hardships, sufferings, persecutions and all the pain and difficulties I've had for Christ's sake.

If people can see the power of Christ helping me through all these difficulties instead of seeing me, then I praise the Lord for all these trials. When I realize my own weakness, then I'm strong.

Paul's Apostleship

¹¹Now I feel like a fool for saying what I did. But you forced me into it. If you had accepted me, I would not have told you all this. Yet I'm the one who boasted and not you. I just wanted you to know that my apostleship is in no way inferior to these so-called "great apostles" who boast so much about themselves. ¹²The numerous miracles the Lord performed by me should have been proof enough of my apostleship, not to mention how patiently I endured your misunderstandings of me. ¹³Did I ever treat you as if you were inferior to other believers? The only thing different was my decision not to be a financial burden to you. If that was wrong, forgive me.

Paul's Love

¹⁴Counting my previous letter as a visit, I'm now ready to visit you a third time. And I want to tell you ahead of time that I'm not planning to make any financial demands of you. I'm not looking for what belongs to you, but I'm looking for you. After all, children don't normally support their parents, but parents support their children. ¹⁵I will gladly expend myself for you even though it seems at times that the more I love you, the less you respond. ¹⁶I agree that I didn't tell you about my problems. You say that was not being honest. Be that as it may, by selflessly serving you, I baited you with God's love and brought you to Christ. ¹⁷Tell me, did I or the men I sent to you ever exploit you? ¹⁸When I asked Titus to go with another brother to see you the first time, did he take advantage of you? Didn't he act the same way toward you as I had and show the same kind of spirit that I had when I visited you?

¹⁹If you think that what I've said has been defensive, let me tell you that I've

been straightforward with you because you're my friends. God is my witness that everything we do is to make you stronger in Christ. ²⁰When I come, I'm afraid I might not find you as I want you to be, and, in turn, you might not find me as you want me to be. I'm also afraid there might be discord, jealousy, angry tempers, arguing, gossiping, arrogance and general disorder in the church. ²¹If that's the case, God will humble me in front of you as I grieve over those who haven't really repented of the impurity, sexual sins and drunkenness which they indulged in before.

A Final Warning

13 When I come, it will be the third time I've talked to you about all this. But this time, everything you tell me I want verified by at least two or three witnesses. ²What I told you before, I want to tell you again. When I come, I will not spare anyone who is still living in sin or who has gone back to live in sin since I left. ³If you want proof that Christ is speaking through me, you shall have it. When He needs to discipline you through me, He will. Christ is not weak when it comes to dealing with sin. He will use His power through me if necessary. ⁴Yes, Christ allowed Himself to be crucified, but He lives a resurrected life by the power of God. Yes, we are weak, but when we're in union with Him, we are strong, and God's power helps us to help you.

⁵Look closely at yourselves and exam-

ine yourselves to see if you're living your faith. Christ can live in you just as He can live in us, unless, of course, you fail to live for Him. ⁶But I hope you can see that we have not failed to live for Him.

Paul's Prayer

⁷We're praying for you that you will do what's right, but not for our sakes. You should do what's right, even though we seem to have failed. ⁸No one can do anything against the truth, but only for it. Everything we do ends up advancing the truth in one way or another. ⁹We're glad to be weak and to see you strong. Every day we pray for you that you will grow stronger and stronger in the Lord. ¹⁰I'm writing you ahead of time so you realize what tremendous power is available to help you correct your problems. Then when I arrive, I won't have to deal harshly with you or discipline you. I don't want to tear you down; I want to build you up.

Greetings

¹¹My brothers, I have to say good-bye now. Continue to grow in the Lord so you can stand in the strength that God is so willing to give you. Comfort one another. Be agreeable with one another and make an honest effort to live in peace. May the God of love and peace be with you always. ¹²Give everyone a brotherly hug for me. ¹³Everyone here sends his greetings. ¹⁴May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God our Father and the presence of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

GALATIANS

Paul's Call by Christ

1 This letter is from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ. I was not chosen to be an apostle by the twelve, nor by any other group of men. I was called to be an apostle by Jesus Christ and by God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead.

²All those who are with me send greetings to the members in the churches throughout Galatia. ³Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who gave Himself for our sins to free us from this world of wickedness in which we presently find ourselves. This was in harmony with the will of God the Father, ⁵to whom be glory and honor forever and ever. Amen.

One Gospel

⁶I am amazed that you have so quickly turned away from God who called you to be saved by grace through Christ, and that you have turned to a counterfeit gospel. ⁷Some people are trying to confuse you and undermine your confidence in the gospel we brought to you. ⁸But if anyone—even an angel from heaven—comes to you and tells you something different from what we have told you, let him be forever cursed! ⁹I want to repeat what I just said. If anyone preaches a different gospel or brings you a different message than the one you received from us, let him be forever cursed!

¹⁰Does this sound as if I'm trying to win the approval of men or of God? If I were still trying to please men, how could I claim to be a servant of Jesus Christ?

Paul's Conversion

¹¹I want to tell you, my brothers, that the good news which I brought to you is not just something I thought up. ¹²Neither did I get it from men, nor was I taught it. The truth is that I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. ¹³You've heard the story of my conversion before. So you know how zealous I was for the

Jewish faith and how I led out in persecuting the Christians. I showed absolutely no mercy because I was determined to wipe them out. ¹⁴Indeed, I showed more zeal for the Jewish faith than anyone else my age. I was totally committed to upholding the traditions of my ancestors, no matter what the cost.

¹⁵But God had special plans for me even before I was born. In His own time, He called me into the ministry because of His mercy and grace. ¹⁶What did He have in mind and why did He call me? God called me to take the good news about His Son to the Gentiles. I didn't consult anyone about preaching the gospel. ¹⁷I didn't go up to Jerusalem to meet with those who were apostles before I was. From Damascus I went straight into the Arabian desert and lived there for three years and was taught the gospel by Jesus Christ Himself; then I returned to Damascus where I had preached before.

From Damascus to Jerusalem

¹⁸Only after this, which as I said was three years after my conversion, did I go up to Jerusalem to stay with Peter for two weeks to have him tell me about the ministry of Jesus Christ. ¹⁹I didn't talk to any of the other disciples except James, the Lord's stepbrother. ²⁰I assure you before God that what I'm telling you is the truth. I am not lying. ²¹After seeing Peter and James, I left Jerusalem and went back to my hometown of Tarsus in Cilicia. ²²I didn't stop along the way to visit a single Christian church in all of Judea, so I had no contact with any of the local leaders. ²³When the believers in Judea heard that the one who had persecuted them now embraced the gospel, they were amazed. They couldn't believe that I was preaching the very faith that a short time before I had been determined to wipe out. ²⁴Then they found in me reason to praise God.

Paul Defends the Gospel

2 I didn't visit Jerusalem again until about fourteen years later. This time I went with Barnabas and took Titus along too. ²I attended the Jerusalem Council because God told me to. When Barnabas and I arrived, we met privately with the apostles and leaders of the church, and I told them the kind of gospel I was preaching to the Gentiles. I didn't want my ministry to be jeopardized by false reports. ³While we were in Jerusalem, not one of the apostles or church leaders said anything to us about circumcising Titus, whom they knew to be a Greek. ⁴Later, some false brothers, who turned out to be Pharisees in heart, attached themselves to our group, trying to find out how much freedom we allow our Gentile converts. They brought up the subject of circumcision and wanted every Gentile convert to be circumcised. ⁵But we didn't give in to their demands, not even for one moment. We were determined to protect the truth of the gospel and the freedom in Christ that it brought to you.

⁶And those men who seemed to be important—whether they are or not makes no difference; we're all the same in God's sight—did not tell me to add anything to the message God had given me. ⁷These same leaders had no problem with my preaching. They knew that God had laid the burden of taking the gospel to the Gentiles on me, just as He had laid on Peter the burden of taking the gospel to the Jews. ⁸The same power that has been working in Peter's ministry helping him carry out his mission to the Jews, has been working in my ministry, helping me carry out my mission to the Gentiles. ⁹When James, the Lord's stepbrother, and Peter and John, who are accepted by the members as pillars in the church, recognized that God had laid on me the burden to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, they extended to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship. They agreed that we should carry on our work among the Gentiles as we've been doing and they

would carry on their work among the Jews as they've been doing. ¹⁰The only thing they asked was that we not forget the poor who lost everything when they became Christians. We had just done this and were eager to continue.

Paul Confronts Peter

¹¹Some time later, Peter came to visit us in Antioch where I had to confront him publicly because he was acting contrary to what we heard him say at the Jerusalem Council. ¹²When Peter first went to Antioch, he ate and fellowshiped with Gentiles as if they were equal with Jews, which is the way it should be. Then, when certain men came to town, claiming they had been sent by James on official church business, Peter drew back and kept aloof from the Gentiles because he was afraid of these people who demanded that all Gentile converts be circumcised. ¹³Soon the Jewish Christians in Antioch started acting in the same hypocritical way. In fact, Peter's influence was so strong that even Barnabas was affected. ¹⁴When I saw that the truth of the gospel was at risk, I decided there was no other choice but to confront Peter publicly. I said to him, "If you as a Jew previously felt free to live with and eat at the same table with Gentiles who were not circumcised, why have you suddenly changed and now give everyone the impression that it's wrong for Jews to eat with Gentiles unless they're first circumcised and become Jews?" Then Peter admitted that what he had done was wrong.

¹⁵Even though we were born Jews and not "sinners," as these Judaizers like to call the Gentiles, ¹⁶we know that all of us are sinners, whether we're Jew or Gentile, because no one is made right with God by keeping the letter of the law. All of us are saved by faith through the Lord Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ that we might be made right before God, not by keeping the law or by cutting our flesh in circumcision. ¹⁷If we as Jewish Christians think that we've been made right with God by cir-

cumcision and are therefore no longer sinners and that Christ requires this, we're making Him part of a false gospel. Never! ¹⁸If I were preaching the need to keep the ceremonial laws as part of God's plan for us to be saved, then I would be promoting what I gave up and would not only nullify what Christ has done, but would again become a legalist. ¹⁹When the Lord first met me on the road to Damascus and I realized that I was keeping the law as a means of salvation, the legalist in me died. This was good because it made me look to Christ as my Savior instead of depending on what I could do. ²⁰I am crucified with Christ, yet I'm very much alive because Christ lives in me. And the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. ²¹Salvation is a gift of grace, and I have no intention of telling people that they are made right with God by doing what these legalists tell them. This would mean that Christ died for nothing.

Justification by Faith

3 How foolish can you Galatians be! Who put you under a spell and bewitched you into believing you could carry out certain rituals in order to be made right with God? Didn't we describe the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary so vividly that you could see it as if you had been there? ²Tell me this one thing: Did the Holy Spirit come into your lives because you were going through certain rituals or because you listened to the gospel and believed in what Jesus had done for you? ³How then can you be so foolish as to believe that after having begun your relationship with God through the power of the Holy Spirit, you could reach spiritual maturity on your own as legalists? ⁴Has all your suffering for Christ and your experience with Him been for nothing? ⁵Does God work miracles among you and give you the Holy Spirit because you're trying to make yourself right with God by law-keeping or because you believe the

gospel and have faith in Jesus?

⁶If you have any doubts about this, then look at the experience of Abraham who came from a pagan ancestry. He was called by God and believed what He said. That's why God accepted him as righteous. ⁷Those who have the kind of faith Abraham had are his true descendants. ⁸The Scriptures foretold that God would justify the Gentiles because of their faith in Him. God said to Abraham, "Through you all nations of the world will be blessed." ⁹So anyone who relies on God and His promises in the same way that Abraham did will be accepted as God's friend, just as Abraham was.

Legalism Cannot Save

¹⁰But those who depend on law-keeping for salvation, whether the ceremonial law or even the moral law, are actually under the condemnation of the law. If you want to live by that rule, then notice what the Scriptures say: "Unless you do everything right all the time just as you were told to do it, you cannot be made right with God."

¹¹It's obvious then that no one can make himself right with God by law-keeping. The Scriptures tell us that God's people will live by faith. ¹²You can see that rituals of any kind which you think are putting you right with God and giving you strength are not rooted in faith but in works. As the Scriptures say, "Whoever will keep all the laws perfectly all his life is the one who will have earned the right to live." ¹³Since we are incapable of doing this, Christ fulfilled the law for us and took upon Himself our disobedience, which the law condemns. He took our curse upon Himself. As the Scriptures say, "The Man who is nailed to a tree is cursed by everyone because the curse of sin is upon Him." ¹⁴Christ died for us so the spiritual blessings that God promised to Abraham might come to Jews and Gentiles alike, including the promise of the Holy Spirit whom we also receive by faith.

God's Agreement

¹⁵Brothers, let me give you an everyday example. Once a man makes out a will and it is witnessed, no one but the man who made it can change it. ¹⁶Notice that the Scriptures tell us that God made this kind of an agreement, not with Abraham and his descendants, but with his Descendant, singular, not plural. This means that God had just one Person in mind when He gave His promise to Abraham. He knew that only this one Descendant would be capable of fulfilling the contractual provisions of the law; that Descendant was Jesus Christ. ¹⁷Also notice that the law at Sinai was given to Israel four hundred and thirty years after God made His agreement with Abraham. So the law, given many years later, does not set aside God's earlier promise nor void the agreement He made. ¹⁸If our salvation depended on law-keeping, then it would not really be based on promise but on reward. But God blessed Abraham and declared him to be righteous because Abraham believed what God said.

Purpose of the Law

¹⁹Then what was the purpose of the law? The law was given in addition to the promise to be sure that our people would know what wrongdoing was. The law would also focus their faith on the promised One until He came. Furthermore, even though God, accompanied by thousands of angels, spoke His law at Sinai, a human go-between such as Moses was needed. ²⁰But a person doesn't need a mediator when there is only one party involved; and God is one. So God could make an agreement with Abraham's Descendant, His own Son, who is one with Him, and the agreement did not need a mediator.

²¹Does this mean that the law given at Sinai is contrary to the promises of God? Of course not! But if God had empowered His law to give us eternal life, then everyone could have it just by keeping the law, if they could do so, and the sacrifice of

Christ would not be needed. ²²But the Scriptures tell us that every human being has broken God's law, so the only solution is God's promise, which is for everyone who has faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

²³Our faith in the promised Messiah was guarded by the law right up until Christ came. ²⁴So the law functioned as a teacher to point us to Christ until He would come and verify that God's plan of salvation was based on faith and not on works. ²⁵Now that God's promise to Abraham has been shown to be true, we no longer need the law hovering over us to point us to God's promise.

In Christ We Are All Heirs

²⁶You are sons and daughters of God through your faith-union with the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷All who are baptized into this faith-union with Christ also commit themselves to live the life of Christ. ²⁸No longer is there any spiritual difference between Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, or males and females. All of us are on the same spiritual level because of our union with Christ. ²⁹Now if you belong to Christ, then you're a descendant of Abraham and you're entitled to everything that God promised him.

4 Let me continue with an illustration of a child and its tutor. A child who is legally entitled to his father's properties is treated somewhat like a servant because he's told what to do and when to do it. He's not given any authority, even though he's the heir and future owner. ²While he's young, he's under the supervision of tutors and estate managers. He's taken care of until the time decided by his father for him to begin to carry some responsibilities and eventually take over. ³In one sense, we Jews were like this young son. While we were not slaves, we were still under the supervision of the ceremonial law and subject to elementary rules and regulations. ⁴When heaven's clock struck the time for God's Son to arrive, He came, born of a human mother, born to live out

the law. ⁵He came to free us from ritual bondage and to make us heirs by adopting us into the family of God. ⁶How do we know that we have been adopted into God's family? Because God sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts, so we, like Christ, may call Him, "Beloved Father." ⁷Now we are no longer in bondage to sin but are free sons and daughters of God and heirs together with Christ.

Paul's Concern

⁸In the past you did not know God as you know Him now; you were the slaves of gods which didn't even exist. ⁹But now that you know God—or more important, now that God has officially adopted you as His sons and daughters—why would you want to go back to those worthless things that controlled you? Do you want to be slaves all over again? ¹⁰You're putting a saving significance on observing all kinds of religious holidays, months, seasons and years. ¹¹I'm really worried about you, and wondering whether all my work for you has been in vain.

¹²My brothers, I was once like you. I beg you to do as I'm doing and place your faith in Christ. No, you haven't hurt my feelings. ¹³Remember how sick I was when I first preached the gospel to you? ¹⁴How kind you were to me then! You didn't reject me because of my weakness. You took care of me as if I had been an angel sent from God or Jesus Christ Himself. ¹⁵You were so happy, always talking about what God had done for you. You would have taken out your own eyes if you could have and given them to me. But what has happened? ¹⁶Have I now become your enemy because I'm telling you the truth? ¹⁷These other people you're listening to might show a deep interest in you, but it's not for a good purpose. They want to alienate you from us so that you will shower them with love as you did me. ¹⁸It's not wrong to be zealous for a good cause, whether I'm with you or not. ¹⁹But remember that you're my spiritual children because the Lord used me to give

you birth. So I feel responsible for you. I feel those same labor pains coming on again, and they won't stop until I know that Christ is once again formed within you. ²⁰I wish I could be there with you and change my concerned tone because I'm really worried about you.

Illustration of Two Women

²¹Tell me, you who are keeping the law as a means of salvation, do you really understand what the law is telling you? ²²The Scriptures tell us that Abraham had two sons. One was born of a servant woman, and the other one was born of his wife, a free woman. ²³The son of the servant woman was brought into the world by Abraham's own efforts, but the son of his wife, a free woman, was conceived by a miracle, fulfilling God's promise. ²⁴This whole experience is filled with meaning. Each of the two women represent two different views of salvation. The first view is symbolized by Hagar, the servant woman, and represents what happened at Sinai when our forefathers promised to obey God but they had nothing in themselves with which to back it up. ²⁵Hagar's experience with Abraham not only represents these unrealistic promises our ancestors made to God at Sinai, but also the earthly city of Jerusalem, because many who live there still think that law-keeping is the way to be saved.

²⁶Now Abraham's wife, Sarah, was a free woman, and she represents the heavenly Jerusalem, which is a free city. She is our mother. ²⁷As the Scriptures say, "Jerusalem, you have been like a single woman without children. But sing and shout for joy, because by the power of God you will conceive. Once you were barren, but now you will have many children. You will be like a woman with a husband." ²⁸Brothers and sisters in Christ, you are God's children as a result of God's power, not because of your own efforts. You were born into His family through a miracle, just as Isaac was miraculously conceived and born into Abraham's family. ²⁹But just as it

was then, so it is now. The son born through human effort persecuted the son who was born to Abraham through the power of the Holy Spirit. ³⁰What else do the Scriptures tell us? “Send the servant-woman and her son away, because her son has no right to be an heir with the son conceived by his wife.” ³¹My brothers, we are not children of Abraham’s servant woman, but of his true wife who was a free woman.

Free in Christ

5 Since Christ has set us free from enslavement to sin and sealed our liberty, let us stand firm in His victory, not becoming entangled in unnecessary rituals in order to be saved.

²Look, I, Paul, am telling you that if you allow yourselves to be circumcised for the reasons we’ve discussed, then what Christ has done for you means absolutely nothing. ³I’m trying to get across to you that if anyone allows himself to be circumcised as a means of salvation, then he’s on a track that obligates him to keep all the other ancient rituals spelled out by Jewish law. ⁴If you do that, then you’ve cut yourself off from God’s salvation which He offers you through Christ. Those who want to save themselves by keeping the law have stepped outside the sphere of God’s grace. ⁵With the help of the Holy Spirit, we continue to hold on by faith and put our hope in Christ, eagerly waiting for the completion of His plan of salvation. ⁶Christ’s love for us doesn’t depend on whether we’ve been circumcised or not. The thing that matters to Him is that we demonstrate our faith in Him by works of love.

Don’t Abuse Your Freedom

⁷You demonstrated this kind of faith before and until now were running the gospel race extremely well. Who are those who cut in front of you, keeping you from obeying the truth? ⁸This new light they claim to have certainly didn’t come from God. He called you to live your lives according to the gospel. ⁹As you know, it takes only a lit-

tle bit of yeast to permeate a whole batch of dough. ¹⁰But I still trust in the Lord that you will hold on to Christ. Under no circumstances should you let go of the truth. God in His own way will take care of the people who started all this, no matter who they are. ¹¹Some are telling you that I expect all my converts to be circumcised. If that were so, then why am I being persecuted by those who insist on circumcision? It’s because salvation through the cross is an offense to them. ¹²If those who are bothering you with their insistence on circumcision would follow their logic, then they should castrate themselves, because if a little cutting of the flesh has merit and supposedly pleases God, then more cutting should be better.

¹³My brothers, you have been called to be free men and women in Jesus Christ. Don’t abuse your freedom by living to please yourselves, but use your freedom to serve each other in love. ¹⁴That’s really what the law of God means when it says, “You should love your neighbor as you love yourself.” ¹⁵If you keep on snapping and snarling at each other, you’ll end up destroying one another.

Let the Holy Spirit Direct Your Lives

¹⁶Let the Holy Spirit direct your lives, and you won’t care about satisfying the desires of your sinful nature. ¹⁷The desires of our human nature and the desires of the Holy Spirit are in conflict with each other. They’re like two powerful forces pulling in opposite directions, so you can’t always depend on what you feel as being the right thing to do. ¹⁸But if the Holy Spirit is leading you, you won’t be led to depend on keeping the law as a means of salvation. ¹⁹The actions of our sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impure thoughts, filthy language and recklessness, just to mention a few. But they don’t end there. ²⁰They also include idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, strife, hostility, heresies, ²¹envy, drunkenness and sexual perversions. There are other

evils committed which I'm not going to mention because you already know what they are. I'm warning you again, those who do these things cannot be taken into God's kingdom. ²²But the fruit which the Holy Spirit produces is totally different: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³humility, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ have crucified their sinful nature and are no longer under its control.

²⁵We get our new life from the Holy Spirit, so let's keep in step with the Spirit and live the way He wants us to. ²⁶Let's not be proud and challenge each other or envy one another.

Help One Another

6 Brothers, if one of your members is overcome by temptation, then let those who are more spiritually mature gently help to bring him back to the Lord. Don't forget that you're not immune to temptation, but could fall into the same sin. ²Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you'll be doing what Christ Himself would do. ³If someone thinks that he's somebody when he's really nobody, he's just fooling himself. ⁴Each one should evaluate his own conduct. If it's good, he'll feel content and won't have to be comparing himself with others all the time. ⁵In the final analysis, everyone is responsible for his own actions and, in that sense, has to carry his own load.

Keep Doing Good

⁶Those who are being taught the gospel should help support their teacher by sharing the good things they have with him.

⁷Don't be deceived and think that you can snub God. Whatever a man sows, that's what he'll reap. ⁸If a man invests time and energy in fulfilling the desires of his sinful nature, he'll reap for himself spiritual decay and eternal death. But if he invests time and talents in what the Holy Spirit leads him to do, then he'll reap spiritual strength and eternal life. ⁹Don't lose

heart and stop doing good. In time, we'll reap the harvest, so don't give up! ¹⁰As we have opportunity, let's help everyone we can, but especially fellow believers.

Hold On to the Cross

¹¹Now I want you to notice the change in handwriting. The reason it's larger is because I'm writing these closing remarks with my own hand. ¹²Those people who are trying to compromise the gospel by forcing you to be circumcised are doing it for fear of the Jews. They don't want to come right out and say that the cross of Christ doesn't require circumcision because they'd be persecuted by their own countrymen. ¹³Have you noticed that those who urge you to be circumcised are not consistent? Many of them don't keep all the Jewish laws themselves. Why then are they putting so much emphasis on the importance of circumcision? They not only want to avoid persecution, but they also like to boast about how many Gentile Christians they have persuaded to be circumcised. ¹⁴As far as I'm concerned, my boasting will continue to be about the Lord Jesus Christ. My interest in status-seeking died when I accepted Christ's death on the cross, and ever since then, I have had no interest in the world and advancing my own reputation. ¹⁵Christ doesn't care whether a person is circumcised or not. What really matters is whether he has been recreated in Jesus Christ and is different from what he was before.

A Final Plea

¹⁶To all God's people who live by the principles of the gospel, mercy and peace. ¹⁷From now on, don't bring up this subject of circumcision again. Don't stir up any more trouble over it. I have scars all over my body from beatings I received to bring you the pure gospel. ¹⁸Dear brothers, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you. Amen.

EPHESIANS

Paul Called to Serve

1 This letter is from Paul, who was called by God to serve as an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the faithful believers in Ephesus and to all others who are faithful to Christ. ²Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you forever.

God's Lavish Grace

³Praise be to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for all the spiritual blessings we have received, made secure in heaven for us through Christ. ⁴Before this world was created, God determined that all who believed on His Son should be saved, and that we should be holy and blameless in His sight. ⁵Because of His love, God decided to secure our destiny by adopting us as His children through Jesus Christ, according to His good pleasure and will. ⁶Let us praise God for His glorious grace which He freely gave us in Christ, the One He so dearly loves. ⁷It is through His blood that we have redemption and forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of God's grace ⁸which He has lavished upon us and through which He has given us wisdom and understanding. ⁹God has already revealed to us the secrets of His will, as He purposed in Jesus Christ. ¹⁰When the right time came, He carried out His plan, the goal of which is to bring together all things in heaven and earth under the headship of Christ.

¹¹It is through Christ that we are included in God's plan and are destined for heaven, which is His purpose and will for all who accept His Son. ¹²We were among the first to accept Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah and to place our hope in Him and now we live for His glory. ¹³You also placed your hope in Christ after hearing the word of truth, the good news of salvation. And God put His stamp of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit because of your faith in His Son. ¹⁴The Holy Spirit is God's first

installment of His gifts and the guarantee that we will receive everything He has promised to the praise of His glory.

Paul's Prayer of Thanksgiving

¹⁵When I hear of your confidence in Christ and how much you love and care for each other, ¹⁶I can't stop giving thanks to God for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, will continue to give you wisdom and reveal more of Himself to you as the days go by. ¹⁸I pray also that the eyes of your heart will see more and more of what Christ has done for you and that you will realize the hope to which God is calling you, the inheritance that awaits His people. ¹⁹The tremendous power of God is available to all of us who believe. This is the same power ²⁰which raised Christ from the dead and seated Him on the right hand of God. ²¹Christ is above all rulers, authority and power or any other title that can be given in this world or in the next. ²²God placed all things under His feet and made Him the head of the church. ²³This makes the church Christ's body, and He fills it with His spiritual presence just as He fills the universe.

Saved by Grace Through Faith

2 In the past you were spiritually dead in transgressions and sins. ²You used to follow the ways of this world by listening to the promptings of the prince of this world, the same spirit seen in those who are disobedient. ³All of us in times past felt Satan's wicked influence. We lived to please ourselves and did whatever our sinful bodies and minds wanted us to do. We were no different than anyone else and deserved God's punishment for what we did.

⁴But God's mercy is great, and His love for us is beyond understanding. ⁵We were spiritually dead, but He gave us a new life in Christ—by grace alone and totally un-

merited. ⁶And spiritually speaking, He raised us out of the tomb of death and enthroned us with Christ to sit next to Him in heaven. ⁷He did all this so that throughout the ages of eternity, He can continue to show the riches of His grace by His kindness to us in Christ. ⁸It is by grace that we are saved, and not because of anything we have done. It is a gift from God which we receive by faith. ⁹We certainly cannot congratulate ourselves and think that we are saved because of what we have done. ¹⁰We are God's people, created in Jesus Christ to do good works and to walk the road He did when He was here.

Christ Brings Peace

¹¹Do you remember when you were called "uncircumcised" and ignorant Gentiles by those who were circumcised and claimed to know God. ¹²In one sense, what they said was true. You didn't know God and were without Christ. You didn't know about the covenant of promise that God had made with His Son to save us from sin. You had no rights of citizenship, but were strangers and foreigners without God and without hope. ¹³But now things are different. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to Him through the blood of Jesus Christ shed for us on Calvary.

¹⁴Christ died for all of us, and by so doing, He brought peace between Jews and Gentiles, between races and nationalities. He broke down the wall of hostility that had divided us. ¹⁵As if it were a dead tree, He did away with the requirements of the ceremonial law which we had used to separate us. Now we have a new relationship with each other because of Him. ¹⁶Christ wants to bring us together in one body, having put to death our hostility toward each other at the cross. ¹⁷He came to preach peace and good will to those who were nearby to hear Him, and then through us to those who were far away. ¹⁸It is in Christ that we have access to the Father

through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹This means you're no longer strangers and foreigners living outside of God and without hope. Because of Jesus Christ, you're now citizens of God's kingdom together with believers everywhere and all those throughout the universe who make up God's wonderful family.

²⁰To use another analogy, you're like living stones of a beautiful temple carefully and securely laid on the foundation of the apostles and prophets who, in turn, are cemented to Jesus Christ, the great Cornerstone. ²¹All these stones are joined together into a beautiful, holy temple, being aligned on Christ and raised up to the glory of God. ²²And in Christ you too, together with us, are part of this growing temple in which God, through the Holy Spirit, lives.

God's Love Includes Gentiles

3 For this reason, I, Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, have been imprisoned, because I took the gospel to the Gentiles. ²I assume that you know how God extended His grace to me and then for your benefit called me to bring you the gospel. ³The hidden things of God's grace and His plan for you were shown to me by revelation, about which I wrote to you before. ⁴So when you read this letter, you'll better understand my insights into the mystery of Christ's love for you. ⁵In the past, people didn't understand all this, but now God through the Holy Spirit has shown these things to His apostles and prophets. ⁶The mystery of God's love includes the Gentiles. It is His plan to make them members together with us of one spiritual body, sharing the promises of God in Jesus Christ.

God's Purpose for the Church

⁷I became a servant of Jesus Christ by the gift of God's grace and was called to share with you the good news of salvation by the power of God working through me. ⁸I am the least important of God's people. Yet, God spoke to me, even

me. and by His grace called me to share the riches of Christ with you. ⁹God has asked me to make plain to everyone what He has done for them through Jesus Christ. The mystery that was never fully understood in the past was that the same God who created all things also planned our redemption.

¹⁰It is God's purpose that through the church His manifold wisdom might be disclosed to other worlds throughout the universe. so they, too, will understand more of His love. ¹¹This agrees with His purpose throughout the ages, to save us from our sins, which He accomplished through Jesus Christ our Lord. ¹²It is through Christ and our faith in Him that we can come to God, speaking freely to Him and in full confidence, without being afraid. ¹³So don't become discouraged because of my imprisonment. The trials He allows me to go through are for your benefit.

Paul Prays for Believers

¹⁴For this reason I bow in prayer before such a loving Father. ¹⁵The whole universe is His family and all who believe in heaven and earth have been given His name. ¹⁶I pray that out of His glorious riches our heavenly Father will strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit ¹⁷so that Jesus Christ will continue to live in your hearts by faith and that you will be rooted and grounded in His love. ¹⁸I pray that you and all believers will be enabled to more fully understand the breadth and length and depth and height of the love of God. ¹⁹And I pray that you will experience the love of Christ, which is beyond human comprehension, until your hearts overflow with love and gratitude to Him.

²⁰To God, who is able to do immeasurably far beyond what we can ask or think, and who wants to do even more for us by His power in our lives, ²¹to Him be glory in the church and in Jesus Christ throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen.

One Lord and One Faith

4 As a prisoner for the Lord, I appeal to you to live lives worthy of your high calling as Christians to which God has called you. ²Be humble, patient and gentle with each other, showing tolerance and love. ³Worship God in peace, stay united and be guided by the Holy Spirit. ⁴Make every effort to preserve the unity given to you by the Holy Spirit, and you will be at peace with one another. ⁵There is one Lord, one faith and one baptism. ⁶There is one God and Father who is over everything, works through everything and now is in all of you.

Spiritual Gifts

⁷In addition, Christ has generously given each one of us special gifts of grace. ⁸As it says in the Psalms: "When He ascended on high, He took a parade of captives with Him and then gave gifts to His people." (These captives were trophies whom He had raised from the dead at the time of His resurrection.) ⁹When it says that He ascended, it proves that He first came down to earth. ¹⁰And He who came down to become one of us has now ascended and been given a place next to God who has put Him in charge of everything in heaven and on earth.

¹¹The gifts He gave were varied. Some were called to be apostles, others to function as prophets, still others to be evangelists and others to be pastors or teachers. ¹²These are only a few of the many gifts God has given to make the church stronger and to equip it to carry out its mission. ¹³The gifts are to help us press together, to treasure our mutual faith and to grow up into mature believers, becoming more and more like Christ. ¹⁴These gifts will lift us out of our childish impulsiveness and keep us from being tossed back and forth like a cork on the waves of the sea, or from being spun around by every wind of doctrine that comes along. There are always those who are crafty and unscrupulous, who will stop at nothing to undermine

the truth and trick people into going the wrong way. ¹⁵But we have spoken the truth in love which will help you grow to be more and more like Him. ¹⁶We're Christ's body, which is only as strong and healthy as its individual muscles and sinews. So as we work together according to our abilities, the church will grow and build itself up in love.

New Lives

¹⁷I appeal to you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ not to live as Gentiles who think differently and have different values. ¹⁸Their minds are darkened and they're alienated from God because of their ignorance, which is due to the hardness of their hearts. ¹⁹They've become calloused, living lives of sensuality, and indulging in undisciplined passions while continually lusting for more. ²⁰This is totally different from the kind of lives I've taught you to live or from the life Christ lived. ²¹You were taught to live in accordance with the truth as it is in Jesus. ²²Take off the old self with its previous conduct, which continues to degenerate into corruption and deceitful lusts. ²³Renew your hearts each day by committing yourself to Christ. Determine to live totally for Him. ²⁴This is what it means to be a new person in Christ, recreated the way God designed, reflecting His goodness and holiness.

Don't Grieve the Holy Spirit

²⁵So stop lying to each other and speak truthfully, because we are all members of the same family. ²⁶If you get upset, don't focus on your feelings until you're filled with hatred. Let go of anger and before nightfall turn everything over to the Lord. ²⁷Don't give the devil a foothold or an opportunity to cause trouble. ²⁸Anyone who has been stealing should stop, do some honest work, pay back what was stolen, then give something to those in need. ²⁹Let no dishonorable talk come out of your mouths but only what will help those who hear.

Impart grace to others by talking faith and hope as fits the occasion. ³⁰Don't grieve the Holy Spirit who put His seal of approval on you when you gave your heart to Christ. The Spirit is the only One who can keep you from living a life of sin and seal you for the day of God's deliverance. ³¹Put away any bitterness, hostility, anger, gossip, rioting, and holding grudges. ³²Instead, be kind and compassionate to one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Imitate Christ

5 In Christ we see what God is like. As children imitate their father, you, as God's children, should be like Him. ²Walk in love and be willing to expend yourself for others as Christ has done for us. Remember that Christ's life was like sweet incense which He offered as a fragrant sacrifice to God.

³Such things as illicit sex, lewd living and greed have absolutely no place in a Christian's life. These things are totally unbecoming to a people who are bound for heaven. ⁴Also filthy language, flippant talk, coarse joking and making fun of people should have no place in your lives. What you should talk about is how grateful you are for what God and others have done for you. ⁵You can be sure that no one who lives immorally, who is greedy, or who values anything as more important than God can have a part in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶Don't let anyone deceive you with untruths. It is because of their disobedience that these people will reap God's final displeasure with sin. ⁷Don't associate with those who keep on insisting that they have a right to do these things.

Walk in the Light

⁸You once did some of these same things because you were in darkness, but now you're different because you're in the light, so you need to live as children who belong to the light. ⁹This light produces in people everything that is good,

wholesome and true. ¹⁰Test your lives by these things and what pleases the Lord. ¹¹Don't get involved with people who are trying to draw you back into a life which has no hope and which produces no such fruit, but show them that they are wrong by the good things you do. ¹²It's not even right to talk about the shameful things these people do in secret, much less do them. ¹³But all things become visible when exposed to the light. The kind of life you live rebukes the way these people live. ¹⁴That's why the Scriptures say, "Wake up and act as though you're alive in Christ and not half dead. Then Christ will give you more light so you can shine even brighter."

Be Careful How You Live

¹⁵So be careful how you live, using the wisdom that God has given you. ¹⁶Take advantage of every opportunity to do good because there is so much evil these days. ¹⁷Don't be foolish, but try to understand what God has in mind for you, and do it. ¹⁸Don't drink wine, because it's too easy to get drunk. If you want excitement, let your spirit get excited about what God has done and is doing. ¹⁹Sing and praise God together, and you'll encourage not only yourself, but others as well. ²⁰Develop an attitude of gratitude and always give thanks to God our Father for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Husbands and Wives

²¹Show a submissive spirit, and yield to one another for Christ's sake. ²²Wives should respect and honor their husbands according to the rule of Christ. ²³Husbands are the sustainers and protectors of their wives, honoring them as Christ honors the church and is her Savior. ²⁴As the church seeks to please Christ in everything, so should wives seek to please their husbands. ²⁵Husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave His life to save her. ²⁶He did this to set the church apart,

and through the power of His word. He washed away our sins even before we were baptized. ²⁷He wants to have a glorious church, without one spot of selfishness or wrinkle of sin. He wants a church in which members live grace-filled lives modeled after His. ²⁸Husbands should love and value their wives as they do their own bodies. When a husband cares about his wife, he's actually caring about himself because the two of them are one. ²⁹Have you ever heard of a normal person hating his own body? People care for their own bodies. That's what Christ does for His church. ³⁰He cares for it because the church is His body. It's His human presence in the world. And since we are members of His body, we ought to care for each other as we care for the various parts of our bodies.

³¹A husband should leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, to love her as part of himself. That's how two people become one. ³²Such a union of heart and mind is a profound mystery. I'm speaking of Christ's relationship to the church, but also of the relationship of a husband to his wife. ³³Husbands are to love their wives and care about them as they care about themselves. And wives are to respect their husbands in loving mutuality.

Children and Parents

6 Children, obey your parents unless it goes against God's commands, because that's the right thing to do. ²Respect your parents, whether they love the Lord or not, because that's the commandment to which God has attached a special promise: ³"That things may go well with you and that you may live a longer life." ⁴Fathers, don't mistreat your children or make them angry, but love them as members of God's family. Raise them up with discipline and in the teachings of the Lord, training them to serve others.

Servants and Masters

⁵Servants, obey your masters with re-

spect and singleness of heart just as you would obey Christ. ⁶Don't do your job only when someone's watching you. You're not out to please men but to please God, so work from the heart as unto the Lord. ⁷Do everything wholeheartedly and cheerfully as if you were serving the Lord, not men. ⁸The Lord will reward everyone for the good he does, whether slave or free. ⁹Masters, do the same for your servants. They're your brothers. Don't mistreat them. You, too, have a Master, and He makes no distinctions, but treats everyone with kindness and great affection.

The Whole Armor of God

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and stand in the power of His might. ¹¹Put on every piece of spiritual armor the Lord has given you so you can stand your ground against the devil's schemes. ¹²We're not dealing with an enemy here on earth that we can see or get our hands on, but with the darkness of spiritual beings who were once in heaven and are now using their authority and power to try to rule the world. ¹³That's why you must put on the whole armor of God and stand, not giving an inch of ground so when the fighting is over, you'll still be standing. ¹⁴Therefore, stand! Tighten the belt of truth securely

around yourself. Cover your chest with the breastplate of Christ's invincible righteousness. ¹⁵Put on the shoes of the good news of Christ's peace. ¹⁶Take up the shield of faith, trusting in the Lord to stop the flaming arrows which Satan sends your way. ¹⁷Then put on the helmet of salvation and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. ¹⁸And pray for the power of the Spirit at every encounter because your life depends on it. Be alert to the needs of your brothers and sisters and pray for them too. ¹⁹Also, pray for me, that God will give me the right words to say when I stand before Caesar and that the Lord will help me share the gospel fearlessly to all who are there, even if it leads to my conviction. ²⁰I'm an ambassador in chains because of the gospel. Pray that I will defend it boldly and without fear.

Greetings

²¹I decided to send Tychicus to you to tell you about the conditions I face here and how I am doing. ²²He'll not only tell you about me but will encourage you by telling you what God has done through us. ²³Peace to all of you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴May God's grace be with you and with all who love the Lord Jesus Christ with a love that grows ever stronger.

PHILIPPIANS

Paul and Timothy Willing Servants

1 Greetings from Paul and Timothy, willing servants of Jesus Christ, to the members of the church at Philippi, including the elders and deacons. ²Grace be to all of you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul Is Thankful for Their Fellowship

³I thank God every time I remember you. ⁴And every time I pray for you, I do so happily, ⁵thanking God for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶There's no doubt in my mind that God who began a good work in you will continue to do so until Christ comes back to take you home. ⁷It's right for me to feel this way about you because you're so close to my heart. I'll never forget how eager you were to have a share in God's grace by helping me preach the gospel when I was free and even now when I'm in chains. ⁸God is my witness how I long for you with all the affection of Jesus Christ. ⁹I pray that the love you have for one another will grow deeper and stronger, becoming more and more discerning and intelligent. ¹⁰This love will help you know the difference between what is good and evil, and will help you live pure, blameless lives until you meet the Lord. ¹¹I want you to be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes from Jesus Christ and that brings glory and praise to God.

Paul Rejoices That Christ Is Preached

¹²My brothers, I want you to understand that the things that have recently happened to me have not hindered the spread of the gospel. ¹³My imprisonment for Christ has been instrumental in taking the gospel right into Caesar's palace. Even the imperial guards know why I'm here, and so does everyone else. ¹⁴Many of our brothers in the Lord have become more confident in their faith because of my imprisonment. They preach the gospel courageously and without fear.

¹⁵It's true that some preach Christ out of envy, rivalry or even a sense of power, and others just like to stir up controversy. But there are some who preach Christ out of genuine concern for people. ¹⁶They do it sincerely and with love, for they want to see others saved in His kingdom. That's why I'm in prison, because I preached the good news about Jesus Christ so people will accept Him and be saved. ¹⁷But, as I said, there are those who preach Christ as a smoke screen from which to promote their own distorted ideas. These kinds of people seem to delight in making things hard for me. ¹⁸But it doesn't matter. The important thing is that Christ is being preached, whether it is in pretense or in truth, and in this I rejoice.

Confidence in Christ

¹⁹Because of your prayers and the powerful working of Christ through the Holy Spirit, I hope to be released. But whatever happens, I have no doubt that my imprisonment will turn out for the good of the gospel. ²⁰When I'm brought before Caesar for trial, I will not be ashamed of Jesus Christ, but I will exalt Him with courage and boldness as I've done in the past, whether Caesar releases me or not. ²¹If I'm released, it will be to the glory of Christ; if I receive the death sentence, it also will be to the glory of Christ and maybe even more so. ²²If I could choose to live I would, and I would go right back to work for the Lord, but I don't have that choice. ²³So I've been wrestling with mixed emotions. On one hand, I would prefer to be sentenced to death and in the next moment of consciousness see Christ, which would be much better than staying here in this old world. ²⁴On the other hand, it's more important for me to stay here and continue helping you. ²⁵From what I've heard, it sounds like I'll be released. Then I'll come to help you grow in Jesus Christ

and to rejoice even more in your faith. ²⁶I know you'll be glad to see me again too, and we'll have even more reason to praise the Lord.

²⁷No matter what happens to me, continue to be good citizens and live as men and women who have been changed by the gospel. And whether I'm able to visit you again or not, I want to hear that you're standing united, all having the same spirit of commitment and the same determination to be loyal to Christ. ²⁸I also want to hear that you're not being intimidated by those who oppose you. What they're doing is a sign of their own impending destruction, whereas your firmness is a sign of your salvation and eternal life. ²⁹This experience you're going through will strengthen your faith. Not only has God given you an opportunity to believe on Christ, but now He's giving you a chance to suffer for Him which will test your love. ³⁰You're going through some of the same conflicts and struggles I've been going through for years, some of which you personally witnessed when I was jailed in your city, only now, I'm jailed in Rome.

Be Like-minded and Humble

2 If you gain courage from being united with Christ, if you receive comfort from His love, if you enjoy fellowship together through the Spirit, and if you possess tenderness and compassion, ²then make my joy complete by being more like-minded, loving each other more deeply, and being more closely united in purpose and truth. ³Don't let selfishness and pride be your motive, and don't try to make a name for yourselves among the churches. But in humility of mind, give more recognition and honor to others than to yourselves. ⁴Don't become totally absorbed in your own spiritual growth, but take an interest in other people and help them to grow too.

Be Like Jesus

⁵You need to think and act like Jesus

Christ. ⁶From all eternity, He had the very form and nature of God. But equality with God was never something He boasted about. Christ always honored the Father above Himself. ⁷In fact, He has always been willing to put self aside like a servant, which in no way detracts from His equality with God, even though He took on man's nature. ⁸As a human being, He obeyed God in everything, even when God led Him to Calvary to die on a cross for us. ⁹This is why God can exalt Him, because He's so selfless. God has rightfully given Him a name above every other name in heaven and on earth. ¹⁰The time is coming when all beings in heaven and on earth will bow at His feet. ¹¹Everyone will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

You Are Lights in a Dark World

¹²My dear friends, just as you've always obeyed God, not only when I was with you, but even more when I was away, continue doing so. Work the salvation God has given you into your life with a sense of awe and gratitude, ¹³always recognizing that it is God who is at work in you. He is the One who gives you the will and power to obey Him.

¹⁴So be thankful for what He is doing for you and whatever you do for Him, do it without arguing or complaining. ¹⁵Everything you do should be blameless, innocent and above reproach. You are God's children living in a corrupt world. You are lights in the darkness, like stars lighting up the night sky ¹⁶as you lift up Jesus Christ and hold fast to His word. If I don't see you now, I'll see you at Christ's second coming. What a thrill it will be to know that my work for you was not in vain. ¹⁷Maybe I'll have to pour out my blood as Christ did, to be added as an offering to your sacrifice and life of faith. If so, I'll gladly die for Him just as joyously as you're living for Him. ¹⁸Be glad with me as I offer my life to Him who gave His life for me.

Timothy and Epaphroditus

¹⁹I hope in the Lord to send Timothy to see you. He'll tell you about me, then bring back news about you. ²⁰I don't have anyone else like him. He genuinely cares for you. ²¹It seems that many are interested only in their own lives and not in the work of Jesus Christ. ²²But Timothy has proven himself. He's like my son. We've worked and sacrificed together as father and son for the good of the gospel, so I know the kind of person he is. ²³I'll send him to you as soon as I know how life will turn out for me here. ²⁴I'm still hoping to be released and if it's the Lord's will for me to come to see you, I'll do so as quickly as I can.

²⁵I'm also planning to send Epaphroditus back to you. He's been a companion and friend and has worked with me fighting for the right to spread the gospel. You were the ones who asked him to come here and be a help to me, which he certainly has been. ²⁶He's been away from home for some time now, so he's anxious to get back to see all of you again, especially since you were so worried about him due to his illness. ²⁷What you heard was true. He was so sick that he almost died. But God was merciful and healed him, and in that sense God had compassion on all of us. If he had died, it would have added even more grief to my life. ²⁸But he's alive and well, and now I'm eager for him to go home so you can rejoice when you see what the Lord has done for him. Then I can stop worrying about you. ²⁹When he arrives, receive him gladly. Give him the honor he deserves, and do so for other gospel workers who come your way. ³⁰After all, he did risk his life for Christ and nearly died in the process. Yet he never once flinched or hesitated to support me but did exactly what you wanted him to do for me.

Paul Rejoices in Christ

3 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. I don't mind repeating what I've said, because if you hear it again, it will

safeguard you even more than before.

²Watch out for those who are constantly needling you about getting circumcised before you can become Christians. They're as irritating as dogs who never stop barking. They're trying to convince you that you have to be cut in the flesh to be saved. That just isn't so. ³The circumcision that counts is the circumcision of the heart, of which the outward circumcision is only a symbol. This means that we rejoice in what Jesus Christ has done for us. Our confidence is not in ourselves and what we can do to earn salvation. ⁴If anyone could have confidence in himself to earn salvation, I certainly could. ⁵I was circumcised an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin when I was eight days old. I grew up and was trained in the strictest Pharisaic tradition. If there ever was a real Hebrew, I was one. I kept the Jewish laws so well that I was made a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish national council! ⁶Sincere? Was I ever! In fact, I was so sincere that the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem entrusted me with the responsibility to rid the country of Christians. As far as external conformity to the law was concerned, I was blameless. ⁷I once thought that all these external things would save me, but now I know they're worthless. My hope is not in myself and what I have done, but in Jesus Christ.

⁸Everything I did before and all the honors I received are worthless compared to the priceless treasure of having Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord. Whatever I had and did was nothing but rubbish in comparison to knowing Him. ⁹Now I have a righteousness which was given to me by Jesus Christ through faith in Him. This righteousness comes directly from God through faith, not through works. ¹⁰All I want is to know Christ more fully and to experience still more of the power of His resurrection in my life. To be more like Him I know I have to experience suffering as He did and be ready to die for Him as He did for me. ¹¹Yes, I'm willing to die for Him because I

have the hope of being raised from the dead just as He was.

Paul Presses Toward the Goal

¹²I've not achieved a state of flawless perfection, but as I strive to copy Him, my fellowship with Him continues to deepen. So I keep pushing ahead, going after what Christ had in mind for me when He first laid hold of me. ¹³I certainly don't consider myself as having reached perfection. However, this one thing I do: I forget the things of the past ¹⁴and press toward the goal to win the heavenly prize God is calling me to receive through Jesus Christ. ¹⁵All of us who have grown to be spiritually mature should think this way. If there are things I've said that you don't understand, God will make them clear to you. ¹⁶In the meantime, at whatever stage of growth we find ourselves, let's keep in step with the truth we know and keep our eyes on Jesus Christ. ¹⁷Follow my example, or that of others who are endeavoring to live closer to God.

Paul's Warning

¹⁸Unfortunately, there are too many believers who live as if they were enemies of Christ, and not His friends. I've warned you about them many times, and now with tears in my eyes, I'm warning you again because I love you and care about you. ¹⁹Those people will only end up destroying themselves. All they think about is their stomachs, bragging to their friends about things they should be ashamed of. Their concern is this present life. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly look forward to the coming of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹At that time, He will subdue all things, and by His power He will change our weak and sinful bodies to be like His sinless and glorious body.

4 I want you to know how much I love you and miss you. You are my joy and my crown. I'm urging you, my dear friends, to continue to stand for the Lord.

²Euodia and Syntyche, I beg you both to try to agree and get along as sisters in

the Lord. ³And I ask you, Syzygus, my trusty yokefellow, to help these women get together, because both of them worked hard when they were with me. They helped me spread the gospel just as Clement and my other fellow workers did. There is no doubt in my mind that their names are written in God's Book of Life.

⁴Always rejoice in the Lord. And again I say, rejoice! ⁵Let your gentleness and kindness be evident to all. Remember that the Lord is always near at hand and one day He will come again. ⁶Don't worry so much about everything. When you pray, ask God for what you need. Don't be afraid to plead with Him, but always do so with a grateful heart. ⁷God's peace which surpasses human comprehension will guard your hearts and keep your minds on Jesus Christ.

Fill Your Minds With What Is True

⁸Finally, my brothers, fill your minds with things that are true, honest and just. Think about things that are noble, pure and lovely. Focus on good reports about others. If any good has happened or there's any reason to praise man or God, think about those things. ⁹Put into practice what I've taught you and what you've learned from watching me, and the God of peace will always be with you.

Paul Expresses Appreciation

¹⁰I rejoice in my union with the Lord, but your renewed love and care for me has added to my joy. I'm not saying that you didn't care for me before, but you never had the opportunity to show it as much as now. ¹¹I'm not saying this because I need anything. Over the years I've learned to be content with whatever I have and to live with the circumstances in which I find myself. ¹²I know from experience what it's like to be in extreme need and also what it's like to have more than I need. I have learned the secret of being happy wherever I am, whether I am hungry or well fed, whether I have little or much. ¹³I can do anything

through Christ who gives me strength.

¹⁴But I'm human and I still appreciate what you've done for me in my troubles.

¹⁵You Philippians know that after I left Macedonia in the early days of my ministry, not one church offered to help me, except you. ¹⁶More than once while I was working in Thessalonica, you sent me the help I needed. ¹⁷I'm not saying this because I want you to give me more gifts, but I do want your generosity to grow and develop, and I want to see even more of the fruit of the Spirit credited to your account. ¹⁸By the way, I did receive everything you sent me through Epaphroditus, and it is more than I need. I have enough. Thank you. Your generous gifts were like sweet perfume—a fragrant offering, pleas-

ing to God. These are the kinds of gifts that God appreciates, because they come from loving hearts. ¹⁹My God will supply all your needs from His glorious riches which, because of Jesus Christ, now belong to you. ²⁰To God, our heavenly Father, be glory and honor for ever and ever. Amen.

Greetings

²¹Greet everyone who belongs to Jesus Christ. The brothers who are here helping me send their greetings. ²²All God's people in Rome send their greetings, especially those who live and work in Caesar's palace. ²³May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you and your generous spirit.

COLOSSIANS

Paul, an Apostle of Christ

1 This letter is from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and from Timothy, our brother, who asked me to send you his greetings, ²to the members at Colossae who are faithful and loyal disciples of Christ. Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul Rejoices in Their Faith

³We thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for all of you and we never stop praying for you. ⁴We were especially thankful after we heard about your faith and trust in the Lord and the love you have for all those who believe. ⁵This is because of the hope you have, which is like a treasure securely kept for you in heaven. You first heard about this hope when we brought the gospel to you and shared with you the good news of salvation. ⁶Since then, the gospel has spread throughout the Roman world and is already bearing fruit in other countries, just as it has in you. Many more now know the truth of God's amazing grace. ⁷Epaphras, a fellow servant and trusted worker, brought you the gospel. Faithfully he ministers for Christ in our place, teaching you the good news of salvation. ⁸He has told us all about your love for each other and what the Holy Spirit is doing among you.

⁹Since we received his report, we haven't stopped thanking God for you. And we're praying that He will give you still more wisdom and understanding in spiritual things. ¹⁰Also, we're praying that you will continue to please the Lord by living honorably, bearing the fruit of good deeds and growing in the knowledge of the Lord. ¹¹May God strengthen you and give you His mighty power to have even greater endurance and patience. ¹²Let us all be joyful in the Lord and give thanks to the Father who has made us acceptable future citizens of His kingdom in heaven.

¹³He has delivered us from the control of the power of darkness and qualified us for the kingdom of light. ¹⁴It was God's own Son who died to redeem us and through Him we have the forgiveness of sin.

Christ's Preeminence

¹⁵He is the visible likeness of the invisible God, and as God's firstborn, He has the right to be over all creation. ¹⁶For by Him all things were created, both in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. All power was instituted by Him, both spiritual and secular, including governments, rulers and levels of authority. All things were created by Him and for Him. ¹⁷He existed before anything was created, and by His power everything continues to hold together. ¹⁸He is also the head of the church and controls the church as the head controls the body. Although He existed from the beginning, He was the only human who ever died and conquered death. Therefore, He is worthy to be given first place above everything in heaven and on earth.

¹⁹The Father was pleased to acknowledge the fullness of God in Him. ²⁰He brought peace to the human race by shedding His blood on the cross, thus uniting heaven and earth.

²¹He also removed the hostility that existed in you toward God because of the wicked way you acted. But now you see things differently. ²²Christ took on human nature and died in your place so He could present you to the Father holy and without blemish, free from all blame. ²³You must continue to place your faith in Him and determine not to be moved away from the hope held out to you in the gospel. This good news has been preached in all the great centers of the Roman Empire, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ whom I serve.

We Preach Christ

²⁴I rejoice in what I have suffered for

you, similar to the suffering of Christ which His body, the church, must still suffer. ²⁵I became a minister to serve the church because God commissioned me to present the message to you in its fullness. ²⁶All through the ages and from generation to generation, the good news has never changed, but it was partially hidden until now, and you are among the first to see it in its fullness, which makes you special. ²⁷God wants to use you to attract others to Him with the glorious riches of what has been revealed and which is seen by Christ living in you, who is our only hope of glory.

²⁸Therefore, we preach Christ, the substance of our message, and with all earnestness we teach and warn everyone so that we may present them to God complete in Jesus Christ because of what He has done for them. ²⁹I work hard, using all my energies for Him, but He is the One who strengthens me and keeps me going.

Not Philosophy but Christ

2 I want you to know how I have agonized over you in prayer and over those in Laodicea, as well as over all those whom I have not personally met. ²May you be strengthened against the onslaught of error as you draw together in love. I want you to fully understand the truth about Jesus Christ and to experience the mystery of the oneness that exists between the Father and the Son. ³In Christ are found all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴I'm telling you this so you won't be deceived by persuasive rhetoric and fine-tuned arguments based on philosophical reasoning. ⁵Even though I'm not with you in person, I'm there in spirit and am happy to see the resolute firmness with which you're standing together in Christ.

⁶Just as you gladly accepted Christ as your Savior and Lord, with that same joy, continue to walk with Him. ⁷Become rooted in Him, build your lives on Him and strengthen your faith in Him as you have been taught. Do all of this

gladly, overflowing with thanksgiving.

⁸Be on guard against deceptive philosophies and empty arguments which undermine the gospel. Such arguments are not based on truth, but on human tradition; on the way the world thinks instead of on Christ. ⁹The fullness of Deity was in Christ when He was here and continues to be. He is the only human in whom all the wisdom and knowledge of God is found. ¹⁰It is in Him that you are complete, and it is from Him that you receive all the essential knowledge that you need to be saved. He is supreme over every spiritual power and all human authority.

Not Legalism but Christ

¹¹Through your union with Christ you were circumcised, not physically but spiritually, by cutting away the power of sin in your life. ¹²That's what your baptism was all about. You were buried in the water, and then rose again. And because of your faith in Christ, the same power from God that raised Christ from the dead changed your heart. ¹³When you were spiritually dead, your life was sinful and your heart uncircumcised. But God gave you a new heart and a new life in Christ, and He's forgiven you all the sins you ever committed. ¹⁴He cancelled the note of indebtedness against us because of our sins, nailing it to the cross, thus satisfying the demands of the law. ¹⁵It was at Calvary that Christ disarmed the powers of evil, stripping them of their armor and taking them captive. He made a public spectacle of them by allowing the entire universe to see and acknowledge His victory.

¹⁶Don't let anyone control your life by giving you a set of ceremonial rules about what to eat, what to drink and which monthly festivals or special sabbaths to keep. ¹⁷All these rules about ceremonial days were given as a shadow of the reality to come and that reality is Jesus Christ. ¹⁸Don't let anyone rob you of your experience with the Lord by con-

demning you for what you're doing. Don't let them put a guilt trip on you by their fake humility, their false concern for spiritual things, their supposed guidance by angels or their mystic experiences generated by their carnal minds. ¹⁹They've already let go of Him who is the Head of the church and by whom the whole church is held together, supported by muscles and ligaments. And it continues to grow as God nurtures it.

²⁰When you accepted Christ and died with Him, you were set free from the pride of this world. Why then do you now submit to meaningless rituals which again foster spiritual pride? ²¹"Don't handle this!" "Don't taste that!" "Don't touch that thing over there!" ²²All such rules and regulations to merit God's favor are worthless and will perish because they are human teachings. ²³They may be impressive and make you feel you are doing something for your salvation. You might even think you're closer to God because of the harsh way you treat your body; you may feel pious because you practice humility. But there is no spiritual value in these things, nor do they help you control your sinful nature.

New Life in Christ

3 Since you've been spiritually resurrected with Christ, continue to seek the things that are above, where Christ is, sitting in the place of honor and power at God's right hand. ²Set your mind on heaven, not on the things of this world as if that was the only thing that mattered. ³Your old sinful self is dead, and your new life is in heaven with Christ and God. ⁴And when Christ, who is your life, returns, then your bodies will be changed and you will share in His glory.

⁵In the meantime, you need to put to death whatever desires belong to your sinful nature, such as sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil passions and greed, which are nothing but self-idolatry. ⁶God will one day withdraw His Spirit from the earth, and those who have done these

things will face God's judgment of sin and reap what they have sown. ⁷You used to do these same things. ⁸But now your lives are different. You're changed. You're no longer the angry, raging, malicious, gossiping, lewd-talking people you used to be. ⁹Be careful not to slip back into your old ways. Don't lie to each other; be open and honest. You have put off the old nature. ¹⁰You're a new people now and every day God is renewing you as the process of His redemption continues to make you more and more like His Son. ¹¹There's no difference between Greeks and Jews, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarians and elite, freemen and slaves, because Christ has died for all.

Christian Behavior

¹²God loves you dearly and has set you apart as His own, so He wants you to be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient. ¹³Be tolerant of one another. If someone has done you wrong, forgive him as the Lord forgave you the wrong you did to Him. ¹⁴But above all else, love one another. Love will hold you together in perfect unity. ¹⁵Let the peace that only Christ can give control your hearts and minds. God called you to work together as one body. Learn to be grateful and thank Him for the fellowship you have. ¹⁶May the message of Christ in all its fullness enrich your life. Encourage each other with Scripture and singing of hymns and gospel melodies with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷Everything you do, in speech or action, do in the name of the Lord Jesus, thanking God the Father for what He has done for you through the gift of His Son.

The Christian Family

¹⁸Wives, honor your husbands, because this is what the Lord would have you do. ¹⁹Husbands, love your wives and don't be harsh with them. ²⁰Children, listen to your parents and obey them, for this is pleasing to God. ²¹Parents, don't antagonize your children, or they will be-

come bitter and will be discouraged from becoming Christians. ²²Servants, listen to your employers and do what they tell you, not because they are watching you, but because you love God and are working to please Him. ²³Whatever you do, do your best, as if you were working for the Lord, not for men. ²⁴Remember, the Lord will reward you when He comes, as He will all His people, just as He promised. For it is the Lord whom you are serving. ²⁵Those who do wrong will also get their wages. There is no favoritism with God. He judges everyone alike.

4 Those of you who have people working for you, treat them fairly, because you, too, have a Master, the One in heaven.

Continue in Prayer

²Continue earnestly in prayer and stay spiritually alert, always being grateful for what the Lord has done for you. ³Pray for us that God will give us opportunities to tell people the good news about Jesus Christ our Lord, for which I was arrested and am in prison. ⁴Pray, too, that I may give this message clearly so people can understand it.

⁵Be tactful as you share your faith with unbelievers when opportunities arise.

⁶Always be pleasant and courteous, speak kindly to everyone and know what you believe so you can give the right answers when people ask you questions.

Greetings From Everyone

⁷Tychicus is our brother and fellow worker in the Lord whom we all love. When he comes, he will tell you all about the circumstances that led to my arrest.

⁸The reason I'm sending him to you is to see how you're doing, to cheer you up

and to encourage you by telling you the experiences we have had. ⁹Onesimus, that dear and faithful brother who is one of your own members, will also be coming. Together they'll tell you everything that's been happening here.

¹⁰Aristarchus, who is in prison with me, sends his greetings. And Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, also sends greetings. I've already written you about welcoming him when he comes to see you.

¹¹Joshua, also called Justus, sends his greetings. These are the only men of Jewish birth who are working with me. They have been a real comfort to me.

¹²Epaphras, who is one of your members and a fellow servant of Christ, sends his greetings too. In every prayer, he prays for you, asking God to help you stand firmly as mature believers, totally committed to doing the will of God. ¹³I

can personally testify that he has worked just as hard for the believers in Laodicea and Hierapolis as he did for you. ¹⁴Luke, our dear friend and doctor, and Demas, send greetings. ¹⁵Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea and to Nympha and the believers who meet in her house.

Send This Letter to Laodicea

¹⁶After you've read my letter, pass it on to the church in Laodicea so the members there can read it too. Then be sure that you read the letter I sent to them which I asked be passed on to you. ¹⁷Tell Archippus to take his call to the ministry a little more seriously and to do the work the Lord wants him to do.

¹⁸Now let me write this postscript myself. Greetings from me, Paul. Do not forget that I'm sitting here in chains. May God's grace be with you.

1 THESSALONIANS

Greetings

1 Greetings from Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church in Thessalonica, which belongs to God the Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ. May the grace of God and the peace of heaven be yours.

Paul Is Thankful for Their Faith

²We thank God for all of you and keep mentioning you to Him in our prayers. ³With God as our witness, we remember very well how quickly you put your faith into practice. how your love for Christ motivated you to work hard and how your hope in the Lord gave you strength to stand firm. ⁴Beloved brothers, God loves you. And we know that He has chosen you for something special. ⁵We know this because when we brought the gospel to you, it came not just with words, but with the power of the Holy Spirit deeply convicting you that what we said was true. Remember the kind of men we were among you? We lived the way we did to help you. ⁶You followed our example and became followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. In spite of great suffering, you received the message with a joy that can come only from the Holy Spirit. ⁷So now you've become an example to all believers throughout Macedonia and Greece. ⁸Not only are you taking the gospel throughout Macedonia and Greece, but news of your strong faith in God has spread everywhere. We don't need to tell about it because everyone already knows. ⁹People everywhere are talking about how warmly you welcomed us and how quickly you accepted the gospel and turned from your idols to the true and living God. ¹⁰They also know how eagerly you look forward to the return of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, the One whom God raised from the dead and who delivers us from our sins and from judgment to come.

Paul's Work in Thessalonica

2 My brothers, you can see that our visit to your city was not a failure ²We were shamefully treated and imprisoned in Philippi just before we came to see you. Yet when we arrived in Thessalonica, we fearlessly preached the gospel to you with the kind of courage that only God could have given us, in spite of the threats on our lives. ³Our appeals to you were not motivated by selfishness, nor did we work some kind of magic or trickery to get your attention. ⁴On the contrary, we spoke to you as God told us to when He first entrusted us with the gospel. We didn't preach the good news to please people, but to please God, who not only sees what we're doing, but also reads our hearts and motives. ⁵You know that when we came to you, we didn't flatter anyone, nor did we use the gospel as a cover for greed. We didn't look for what we could get out of you and then leave town. God is our witness that our only motive was to help you and nothing more. ⁶We didn't look for praise or financial support from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ, we could have exercised authority over you. ⁷But we tried to be as gentle as a mother with her little children. ⁸We loved you and cared about you and were not only ready to share the gospel with you, but to even risk our lives for you. That's how much we thought of you.

⁹I'm sure you remember our labor and hardships as we worked day and night to support ourselves so we wouldn't be a financial burden to you, while sharing with you the good news about our God. ¹⁰You're our witnesses, and so is God, that our motives toward you were pure, our conduct fair and our words honest as we worked in your midst. ¹¹We treated each of you as a loving father treats his own children. ¹²We encouraged you when you needed it and comforted you when you were hurt. Our concern was

that you live the kind of lives worthy of God, who wants to share His kingdom and glory with you.

Persecutions

¹³We will ever be thankful that when we brought the gospel to you, you listened with all your hearts and received it, not as a message from man, but as a message from God, which it is. This was evidence to us that God had already been working with you to help you believe. ¹⁴What has happened to you since then has also happened to the believers in Judea who accepted Jesus Christ. You're receiving the same harsh treatment from your countrymen as the believers in Judea received from the Jews. ¹⁵That persecuting element among them killed the Lord Jesus Christ just as their fathers killed the prophets before that. Now they're after us and are even persecuting you. How can they think they're pleasing God when they treat others the way they do? ¹⁶They try to stop us from preaching the good news to those who have never heard about God. This shows the kind of people some of them are. They're filling up their cup of sin and will soon reap the consequences of what they've done to us.

Paul's Plan

¹⁷When we were forced to leave you, it was painful. We felt like parents who for a short time had been separated from their children, but we were never really separated because we had you in our hearts. We're doing all we can to work things out to come to see you. ¹⁸Again and again I have tried, but each time Satan has stirred things up to keep me from coming. ¹⁹What is life without our mutual hope and faith and our final victory in Jesus Christ? When the Lord does come and we stand in His presence, we'll rejoice over you. ²⁰You are our glory and joy!

Paul's Concern

3 When we were in Athens, we couldn't stand it any longer and had

to know what was happening to you. ²As soon as Timothy, our brother and fellow worker, came and told us about your sufferings, we sent him back to comfort and encourage you to stand firm in the faith, even if we have to stay here alone. ³We don't want any one of you to turn away from Jesus Christ because of what you're now going through. You know that these persecutions are not happening without God knowing about it. ⁴When we first came to you, we told you ahead of time that we would all be persecuted for our faith. As you now know, that's exactly what happened. ⁵The reason I sent Timothy back to you so soon was that I had to know how you were doing and how your faith was holding out. I was concerned that the devil may have stirred things up and the persecutions may have been more than you could take so that our work and sacrifice for you would be fruitless.

Paul Encouraged by Timothy's Report

⁶But Timothy is back and has brought us the good news about your steadfast faith in the Lord and your intense love for Him. He told us that you still have a warm spot for us in your hearts and that you long to see us just as we long to see you. ⁷My brothers, in all the difficulties and pressures we face here, we are encouraged and strengthened by your faith in the Lord. ⁸We can live more courageously now, knowing that you're standing firm. Such news is life itself. ⁹Once again we thank God for you and for the joy you give us which lifts our spirits and makes our ministry more joyful. ¹⁰We pray to God day and night that He will see fit to overrule our present situation so we can come to strengthen you and help make your faith even stronger.

Paul's Prayer

¹¹May our God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, see fit to make it possible for us to come to see you again soon. ¹²In the meantime, may the Lord make your

love for one another and for others become as great as is His love for all of us and our love for you. ¹³May He give you inner strength to be blameless in holy living when you stand in the presence of our God and Father with all the holy people whom the Lord Jesus will gather together at His coming.

Live to Honor God

4 Brothers, in this last part of my letter, I urge you, in the name of the Lord Jesus and for His sake, that you put into practice what you've learned from us and live more and more for the glory of God. ²You know what we taught you was not on our own authority, but on the authority of Jesus Christ. ³The will of God is that your lives be different from the lives of unbelievers. So don't do all the immoral things that they do, sexual or otherwise. ⁴Every one of you should know how to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable. ⁵Don't be led by passion like the heathen who don't know or care about God. ⁶And don't lie and defraud your brother in Christ or take advantage of him in any other way. As we told you before, the Lord will punish those who do these things by letting them reap the consequences of what they've done. ⁷God has not called us to be impure, but He has called us to live lives of purity and holiness. ⁸Whoever rejects our teaching is not rejecting us, but rejecting God, who spoke to us through His Holy Spirit and told us what to tell you.

Be Good Citizens

⁹Now I don't need to write to you about brotherly love because the Holy Spirit Himself has taught you to love one another. ¹⁰You've already shown this love by the attitude you have toward fellow believers throughout Macedonia. But I'm urging you on because I want you to love each other more and more. ¹¹Make it your aim to live quiet and orderly lives, minding your own business and working

to earn an honest living as we have taught you to do. ¹²This way you'll be seen by unbelievers as being honest citizens, and you'll be able to take care of yourselves without depending on others.

At Christ's Coming the Righteous Will Be Raised

¹³Brothers, I want you to know the truth of what I told you when I was with you. Your loved ones who have died are sleeping in Christ. Don't grieve as people who have no hope. ¹⁴Jesus died and rose again; therefore, those who died believing in Him will be raised to life by God just as Jesus was. ¹⁵We're telling you this by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. What He taught us was that those who are still alive when He comes will not be taken to heaven ahead of their loved ones who have died believing in Him and are now sleeping. ¹⁶When Christ descends from heaven as the Archangel, He will give a shout like a trumpet, which is God's call to the dead, and those who died in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then those who love Him and are still alive will be changed and, together with those who have been resurrected, will be caught up in the sky to meet Him in the air. From then on, we'll all be together with the Lord! ¹⁸So comfort and encourage each other with these words.

Be Ready for the Lord's Coming

5 There is no need for me to write to you about the times and seasons which will indicate when the Lord will come. ²You know yourselves that the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief in the night. ³When everyone says, "We've finally achieved peace and the world is safe," then sudden destruction will hit this world as never before. The end will come as quickly as labor pains come on a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape. ⁴You are not in the dark, brothers, so that day should not surprise you like a thief. ⁵All of you have been given light on the subject. We are

not in darkness as those who can't see where they're going. ⁶But let's not feel so secure about what we know that we fall asleep spiritually, as some do, but let's discipline ourselves to stay awake. ⁷People sleep and get drunk at night. ⁸But we are people of the day. In addition to self-discipline, wear faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹God's purpose is not to destroy us, but to save us through the Lord Jesus Christ! ¹⁰He died for us, and whether we're alive or dead when He comes, we belong to Him, and He will take us home to be with Him forever. ¹¹Therefore, cheer each other and encourage one another in the faith, just as you've been doing.

Final Instructions

¹²Now brothers, we ask you to respect those leaders who are working so hard for you. The Lord has set them over you to admonish you and to help you in your walk with Christ. ¹³For the sake of the work, love them and hold them in high regard. Be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴Fellow workers, we urge you to warn those who are misbehaving, encourage those who are ready to give up, help those who are weak and be patient with

everyone. ¹⁵See to it that no one tries to get even with another member for a wrong he has done. Always be kind to each other and to everyone else. ¹⁶Always be joyful in Christ. ¹⁷Never stop praying. ¹⁸Be thankful to God for what He has done for you, no matter what happens. This is the kind of life God expects from those who know Jesus Christ. ¹⁹Don't put out the fire of the Holy Spirit kindled in your heart. ²⁰Don't treat inspired messages as if they were not important. ²¹Check out everything you read and everything you hear and hold on to what's true. ²²Avoid every form of evil, even if it looks innocent.

Final Greetings

²³May the God of peace be with you and help you to live for Him. I pray that your whole being—body, mind and spirit—will be kept blameless until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The One who called you is faithful and will help you do that as He said He would.

²⁵Don't forget to pray for us, dear brothers. We need your prayers.

²⁶Greet all our brothers with a warm embrace. ²⁷In the name of the Lord Jesus. I urge you to read this letter openly to all members. ²⁸May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

2 THESSALONIANS

Greetings

1 Greetings from Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church in Thessalonica which belongs to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²Grace and peace to you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus.

Judgment at Christ's Coming

³Brothers, we are thankful to God for all of you, and it's right for us to feel this way because your faith in God and your love for one another is growing more and more. ⁴That's why we boast about you when we visit other churches. We tell believers everywhere about your continued endurance and confidence in the Lord, in spite of all the persecution and suffering you're going through.

⁵This shows the strength of God's grace and that His confidence in you has not been misplaced. It also shows that you're members of God's kingdom, because you're willing to suffer for it. ⁶God will be just and will repay those who are persecuting you. They will not escape the consequences of their deeds. ⁷Keep your thoughts on the Lord. He will give you the rest you deserve when He returns from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels. ⁸He will carry out judgment on those who refuse to know God, and on those who know Him but refuse to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. ⁹They will be totally destroyed by the presence of God and the glorious majesty of His power.

¹⁰When Christ comes back, His glory will be reflected in His people who are the miracles of His grace. They will stand amazed at the glory of the Lord in whom they have put their faith. And you will be among them because you believed what we have told you. ¹¹With all this in mind, we keep praying that God will help you live a life worthy of His calling. May His mighty power help you carry out your good intentions and build your faith. ¹²We pray this so that the Lord Jesus

Christ will be glorified in you and you in Him, through the grace of our God and of Jesus Christ His Son.

The Great Apostasy

2 Let me further clarify for you what I said about the coming of the Lord and the time when we will be gathered together to meet Him. ²Don't become unsettled, alarmed or caught up in a state of excitement by those who tell you that the Lord's coming is at the door, whether they claim to have the gift of prophecy or some written communication from me. And don't believe those who tell you that I believe Christ will soon come and restore Israel to its former glory. Neither of these things is true. ³Don't let anyone deceive you. Christ will not come again until the great apostasy takes place and the man leading this global rebellion against God's law is exposed. ⁴He will exalt himself by opposing all those who truly worship God. He will set himself up in the midst of the church and speak for God as if he were God.

⁵Don't you remember that I told you all this before? ⁶You know that this global rebellion is being held back until God's appointed time when He will remove His restraining power from the one who opposes His law. ⁷This mystery of lawlessness is already at work and will continue to spread until the one behind it is exposed and taken out of the way. ⁸The man who opposes God's law will be seen for what he is, and the Lord will destroy him with the breath of His mouth and by the brightness of His coming. ⁹All that this man will do will be in accordance with the work of Satan, who will also come and display his power by working miracles and all kinds of signs and wonders.

¹⁰Those who do not love the truth enough for God to save them will be swept away by all kinds of deceptions brought about by the power of evil. ¹¹For this reason God will allow them to be de-

ceived, and they will end up believing a lie. ¹²However, they will not be judged because they believed a lie but because they did not believe the truth and continued to take pleasure in wickedness.

Stand Firm in What We Taught You

¹³But we thank God for you, my brothers, because you are beloved of the Lord and are among the firstfruits of the gospel in Macedonia. You were drawn to the Lord by the Holy Spirit and you accepted the truth as soon as you heard it. ¹⁴God has not only spoken to you through the preaching of the gospel, but He has called you to share in the honor and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵So stand firm and hold on to the truths we taught you when we were with you, as well as the truths we shared with you in our letters. ¹⁶May God the Father, who loved us so much and by His grace encouraged us and gave us hope, ¹⁷continue to give you courage to stand firm in what you have been taught and in what you believe.

Pray for Us

3 Finally, pray for us that we may spread the good news about Jesus Christ freely and that many others will accept it as eagerly as you did. ²Also, pray that we may be delivered from the outrageous acts of wicked men, because not everyone accepts the gospel, as you well know. ³Remember that the Lord is faithful and will continue to strengthen and protect you from the power of the evil one. ⁴We have confidence that you will continue to be faithful to Him and do what we've asked you to do. ⁵May the Holy Spirit continue to lead your minds and hearts into greater understanding of God's love and give you the same persevering faith that Christ had.

Work for a Living

⁶In the name of the Lord Jesus, do not

be influenced by those who sit around idly, showing no inclination to work for a living. This is contrary to what we have taught you to do. ⁷You know that you ought to follow our example. Did you ever see us sitting around all day long doing nothing? ⁸We worked day and night making tents to support ourselves and shared the gospel with you without asking to be paid. We didn't even eat anyone's food without paying for it. ⁹Even though we knew we had a right to ask for your support, we wanted to give you an example to follow. ¹⁰We told you that whoever sits around waiting for the Lord to come and refuses to work has no right to eat. ¹¹I say this again because I keep hearing that there are still some among you who are not working but are spending their time minding everybody's business but their own. They say they're working for the good of the church, but they're not, and on top of it all, they expect you to feed them. ¹²By the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, I am asking these people to go to work, to earn a living and to stop living off the church's funds. ¹³My brothers, don't get tired of doing good.

¹⁴But if anyone refuses to follow our instructions in this letter, notice it. Then stop inviting him home to eat with you. Maybe he'll wake up and be ashamed of living off others. ¹⁵Now don't go to the extreme in this and treat him as an enemy, but correct him as a brother and help him do what is right.

A Final Blessing

¹⁶May the Lord of peace give every one of you the peace of heaven in everything you do. The Lord be with all of you.

¹⁷I'm finishing this letter in my own handwriting. I simply want to say: Greetings from Paul, which is how I end all my letters. ¹⁸May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.

1 TIMOTHY

Paul, an Apostle of Christ

1 This letter is from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the command of God our Savior and Jesus Christ our Hope, ²to Timothy, my son in the faith. May the grace, mercy and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Warning Against False Doctrines

³I want you to stay at Ephesus just as I asked you to do when I left Asia Minor to go to Greece. You need to stop some people there from teaching false doctrines. ⁴They're teaching things based on rabbinical stories, priestly genealogies and Gnostic teachings, all of which raise a lot of questions in the minds of the people about the gospel. Instead, the believers ought to be encouraged to live godly lives and to strengthen their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what administering the gospel is all about. ⁵So I'm charging you to show believers that the goal of our commission is to engender a spirit of love, which comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience and sincere faith. ⁶Some members have already turned aside from the gospel by engaging in endless discussions and continual analysis of doctrines. ⁷They want to be known as teachers of God's word, but they themselves don't understand what they so confidently affirm.

⁸We know that the law of God is good, if it is rightly understood and applied. ⁹The law does not condemn good men but those who are lawless. It's against criminals, lawbreakers, irresponsible members of society and those we generally call sinners. It's against the unholy and profane, those who mistreat their parents, who are murderers, ¹⁰prostitutes, sexual perverts, slave traders, kidnappers, liars and perjurers and anyone who lives contrary to God's commandments and the gospel. ¹¹Sound doctrine harmonizes the law and the gospel, which our glorious and blessed God entrusted me to teach.

Thank God for His Grace

¹²I thank the Lord Jesus Christ, who counted me worthy of His trust by selecting me for the ministry and giving me the strength I need to serve Him. ¹³He did this in spite of my past when I cursed His name, persecuted His followers and even had them put to death. I was a violent man, but Jesus was merciful to me because I did these things out of ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴The Lord filled me with His grace and gave me the faith and love I needed to minister to the needs of others. ¹⁵This is a fact and should be accepted as such, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶However, God dealt mercifully with me by leading me to Jesus Christ and allowing me to taste of His salvation which is available to all mankind. He wanted to display His mercy through me, the worst of sinners, as an example to others so they, too, would see God's great love, accept the Lord Jesus Christ and receive eternal life. ¹⁷Now to the great King of all ages, immortal, invisible to human eyes, the only true God, to Him be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Take Your Ministerial Charge Seriously

¹⁸Timothy, my son, the same charge to take care of the churches that I received from the Lord Jesus Christ I'm now passing on to you, which is in harmony with the prophecies given about you. So I want you to accept this charge seriously. Take the gospel weapons and fight well for our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁹Hold on to what you believe and keep a clear conscience. Some have already forgotten their ministerial charge and lost their way. They did not listen to the Holy Spirit and ignored their conscience. As a result, they made shipwreck of their faith. ²⁰For instance, I think of Hymenaeus and Alexander, both of whom I had to leave in the hands of Satan because I couldn't

reach them anymore. I hope and pray that they will wake up and stop blaspheming the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pray for Government Leaders and Everyone

2 I'm urging all our people to be more constant in prayer. First, they should bring their petitions to God with thanksgiving for what He has already done for them. Then they should pray for people everywhere so others, too, may accept the gospel and be saved. ²They should pray for the emperor and other rulers so these men will let us continue living quiet, peaceful lives in holiness and loyalty to God while honoring those in authority. ³Such conduct is good and acceptable to God and pleases our Savior. ⁴The Lord wants everyone to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵We all know there is only one God and only one Mediator between us and God, the Man, Christ Jesus. ⁶He paid the price to set all men free, which is proof that God wants all of us to be saved. And the proof of His love was given to us at the appointed time. ⁷For this cause I was called to be an apostle and sent to the Gentiles, to proclaim the good news about God. I'm telling the truth. I've been specifically appointed as a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.

Men and Women Should Dress Modestly

⁸I wish that our believers everywhere would lift up their hands full of holy deeds to God in prayer without being full of anger and criticism. ⁹Also, I wish that our members, especially the women, would dress modestly, sensibly and in harmony with what is proper for Christian decency and dignity. They should not draw attention to themselves by such things as outlandish hairdos, gaudy makeup, ornaments of gold or pearls and expensive fashions as unbelievers do. ¹⁰They should show themselves beautiful by doing good deeds which are fitting for women who

profess to be followers of Christ. ¹¹Let a woman who is a new convert learn and receive instruction with a quiet and peaceful spirit. ¹²I do not allow a woman to lord over a man the false claim that a woman was created first as the pagans teach.

¹³Adam was created first and then Eve, not the other way around. Woman was molded from a rib taken from man's side, made to be equal with him, not to exercise authority over him. ¹⁴Adam was not the one deceived; Eve was deceived when she left his side and became a sinner. ¹⁵But she will be saved through the birth of the promised Seed, if she places her faith in Christ and continues in love and holiness with modesty.

Qualifications of Elders

3 When a man wants to be a leader in the church, he's longing for something noble and good. There's nothing wrong with that. ²An elder should be someone who is blameless. If he's married, he should be loyal to his wife. He should practice self-control, conduct his affairs in an orderly manner and be known as a man of sound judgment. He should be hospitable, willing to open his home to fellow believers. He should be sufficiently skilled to teach the gospel so people can understand what he's talking about. ³He should not be known as someone who is addicted to wine, one who is always arguing about something, or one who loves money and is never satisfied with what he has. He should be a gentle, peaceful and patient man. ⁴He should be able to guide his own family, teaching his children to be obedient and respectful and to love the Lord. ⁵If a man can't give guidance to his own family and conduct himself as a good husband and father, how can he give guidance to the church and lead people to the Lord? ⁶He shouldn't be a recent convert because this responsibility could inflate his ego, and he'll come under judgment just as Lucifer did in heaven. ⁷He should be a man with a good reputation, respected

by the community. He should not be someone who easily falls into one of Satan's traps and disgraces himself.

Qualifications of Deacons

⁸A deacon has similar standards to uphold. He should have a good character and be honest and truthful in all things. He shouldn't be one who must have his wine or be controlled by greed and a passion to get rich. ⁹He should be someone who holds to the faith with complete sincerity. ¹⁰You should test him first before you ordain him. He should be above reproach before you put him into office. ¹¹Women chosen as deaconesses must also be of good character, not known in the community or the church as gossipers, but as sensible women, honest and faithful in everything they do. ¹²Any man who serves the church should be faithful to one wife and be able to guide his family and manage his finances. ¹³If such men carry out their duties as they should, they'll gain a reputation for being honest, dependable men. Then they'll be able to stand up and boldly speak about their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's Hope to See Timothy

¹⁴As I'm writing this letter, I'm still hoping to come to see you as soon as I can. ¹⁵But if my coming is delayed, this letter will let you know how things should be done in the family of God. Our members need to know how to conduct themselves, for the church is the living temple of the one true God and the pillar and mainstay of the truth in a world of sin. ¹⁶There's no question that the mystery of our religion is great: God manifest in the flesh, confirmed by the Holy Spirit, worshiped by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world and taken bodily to heaven.

Spiritual Dangers in the Last Days

4 The Holy Spirit has explicitly told us that in the last days, people will give up their faith and turn away from Christ.

They will listen to deceiving spirits and end up following doctrines of demons. ²Some will pretend to be loyal to the truth while teaching lies. Their consciences will be as insensitive as if they had been seared with a hot iron. ³Others will say that it's wrong to marry and to eat the good things God created which we should receive with gratitude. ⁴God created everything. Nothing should be rejected which He has said we can eat, and we should do so by offering thanksgiving and praise. ⁵These foods not only have the approval of the word of God, but will also be blessed by Him through our prayers.

Be an Example in All You Do

⁶When you share with people the things I just told you, remind them of my other instructions. If you do this, you will be a good minister, nourished by your faith in Christ and the doctrines which you have been taught and which you have integrated into your life. ⁷Don't waste your time with Jewish legends and myths which old women love to pass on. Instead, pour your energies into following Christ. ⁸Take time for physical exercise because this will help keep you fit and mentally alert. Most of all, exercise your spiritual faculties because this not only gives you a happier life here, but also promises to give you eternal life in God's kingdom. ⁹You've heard me say all this before, but it's still true. ¹⁰We gladly work and suffer because we have set our faith and hope on the living God who extends salvation to all men but is the Savior only of those who believe.

¹¹I urge you to teach and preach these things. ¹²Don't let anyone tell you that you're too young to teach them. Just continue being an example to the believers in speech, in attitude, in faith, in purity, but most of all, by your love for Christ and dependence on Him. ¹³I expect to be released soon, but until I come, continue reading the Scripture publicly during worship to strengthen our people, and keep preaching and teaching. ¹⁴Don't neglect

the spiritual gifts and responsibilities given to you through a prophetic message from God when the elders laid their hands on you at your ordination. ¹⁵Think about your duties as a minister and put your gift to use so that your spiritual progress and commitment can be seen by everyone. ¹⁶Watch to be sure you continue centering your teaching in Christ. As you do, you'll not only save your own soul, but those who listen to you.

Treat Older Members Like Parents

5 As you pastor the church, don't speak harshly to an older man but appeal to him as if he were your own father. Relate to the younger men as your brothers. ²Treat an older woman as if she were your mother and a younger woman with the respect you would give to your own sister with all purity.

Assist Widows Who Are Alone

³Women who are widowed should be treated with special deference. ⁴If a widow's children or grandchildren are able, they should take care of her. This is both good and pleasing in God's sight. ⁵The church should consider a woman a widow if she's alone. She should also be one who continues to pray and trust God. ⁶But the widow who lives in leisure and indulges herself in pleasure has turned from the Lord and in that sense is already dead while she's still alive. She doesn't need your help. ⁷Ask the believers to use these guidelines so what they do for widows and others will seem sensible to everyone. ⁸Anyone who doesn't provide for his own relatives, especially members of his immediate family, is denying the very principles our faith is built on. He's worse than an unbeliever because he knows what is right but doesn't do it.

⁹So don't offer financial assistance to a widow unless she's over sixty, in need, and her single state appears to be permanent. ¹⁰She should also be a woman who has done her best to raise her children, made her weary guests feel welcome by

washing their feet, helped the handicapped and devoted herself to doing good deeds. ¹¹Don't put young widows on your welfare list. Their natural desire to have a family has led some to turn their backs on Christ. ¹²They will be judged for having broken the promise they made in the hearing of the church to put Him first. ¹³If the church continues supporting them, they will use their time going from house to house as busybodies, gossiping, tattling about fellow church members and talking about things they have no business talking to others about. ¹⁴It's not wrong for young widows to want to get married. We hope they can, and we pray that they'll find good Christian husbands, have children and manage their households in such a way that no one can speak evil of them. ¹⁵But some of our younger widows have already left the church and returned to paganism. That's what makes the whole thing so painful. ¹⁶If a believer has a widowed mother, he should look after her and not let the church do it. The church needs to take care of widows who are alone and destitute.

Avoid Partiality

¹⁷As far as elders are concerned, those who do a good job as church leaders are worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. Express your appreciation to them. ¹⁸As the Scriptures say, "Don't put a muzzle on your ox while he's threshing your grain," and "A working man should be paid for the work he's done." ¹⁹Don't listen to people who slander an elder unless you hear the same thing from two or three reliable witnesses. ²⁰But if an elder is sinning openly, what he is doing must be publicly rebuked, and the church should discipline him. Hopefully, such discipline lovingly done will keep others from doing the same thing. ²¹I charge you before God, before the Lord Jesus Christ and before all the holy angels, that you carry out your responsibilities without favoring one person above another or

doing anything that even looks like partiality. ²²Don't ordain people and put them into office or positions of leadership too quickly. Have no part in church politics. Avoid even being implicated in such things. Keep yourself pure.

²³And take care of your digestive problems, no doubt made worse by the stress you've been under. Rather than taking the risk of drinking polluted water, buy yourself some unfermented wine to drink.

²⁴As a pastor, you know that some people's sins are plain to see and everyone can tell where they stand, but other people's sins are not so open and won't be seen until the judgment. ²⁵Much the same is true of good deeds. Some good deeds are plain to see, while other good deeds won't be seen as such until the Lord comes. But no deeds, good or bad, will go unnoticed.

Servants and Masters

6 Members who are slaves of pagan masters should give them their full respect so they won't curse God and blame our teachings for their misbehavior. ²Those who are servants of believing masters should show them respect and serve them better because they are brothers in the faith. These are the things you need to teach and preach.

Conceit and Greed

³If someone in your church does not accept the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and teaches things contrary to the gospel, ⁴he's conceited and doesn't understand what he's talking about. Such people have an unhealthy interest in arguing about the meaning of words and end up creating controversy, jealousy, slander and distrust. ⁵This leads to more arguments by people whose minds are deprived of truth. Some think that serving God is a way to get ahead financially. ⁶Serving God and doing what is right makes a person rich by giving him contentment, courage and hope. ⁷We brought nothing into this world and it's certain that we'll take nothing

out of it. ⁸If we have food and clothing, what else do we really need? Let's be thankful and content with what we have. ⁹Those who desire riches set themselves up for many temptations, trying to satisfy their foolish desires. If they're not careful, they'll be caught in the undertow of sin and, like a sinking ship, pulled down to destruction. ¹⁰The love of money leads to all kinds of evil. Some are so anxious to get rich that they've left the faith, only to later bring upon themselves tears of anguish and regret.

Don't Be Ashamed of Your Faith

¹¹But you're a man of God. So avoid these things and go after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of faith. Hold on to the gift of eternal life that you publicly accepted from God through Christ in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³I charge you in the sight of God, the great giver of life, and in the sight of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was not ashamed to confess His faith in His Father before Pontius Pilate, ¹⁴that you keep your ministry free from reproach. Be true to the gospel so that at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ you will be found faithful, ¹⁵who will come when God, the blessed and only Ruler of the universe, the King of kings and Lord of lords, decides. ¹⁶God alone is immortal. He lives in light so bright that no human can approach Him. No man has ever looked into the face of God and lived, nor will sinful man ever be allowed to see His face. To Him be glory and power forever. Amen.

Counsels to the Rich

¹⁷Charge members who are rich not to become proud or to trust in their wealth. They should put their trust in God who gave them what they have. He wants everyone to be happy. ¹⁸So they should focus their lives on doing good, becoming rich in virtue, helping those in need and being kind to everyone. ¹⁹It's like putting money in the bank of

heaven where it will never be devalued. They'll have a meaningful life here, and in the end, be given eternal life.

Final Instructions

²⁰Timothy, my son, hold on to the teachings which God has entrusted to you. Stay away from godless chatter, and

don't get involved in arguments with those who oppose the gospel because of some so-called higher spiritual knowledge. ²¹Those who claim to have such knowledge have missed the mark and left the faith.

God's grace be with you.

2 TIMOTHY

Greetings

1 This letter is from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, who sent me to the Gentiles to tell them about the promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ, ²to Timothy, my dear son in the faith. May grace, mercy and peace be yours from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Timothy's Faith

³I thank God for what He has done for me, and I serve Him with a clear conscience as many of my ancestors did. Day and night, I think about you and lift you up to God in prayer. ⁴I still recall your tears when they arrested me the second time. I very much want to see you for the joy and encouragement you give me. ⁵When I remember your simple unwavering faith in God, the same faith I've seen in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, I have no doubt that you'll remain loyal to the Lord Jesus. ⁶Keep that inner fire burning that God sparked when He called you to the ministry and I laid my hands on you in ordination. ⁷God has not given us a spirit of timidity and fear, but a spirit of boldness, love and self-discipline.

Don't Be Ashamed of

What You've Been Taught

⁸Never be ashamed to be a disciple of Jesus Christ or of me because I'm in prison. I was arrested for preaching the gospel and accused of teaching Christians to be disloyal to Rome. Join me in suffering willingly for the gospel, for God will give us the strength to do so. ⁹God not only sent His Son to save us, but also called us to be His people. He did this, not in response to anything we've done, but because of His own purpose and grace promised to us through Jesus Christ before this earth's history even began. ¹⁰What God had in mind was made unmistakably clear when Jesus Christ came and

destroyed the power of death, bringing to light the gift of eternal life and immortality through the gospel. ¹¹This is the good news that God asked me to take to the Gentiles when He first called me to be an apostle. ¹²I've suffered a lot to do this. But I'm not ashamed of my ministry. I know in Whom I have believed and know that He is able to keep everything I've entrusted to Him until the day I see Him face to face.

¹³Hold on to the truth that I've taught you with confidence and love in Jesus Christ. ¹⁴The Holy Spirit who lives in you will help you guard the truth that has been entrusted to you.

¹⁵As you already know, everyone who came to Rome with me from Asia Minor has left me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes, who were once very faithful. ¹⁶May the Lord bless the family of Onesiphorus because he stayed by me and wasn't ashamed of my chains. ¹⁷When he first came to Rome, he diligently looked for me until he found me. ¹⁸You know how much he did for me in Ephesus. Surely the Lord will be merciful to him on that day when Christ comes to take us home.

A Good Soldier Is Loyal

2 My son, be strong in the enabling grace of God which we have through Jesus Christ. ²The things that I've taught you, which you've heard me proclaim publicly in the presence of many witnesses, I want you to entrust to reliable men so they, in turn, can teach them to others. ³Endure hardships like a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ⁴A good soldier is totally loyal to the commander he serves. He doesn't get involved in civilian affairs, but his one aim is to please the commander who has chosen him. ⁵An athlete doesn't qualify for the games, nor can he receive the wreath of victory, unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶A farmer who has worked hard preparing the soil and planting the seed should be the first to benefit

from the harvest. ⁷Think about these analogies, and the Lord will help you understand the principles involved and how to apply them to your ministry.

⁸Don't forget that Jesus Christ in His human nature was a descendant of David, but He was raised from the dead and is now in the presence of God. This is the good news I've been preaching. ⁹It was over this that I have suffered so much, even being chained and lowered into a dungeon like a dangerous criminal. But God's word is not chained. ¹⁰I'm willing to suffer anything for God's chosen people that they may accept Christ and be saved. I also pray that the Gentiles, who through my suffering have accepted Christ, will continue as God's people through faith in Him.

¹¹If we die to sin as Christ died for us, then we, too, will be raised from the dead as He was raised from the dead. ¹²If we suffer and sacrifice for Him, even as He did for us, then we'll share in His glory as He said we would. On the other hand, if we deny knowing Him, He'll have no choice but to deny knowing us. ¹³If we turn against Him, He'll still love us because that's the kind of Person He is. His attitude toward us is not dependent on our attitude toward Him. He will always love us because He is part of us and we're part of Him, and He can't disown part of Himself.

Study to Be a Worker Pleasing to God

¹⁴Keep reminding our people of this and tell them to stop arguing about the meaning of words which only unsettles those who listen. ¹⁵Study every day to show God that you're a workman who does not need to be ashamed, correctly handling the word of truth and presenting the gospel with tact and conviction. ¹⁶Stay away from profane and senseless discussions which never help anyone but only make people irritable and more ungodly. ¹⁷Such discussions are like a cancer that eats away at people's spiritual lives. Hymenaeus and Philetus are the

kind who love to get people all worked up and involved in just such discussions. ¹⁸Where are they now? They have left the truth and are denying the resurrection, saying it has already taken place in our hearts. This has destroyed the faith of some and taken away their hope of heaven. ¹⁹But the solid foundation that God has laid continues to stand, and His promise is sealed with these inscriptions: "The Lord knows those who belong to Him," and, "Let all who profess the name of Christ renounce their ungodliness."

²⁰In large expensive houses you'll find two kinds of dishes and flatware. Some are made of gold and silver and others of wood and clay. The gold and silver ones are honored by being used for special occasions, while the others are used every day and are eventually discarded. So it is in the church. ²¹Whoever keeps himself pure by staying away from evil is like a gold and silver vessel useful to the Master, ready to do any good work. Those who pervert the truth are like vessels of wood and clay which eventually must be discarded. ²²Stay away from those who practice youthful lusts, but enjoy the companionship of those who are pure, focusing on faith, love and peace. ²³Avoid answering foolish and ignorant questions because they only breed more arguments. ²⁴A servant of the Lord must not get involved in such foolish debates but give his energies to being a good pastor and teacher, being patient and gentle with everyone. ²⁵He should teach those who disagree with him in such a way as to gently lead them to a greater knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ. ²⁶They need to come to their senses and escape the trap of the devil who is using them to discredit the gospel.

Perilous Times of the Last Days

3 I want you to realize that as bad as times are now, this is nothing compared to the perilous times of the last days. ²People will love only themselves and money. They'll be conceited, abu-

sive, disobedient, contemptuous of parents, ungrateful and impious. ³Many will lose all natural affection, will break contracts, slander their friends, lack self-control, be brutal and despisers of what is good. ⁴They will be treacherous, rash, irresponsible, conceited and will love pleasure more than they love God. ⁵Outwardly, they'll be religious, but they'll deny the power of God and the need for them to change. Don't be taken in by such people. ⁶Some of them cleverly talk their way into members' houses to exploit those who are burdened with guilt and sinful desires, gullible enough to listen to any new doctrine that might appease their conscience. ⁷They're always ready to learn but never take hold of the truth.

⁸These men who keep visiting our people are like Jannes and Jambres, those priests in Egypt who challenged Moses in front of Pharaoh. They deceived the king by using magic to do some of the same things Moses did. This kind of men are corrupt in their thinking and have rejected the faith by denying the truth. ⁹In time they'll be seen for what they are and their influence among our members will end, just as the power of the magicians in Egypt did.

Religious Imposters Will Increase

¹⁰But you know all about me. You've listened to my preaching and seen the kind of life I've lived. You've noticed my faith, endurance and love ¹¹and saw how I was persecuted and suffered first in Antioch, then in Iconium and Lystra. I'm sure you remember how the Lord rescued me from them. ¹²All who are in union with Jesus Christ and live the gospel will find themselves either shunned, rejected or persecuted. That's nothing new. ¹³But wicked people and religious imposters will increase more and more. Near the end, things will be even worse as they try to deceive our members when all the time they're being deceived themselves.

¹⁴As for you, hold on to the truth you were taught with the same fervor and faith as when you first heard the gospel because you know those who taught you.

¹⁵As a child, you were taught the Scriptures and asked to commit parts of them to memory, which wisely prepared you to accept salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. ¹⁶All Scripture is inspired and given by God for teaching truth, refuting error, correcting our ways and helping us to live right. ¹⁷This is so those who serve God may become mature and be thoroughly equipped to live lives full of love and good deeds.

Preach the Word

4 Therefore, I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who at His appearing will judge the living and the dead, ²that you preach the word at every opportunity, whether it's convenient for you or not. Don't hesitate to correct people if you need to and to tell them when they are wrong. Do all this with gentleness and patience as you encourage them along the way. ³The time will come when people will not listen to solid teaching but will follow their own inclinations and find teachers who will tell them what their ears are itching to hear. ⁴They'll turn away from hearing the truth and will turn to entertaining stories and myths. ⁵As for you, be watchful, be willing to suffer, do the work of an evangelist and continue preaching the gospel.

Paul's Farewell

⁶As for me, I'm ready to spill my blood as an offering to God. I believe that this time Caesar will not hesitate to hand down the death sentence. ⁷I have fought a good fight; I have completed my course; I have kept the faith. ⁸The victory wreath is waiting for me which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, will give to me when He comes back, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved Him and longed for Him to come.

Abandoned

⁹As far as my situation is concerned, do your best to come to visit me as soon as you can. ¹⁰Demas, who loves this present world more than the next, has deserted me and gone to live in Thessalonica. Crescens went to preach the gospel in Galatia and Titus went to look after the churches in Dalmatia. ¹¹Only Luke, the faithful physician, is with me. When you come, bring Mark along. He's developed into a dependable worker, and he can be a big help to me here. ¹²I've already sent Tychicus to Ephesus to take your place. ¹³Oh, yes, when you come, bring my winter coat with you, the one I left in Troas at the house of Carpus when they arrested me so quickly. Also bring with you my scrolls, especially the leather parchments of Scripture which have given me such comfort. ¹⁴Alexander, the metal worker from Ephesus, never gave up and was responsible for my recent arrest. But don't let it bother you. The Lord will let him reap the consequences of his work. ¹⁵However, you do need to be on guard against him because he's strongly opposed to our message. ¹⁶I should tell you that at my first scheduled defense before Nero, no one stayed by to testify in my favor, so I defended myself. I'm not holding that against them, and I pray that the Lord will forgive them.

Not Expected to Be Set Free

¹⁷But the Lord stood beside me and strengthened me, so that no one present could say he had never heard the gospel. To my surprise, as well as everyone else's, Nero didn't give me the death sentence, but sent me back to my cell so he could have more time to think about it. Temporarily, I was delivered from death as from a lion's mouth, but this time I'm not expecting him to set me free as he did a couple of years ago. ¹⁸I know the Lord will deliver me from everything the evil one brings against me. He'll be with me in death, and when He returns, He'll resurrect me and take me home. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Final Instructions

¹⁹Say hello to Priscilla and Aquila as well as to Onesiphorus, his family and all those who make up his household. ²⁰I left Erastus to care for the church at Corinth and told Trophimus to stay in Miletus and get some rest because he wasn't feeling well. ²¹Do what you can to come to see me before winter sets in. Otherwise you'll have difficulty traveling and might get here after I'm gone. Eubulus, Pudens, Linus and Claudia send their greetings, as do all the other believers.

²²May the Lord Jesus Christ strengthen your spirit and give you courage. Greet everyone there. God's grace be with you.

TITUS

Paul, a Servant of God

1 This letter is from Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. I was called to take the gospel to the Gentiles to tell them that by faith they can become God's chosen people and to equip them with a knowledge of truth that leads to godliness. ²This faith and knowledge rests firmly on the hope of eternal life which God, who does not lie, said before this world's history began that He would give us. ³When the right time came, God confirmed His promise by sending His Son to redeem us. He has entrusted me with this message and commanded me to preach it. ⁴Dear Titus, my son in the faith, may grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Savior, be with you.

Qualifications for Elders

⁵The reason I left you in Crete was so you could do some things there that still need to be done. You need to select and ordain elders for every congregation on the island, just as I asked you to do elsewhere. ⁶An elder must be someone who has a blameless reputation and has only one wife. His children should be believers, not wild and rebellious. ⁷He should not be arrogant or quick-tempered and certainly not one who drinks, gets into fights or is known as greedy for money. ⁸He should love people, be hospitable and interested in doing good, be fair, holy and self-disciplined. ⁹He should be faithful to God's message as it has been taught, be able to teach it faithfully to others and expose the errors of those who oppose it.

Church Discipline

¹⁰We have a number of Cretan converts from Judaism who are not really converted. They are demanding that the Gentiles be circumcised. They deceive people with such theological nonsense and cause endless trouble among the churches. ¹¹These men must be stopped

from ruining whole families by teaching and preaching things that are not true. Their real object is to get followers so they can receive their tithes and offerings.

¹²In fact, it was a Cretan poet, whom the people there consider to be a religious reformer and one of their prophets, who said of his own countrymen: "Cretans are naturally lazy gluttons, liars and evil brutes." ¹³This seems to be true. So you need to rebuke those who are perverting the gospel so the faith of the church can stay healthy and strong. ¹⁴They should stop listening to rabbinical stories and the commandments of those who have turned from the truth of the gospel. ¹⁵Those who are honest and pure in heart recognize goodness wherever it is found, but those who are defiled and unbelieving always see something wrong in everything, because their minds and consciences have lost the ability to make sound moral judgments. ¹⁶They say they know God, but their actions deny it. Because of the disgusting things they do and their disobedient and rebellious attitude, they're useless for doing anything good.

Sound Teaching

2 You must continue to teach our people what is in harmony with sound doctrine based on Scripture. ²Teach the older men to be sober, self-disciplined and worthy of respect. They should be strong in faith and love and steadfast in their commitment to the Lord. ³Teach the older women to behave likewise, as befits our religion. They should not spread rumors, or slander others. They should not be flitting socialites and lovers of wine, but women who teach useful things. ⁴They should be examples to the younger women, teaching them to love their husbands and children. ⁵They also should teach them to be sensible, self-controlled and pure, to be good mothers and housekeepers and to respect their husbands so

the truth of the gospel will not be discredited. ⁶For the same reason you should teach young men to control themselves. ⁷Be an example to our people in everything so they can see the things you teach modeled in your own life. In all your teaching and preaching be honest, sensible and sincere. ⁸Carefully choose what you say so it can't be condemned by our opponents. They will then feel ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us. ⁹Encourage slaves who are believers to obey their masters and do their best for them. Tell them not to talk back and argue about what they were asked to do because this will only hurt them and bring persecution on all of us. ¹⁰Tell them not to steal from their owners but to demonstrate how loyal and dependable they are so their actions will give credibility to what we teach and will attract others to our God and Savior.

Do What Is Right for the Gospel

¹¹After all, the grace of God is for everyone, slaves and masters alike. ¹²It teaches us to give up our own interests and desires and to do what is right for the gospel. We need to be self-disciplined and live upright and godly lives wherever we find ourselves. ¹³We are looking forward to the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. ¹⁴He gave His life to redeem us from sin and to purify for Himself a special people who are His very own and who are eager to do what's right and good.

¹⁵Teach these things to our people and use your position as pastor to strengthen and encourage them. If necessary, gently rebuke them according to the authority God has given you so they can be the kind of people they ought to be. Don't let anyone think that what you say is unimportant.

Be Good Citizens

3 Remind our people to be responsible citizens, to obey their rulers and others in authority, and be ready to do good in

every way they can. ²Tell them not to speak evil of anyone. Also tell them not to curse those who offend them but to live in peace and be friendly and gracious to everyone. ³All of us at one time or another were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved to passions and pleasures. We showed malice, were jealous and disliked or even hated others, especially if they hated us. ⁴But when the kindness and love of God was shown to us in Christ and we welcomed Him into our lives, a new power began to operate within us. ⁵God saved us, not because of the right things we had done, but because of His mercy and grace. We were born again through the power of the Holy Spirit and were baptized as a witness to our new life in Christ. ⁶God gave us the Holy Spirit for our spiritual good, and continues to do everything He can for us through the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷Thus by God's gracious act in Christ we were put right with Him and are now heirs of a new kingdom, full of hope, having been promised eternal life.

⁸These things are true, and I want you to keep emphasizing them so that our members will use their new lives doing good and helping those in need. Such things are praiseworthy and profitable for everyone.

Avoid Dissension

⁹Avoid foolish questions over scriptural genealogies and contentions over what the law of Moses teaches. Such arguments are useless and encourage no one to live a better life. ¹⁰If someone continues to agitate such questions, give him a warning. If he continues, warn him again. Then if he doesn't stop, you'll know the kind of person he is. Have nothing to do with him. ¹¹His actions show that his mind is warped and sinful. Let his own conscience condemn him.

Final Instructions

¹²I'll be sending Artemas or Tychicus to take your place. When they arrive, come to see me at Nicopolis where I plan

to spend the winter. ¹³In the meantime, do all you can to help Zenas, the lawyer, and Apollos on their way as they come through Crete to deliver my letter, and make sure before they leave that they have everything they need. ¹⁴Our people must learn to do good. They should not

fall back into the habit of living useless lives, but should provide for their own necessities as well as for those in need.

¹⁵All who are with me send their greetings. Pass them on to those who love us in the faith. May God's grace be with all of you.

PHILEMON

Paul, a Prisoner

¹Greetings from Paul, a prisoner because of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and from Timothy our brother, to Philemon, our dear friend and fellow laborer. ²Share this letter with your wife Apphia, a dear sister, with Archippus, your son and a fellow soldier of Christ, and with all the church members who meet in your house. ³Grace and peace to all from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philemon's Love for Christ

⁴Every time I pray, I thank God for you, Philemon. ⁵When I hear about how much you love the Lord Jesus, the confidence you have in Him and the concern you show for each member, my heart overflows with joy. ⁶I pray that God will enable you to share your faith even more effectively and to help you understand more fully all the good that comes to us through Christ. ⁷I'm really cheered and comforted because the members there have been blessed by your leadership.

Paul's Plea for Onesimus

⁸Let me be bold and in the name of Jesus Christ ask you to do something which may not be convenient. ⁹Because of the love that exists between us, I appeal to you to do a favor for the old man Paul, now imprisoned for Christ. ¹⁰I'm asking this favor for the sake of Onesimus who is like a son to me and to whom I gave spiritual birth right here in prison. ¹¹In the past he was rebellious and of little value to you, but now he's changed and become useful to both you and me. ¹²I'm sending him back to you because he is yours, and with him I'm sending my heart. ¹³I really would like to keep him here because he could help me during my imprisonment, just as you would if you were here. ¹⁴I don't want

to obligate you to do anything, but if you do take him back, do it of your own free will and not just to please me.

¹⁵All this may have happened for a reason. Even though he ran away and was separated from you for a while, he's now coming back to you for as long as you want him or as long as he lives. ¹⁶However, now he's no longer your slave but your employee. More than that, he's now your brother. That's what he has been to me, a beloved brother in the Lord. And that's what he should be to you.

In Partnership for the Lord

¹⁷If you and I are in partnership for the Lord as you've told me so many times, then welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸If he owes you anything or has wronged you in any way, charge it to my account. ¹⁹I'm writing this letter to you myself so you'll have everything in my own handwriting. I promise to pay for any damages he might have caused you. I won't even mention how much you owe me for the rich life you're now living in Christ. ²⁰My dear brother, do this favor for me and for the Lord's sake. In this way you will cheer my heart in Christ still more.

²¹I have confidence in your willingness to do this, and that's why I'm writing to you, knowing that you'll do even more than I ask. ²²One more thing, prepare a guest room for me, because I'm trusting that your prayers will help get me out of prison.

Final Greetings

²³Epaphras, who is in prison with me because of Jesus Christ, sends his greetings ²⁴and so do my fellow workers, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke the physician. ²⁵May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you forever.

HEBREWS

God Has Spoken Through His Son

1 God, who in the past spoke to our fathers through the prophets many times and in a variety of ways, ²has at the end of the preceding ages spoken to us through His Son, who is the rightful Heir of this world because it was through Him that God created all things. ³Christ is the reflection of God's glory, the visible expression of God's thought, the exact copy of God's inmost nature. He upholds and directs the whole universe by the power of His word. After providing cleansing from sin by His own death, He sat down on the right hand of God. ⁴This makes Christ so much greater than the angels, as shown by the more excellent name God gave to Him.

The Son Superior to Angels

⁵When did God ever say to an angel, "You are my Son because I have fathered you"? Or when did He say to any of the angels, "I will become your Father and you will be born as my Son"? ⁶But when He brought His firstborn Son into this world, God said, "Let all the angels bow down and worship Him!" ⁷Angels are created beings who serve God in whatever capacity is needed. As the Scriptures say, "His angels are as swift as the wind and as fearsome as flames of fire." ⁸In contrast, God spoke to His Son, saying, "Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever because righteousness is the foundation of your government. ⁹You loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. Therefore, I have exalted you above every other being in the universe and have done so with gladness and joy."

¹⁰God also said to His Son, "You existed with me before time began. You carried out our plan and shaped the earth, creating the sky above it with your own hands. ¹¹They will pass away, but you will remain. They will wear out like a piece of clothing. ¹²You will fold them up like an old garment. They will be

changed, but you will always be the same and your years will never end." ¹³To which of the angels did God at any time say, "Come, sit at my right side until I subdue all your enemies and they acknowledge you as Lord and give you the honor that's rightfully yours"?

¹⁴Are not angels created to serve us? Are they not sent to help those who are being saved and will inherit the earth?

God's Gift of Salvation

2 Therefore, we ought to pay close attention to what we were taught so we don't forget what God said in the Scriptures. ²For if His message given to our ancestors through angels was binding and every violation was punished, ³then how can we expect to escape punishment if we refuse this tremendous gift of salvation, our only means of being saved? From the beginning of His ministry, Christ announced that He had come to save us. This was confirmed by those who heard Him. ⁴Then God testified to it by signs and all kinds of miracles, as well as gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will.

The Son Made Lower Than Angels

⁵God did not turn the future of this world or its salvation over to angels. ⁶As the Scriptures say, "What is man that you should pay attention to him or the sons of men that you should visit them? ⁷You made him a little lower than the angels, but crowned him with glory and honor and put him in charge of everything you had made." ⁸God did the same thing for His Son when He became a man. He put Him in charge of everything, and that included the angels. Nothing in all creation was left out, even though at present we don't see that everything is subject to Him. ⁹So we see Jesus made a little lower than the angels who without God's comforting presence suffered and died but is now crowned with glory and honor after

having tasted death to the full for everyone of us.

God Carried Out His Plan

¹⁰It was fitting for God, for whom and by whom everything exists, to carry out His plan of bringing many sons and daughters to glory by letting Christ make a perfect sacrifice through His suffering and death. ¹¹Therefore, the Son who is holy and those who are made holy belong to the same family, and Christ is not ashamed to call us His brothers and sisters. ¹²The Scriptures tell us that He promised God, "I will tell my brothers and sisters about you and what you have done for them. I will praise your name in their meetings." ¹³In another place He said, "I will put my trust in God." Again the Scriptures quote Him as saying to God, "Here I am with your children whom you have given to me."

The Son Made a Descendant of Abraham

¹⁴Since God's children here on earth have bodies of flesh and blood, the Lord Jesus came and took on the same so that by His death He could break the hold of him who has the power of death over us, that is, the devil. ¹⁵By doing this, He freed us from a lifelong slavery to sin and from our fear of death. ¹⁶Clearly, He does not need to help save sinless angels but the descendants of Abraham. ¹⁷That's why He had to be made like us, His brothers, so He might become a merciful and just High Priest in the service of God, applying the atonement He had personally made for the sins of the people. ¹⁸And because He experienced the temptations and trials that we have to face, He is able to help us.

The Son Is Greater Than Moses

3 Therefore, my brothers, sharers in the heavenly calling, consider Christ's role as the One who was sent by God to be our High Priest, as we confess. ²The Lord Jesus was faithful and loyal to God just as Moses was when he carried

out his God-given responsibilities for Israel. ³Yet you should honor Christ more than Moses in the same way that the builder of a structure receives greater honor than the building itself. ⁴Just as every building we see has a builder, so God is the architect and builder of our spiritual house. ⁵Moses carried out his responsibilities faithfully, as a servant should. Many things he did pointed forward to the coming of the Messiah and testified about what Christ would do later. ⁶When Christ came, He carried out His responsibilities as a Son and not as a servant. He is in charge of His own house to which we all belong if we hold on to the confidence we have in God and the hope we have in Christ.

Don't Be Stubborn

⁷That's why the Holy Spirit is speaking through Scripture today, saying, "Listen to what God is trying to tell you. ⁸Don't be stubborn as your ancestors were when they rebelled against God in the wilderness and tested Him." ⁹David also reminded his people what God had said to those who came out of the wilderness: "Your forefathers questioned my love for forty years. ¹⁰That's why I told my servant Moses, 'These people never seem to learn. Their hearts are always going astray and they never do what I ask them to do.' ¹¹So I decided to take an oath not to give them the rest I had promised, regardless of how much I love them."

¹²My brothers, we need to be careful lest we have an unbelieving heart and begin to question what God has done for us through His Son and end up rebelling against God as our fathers did. ¹³Every day we need to encourage each other in the faith so our hearts will not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴We will all share in Christ's victory if we hold firmly to the end the confidence we had in Him in the beginning. ¹⁵Don't forget the warning given in the Scriptures, "If you hear God's voice today, don't be stub-

born as your ancestors were when they rebelled against God.”

¹⁶Who rebelled against Him? Wasn't it those who came out of Egypt with Moses and had witnessed God's mighty acts?

¹⁷Let me ask again, Who were the ones who provoked God for forty long years? Wasn't it those who sinned by refusing to listen to Him, whom He let die in the desert until a new generation came along?

¹⁸To whom was God speaking when He took an oath, saying, “I will not let them enter the land and give my rest to those who have disobeyed me”? ¹⁹He was speaking to His own people. They were not permitted to enter the land and receive God's rest because of their unbelief.

God Offers Spiritual Rest

4 Therefore, let's be careful that we don't make the same mistake and end up not receiving this rest in our souls or entrance into the heavenly Canaan. ²Remember that the same gospel was preached to them through the services of the Sanctuary as is being preached to us today. But what they saw and heard didn't help many of them because they didn't take hold of it by faith. ³As God said, “Those who lack faith shall never enter my rest.” This is the rest of faith He had in mind when He finished creating this world. ⁴That's why He gave man the seventh day, as a sign of spiritual rest, a reminder of His rest after creation. You'll find this in the Scriptures where it says, “And God blessed the seventh day and rested from all His work.”

⁵In the Psalm we quoted from, God said, “Those who do not believe, but harden their hearts, shall never enter my rest.” ⁶Through the centuries God has extended this invitation to every generation. The offer is still good, and there are some who will enter into that spiritual rest, but others, like our ancestors, will not, because they, too, refuse to believe and obey. ⁷Again, God earnestly appealed to His people in David's time, saying, “Listen to my voice; don't harden

your hearts.” ⁸If the literal land of Canaan had been the final rest God had promised, then why would He make another strong appeal to His people in David's time? Entering Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, as important as it was, was not the only thing God had in mind. ⁹So there still remains the offer of Sabbath rest in God that He intends for each generation to have, of which the seventh day is a sign. ¹⁰Those who receive the rest that God has in mind for them will rest from salvation by works, just as He rested from all His work at the time of creation.

¹¹So let's put forth every effort to enter into God's rest and not follow the example of our ancestors who disobeyed and died in the wilderness. ¹²God's word is like a sharp, double-edged sword. It cuts into a man's soul and spirit, as well as into his bones and marrow; it lays open to us our spiritual condition and exposes the thoughts and intentions of our hearts; it lets us see our own motives and then helps us change them. ¹³Everything in creation is open to God's eye. He sees everything we do.

Christ Was Tempted but Never Sinned

¹⁴He gave us a wonderful High Priest, Jesus the Son of God, who came to live with us and who has now gone up to heaven into the very presence of God, ministering there on our behalf. So let's hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵We don't have a High Priest who doesn't understand us or who's incapable of feeling our pain. He was tempted in every way more powerfully than we will ever be tempted, yet He never sinned. ¹⁶So let's approach our Father's throne with confidence, asking Him for mercy and grace to help us, especially in our time of need.

The Levitical Priesthood

5 Notice that when a new high priest is chosen, he's selected from among his fellow Levites and is expected to represent his people in matters relating to God,

such as offering up prayers, sacrifices and other gifts on their behalf. ²As a human, he realizes he needs God's help to overcome his weaknesses just as other humans do, so he deals gently with those who do not understand and those who are going astray. ³The fact remains that because of his human frailties, he has to pray for strength and he must offer sacrifices not only for the sins of his people, but also for his own sins. ⁴No one can take the honor of being a high priest upon himself just because he feels he's worthy of the office. Instead, he receives the honor of being a high priest only because God first called Aaron to that office.

Christ Is Our High Priest

⁵Similarly, Christ did not take the honor of being a high priest upon Himself, but God called Him to that office when He said, "You are my Son. I am your Father." ⁶In another place God said to Him, "You will be a high priest forever and function after the priestly order of Melchizedek."

⁷But Christ became one of us, so all through His life He had to offer up earnest petitions for help to withstand temptations. In the Garden of Gethsemane He prayed with strong cries and tears to God to help Him endure Calvary and raise Him from the dead. His prayer was heard and He was delivered from the fear of death because of His submission. ⁸Although He was God's own Son, He learned the real meaning of obedience by the things He had to suffer. ⁹And having lived a perfect life, He who learned obedience became the source of eternal salvation to all who in faith obey Him. ¹⁰That's why God appointed Him to be a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, who prefigured an enduring priesthood, rather than after the order of Aaron, who belonged to a temporary priesthood.

¹¹I would like to tell you much more about what the Melchizedek priesthood means, but it's difficult to put all of this in

writing, and even if I did, you probably wouldn't understand the full significance.

The Need to Grow in Understanding

¹²By this time you ought to be teaching others these basic things, but first you need some instruction yourselves, especially on the subject of salvation that God taught us in the Scriptures. So, rather than giving you solid spiritual food, I need to give you some more spiritual milk. ¹³Those who need spiritual milk are still growing and are not yet skillful in handling the word of God and its teachings that righteousness is by faith, for they are still children. ¹⁴Solid spiritual food is only for those who have grown to be spiritually mature, who have that firm relationship with God and by experience have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Mocking the Christian Faith Crucifies Christ

6 Let's not stop with just knowing the more obvious truths of our Christian faith, but let us move forward to a more mature understanding of what we believe. We shouldn't have to lay again the foundation of the need for repentance, the uselessness of trusting in salvation by works, or the importance of faith and obedience. ²Nor should we have to keep talking about the importance of baptism, the laying on of hands to receive the Holy Spirit, the certainty of the resurrection and the coming judgment. ³By God's grace and with the help of the Holy Spirit, I'll try to help you look beyond these basic beliefs, but doing this in so short a letter won't be easy. ⁴Some of the more mature questions we need to ask ourselves are these: Can those who have left the faith, who once tasted the gift of salvation and who had been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, be brought back to Christ? ⁵Can those who have tasted the goodness of God's word and felt the power of His coming kingdom be restored?

⁶It's impossible to bring back to repentance those who have fallen away from

Christ if they reject Him and continue to mock the Christian faith. By doing this, they're crucifying Christ all over again and holding Him up to public shame. ⁷Consider nature. God sends the rain, the earth drinks it in and produces crops, but only those who work the soil receive the blessing. ⁸If the field is not worked, it will keep on producing thorns and thistles which are worth nothing. Eventually, people will curse the field and clear it of weeds by setting it on fire. This is what will happen to those who produce thorns and thistles.

Don't Be Casual About Your Faith

⁹But, dear friends, even though we speak like this, we are confident that you will produce better things—fruits that belong to salvation. ¹⁰God is just. He will not forget how hard you have worked or the love you have shown for Him by helping His people, which you continue to do. ¹¹We don't want you to do this just for a few years, but as long as you live. We want this kind of ministry to become second nature to you so that your hope will become even more a reality. ¹²Don't be sluggish or casual about your faith, but imitate those of our ancestors who endured until they inherited what God had promised.

God Took an Oath and Cannot Lie

¹³When God gave Abraham His promise, He took an oath to confirm it. Since there is no one greater and stronger to swear by, He swore on the basis of His own ability and power, ¹⁴saying, "I promise to bless you, to give you a son of your own and through him to multiply your descendants." ¹⁵Abraham clung to that promise and although he wavered at times, he eventually received the son that God said he would have. ¹⁶You know as well as I do that when people take an oath, they always swear by someone greater and stronger than they are, and an oath like that puts an end to all arguments, because it's taken as a

confirmation of what they have said. ¹⁷Since God wanted to show us His intention to keep His promise in a way we could understand, He confirmed His promise to Abraham by an oath. ¹⁸So God's promise rests on two unchangeable facts: One is that it's impossible for God to lie and the other is that He confirmed what He said by an oath. So, having fled to Him for refuge, we can lay hold of the hope before us with absolute assurance. ¹⁹This hope is a firm and secure anchor for our souls, not in ourselves, but in Christ. It takes us behind the curtain of the Sanctuary into God's presence, ²⁰where Christ, who went before us, now serves as our High Priest after the priesthood of Melchizedek.

Abraham Accepted Melchizedek's Priesthood

7 In the days of Abraham, Melchizedek, king of Salem, was called by God to serve Him as priest. He went out to meet Abraham when Abraham returned from defeating four local kings and rescuing his nephew Lot. And when they met, Melchizedek blessed Abraham. ²Abraham acknowledged Melchizedek's priesthood by giving him one tenth of everything he brought back. So you can see how great a man Melchizedek was. His name meant King of Righteousness, and because he was king of the city of Salem, his name also meant King of Peace. ³From the Scriptures we know nothing about his father or mother or his beginning or end. So in this sense, he's a type of Christ whose priesthood is timeless because He always was and always will be.

⁴Think how great this man Melchizedek must have been in the eyes of Abraham, for our ancestor to give him one tenth of everything he had taken. ⁵We know that the sons of Levi collected tithes from the people according to the law of Moses. And their brothers gave them their tithes recognizing their priestly function even though they all came from Abraham. ⁶But Melchizedek

did not belong to the tribe of Levi that he should receive tithes, yet Abraham gave him his tithe and Melchizedek blessed him for it, even though God had given Abraham the promise of the covenant. ⁷It's obvious that those with lesser authority are blessed by those with greater authority. ⁸In the present Levitical system, men who die receive tithes, but back then, one received tithes of whom we have no record that he ever died. ⁹The point is that through Abraham, the Levites who themselves received tithes, paid tithe to Melchizedek. ¹⁰This means that even though their father Levi was not yet born, he acknowledged the higher priesthood of Melchizedek by what his great-grandfather Abraham did.

Christ's Priesthood Like Melchizedek's

¹¹If the Levitical priesthood could have perfected our relationship with God through the law, then why do the Scriptures talk about a different high priest to come, one like Melchizedek and not like Aaron? ¹²And if there is a change of priesthood, there must also be a change of the law that forms the basis of the priesthood. ¹³Now the One of whom the Scriptures speak as assuming this new priesthood came from a different tribe, not the tribe of Levi which was the only tribe allowed to serve in the Sanctuary. ¹⁴It is clear that our Lord didn't come from the tribe of Levi but from the tribe of Judah, and Moses never said that descendants from the tribe of Judah should serve in the Sanctuary.

¹⁵This becomes even clearer when a different High Priest comes, one who is like Melchizedek. ¹⁶This new High Priest was then chosen, not because He's a descendant of Aaron and therefore legally qualified, but because He resembles Melchizedek who has no written record of beginning and ending. ¹⁷God Himself instituted this new priesthood when He said to His Son, "You are a High Priest forever according to the priestly order of Mel-

chizedek." ¹⁸So the ceremonial law with its rites and symbols and all the instructions given to the Levitical priests had to be set aside because it was ineffective and no longer needed. ¹⁹That is to say, the law of ceremonies had no power to perfect our salvation but only to point to it. Now a much better hope is introduced by which we draw near to God. This hope came to us through Jesus Christ.

God Chose Christ to Be High Priest

²⁰He was made Priest by an oath, while other priests become such by inheritance without an oath. ²¹Christ became a priest by an oath when God said, "I will swear and will never change my mind. You are a High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." ²²This makes Jesus a High Priest of a much better covenant because He's the only one who can guarantee salvation and fulfill the promise God made to Abraham.

²³Furthermore, human beings die, so you have a constant change of priests. ²⁴But Christ lives forever. His priesthood does not pass on to someone else. ²⁵Therefore, He is able to fully save all who come to God through Him. He will never die but will continue to intercede for us as our High Priest until God's plan of salvation is complete.

²⁶Our High Priest is holy, harmless and pure, different from sinners. And He is now ministering for us in the Sanctuary in heaven above. ²⁷He doesn't have to sacrifice animals every day as priests do, first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people. Christ died for our sins once and for all time when He offered Himself up as a sacrifice. ²⁸The law of Moses appointed men who were imperfect to serve us as high priests, but the ceremonial law expired, and God took an oath and made His Son our High Priest, who is perfect forever.

Christ Serves in the Heavenly Sanctuary

8 The whole point of what I've said is this: our new High Priest is so great

that He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty of heaven and earth. ²He is serving in the true Sanctuary which is in heaven, set up by God and not by man. ³Every high priest who ministers in the earthly Sanctuary is expected to present offerings and sacrifices to God on behalf of his people. So Christ, who is ministering in the heavenly Sanctuary, must also have something to offer. ⁴If Christ were still here on earth, He wouldn't need to be a priest, because there are scores of priests who offer gifts prescribed by law. ⁵But the work they do here is only an imperfect copy and shadow of what is being done for us in heaven. This is what God had in mind for the services of the earthly Sanctuary when he said to Moses, "Build according to the plan which I showed you on the mountain." ⁶Christ's ministry in the heavenly Sanctuary is far better than the ministry of priests on earth, just as the covenant of which He is the Mediator is better than the old Levitical covenant, because it is based on promises already fulfilled.

The Levitical Covenant Obsolete

⁷If the Levitical covenant made at Sinai under the leadership of Moses had been faultless and final, then why would there be need for a new priestly covenant under the leadership of Christ? ⁸But God found fault with how the people accepted it, placing their faith in what they could do instead of in what Christ would do. In the days of Jeremiah, He said, "The time is coming when I will carry out the promise I made to Abraham and will set up a new order of things with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ⁹I will not speak through symbols as I did to your ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. They turned away from my covenant, and so I turned away from them.

¹⁰This is the covenant I will again offer to the descendants of Israel: I will put my laws in your minds and write them on your hearts. I will be your God, and you

will be my people. ¹¹Then no one will have to teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, 'Come, let me tell you about the Lord,' because the people will already know me, from the least to the greatest. ¹²I will be merciful and forgive their wickedness, and I will remember their sins no more." ¹³When God talked about a new covenant, He was not talking about doing away with the covenant of righteousness He had made with Abraham, but the Levitical covenant which has now become obsolete and old.

The Earthly Sanctuary

9 Under the Levitical covenant, there were specific rules for worship connected with a man-made Sanctuary. ²When the Levites put up the Sanctuary tent, they placed the seven-branched candlestick and the table with the consecrated bread behind the first curtain in the part called the Holy Place. ³Behind the second curtain was that part of the Sanctuary called the Most Holy Place. ⁴While the golden altar of incense was in the Holy Place, its function had to do with the Most Holy Place. In the Most Holy Place itself was the golden Ark, inside of which was the golden pot filled with manna, Aaron's rod that had budded and the two tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written. ⁵Above the Ark were two beautifully carved angels, one on each side, whose outstretched wings overshadowed the lid of the Ark called the Mercy Seat where the presence of God appeared. I can't take time just now to explain the meaning of each piece of furniture and the function of all the Sanctuary services with which you're so familiar.

⁶But after the Levites put up the Sanctuary tent and arranged the furniture like this, the services were carried out by the priests who, every day, would go behind the first curtain into the Holy Place to carry out their duties. ⁷But only the high priest was allowed to go behind the second curtain into the Most Holy Place

to carry out those services and then only once a year. He was never to enter without blood from the animals he had offered to God, both for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. ⁸The Holy Spirit was using the services of these holy places to teach us important truths about the services of the heavenly Sanctuary which could not begin as long as the earthly Sanctuary still had its appointed function. ⁹Those ancient services were filled with meaning and for the time appointed illustrated God's plan of salvation, but its offerings and animal sacrifices could not cleanse the heart of the worshiper. ¹⁰The entire Sanctuary service with its meat and drink offerings and its purification ceremonies was only temporary, pointing the worshiper forward to a time of change when the real Sacrifice would be offered and God's covenant promise would be fulfilled.

The Heavenly Sanctuary

¹¹Christ embodied all the realities to which the Sanctuary rituals pointed. And now He ministers the good things He has done for us in the more perfect Sanctuary above, the one not built by human hands. ¹²When Christ went to heaven, He didn't have to take the blood of bulls and goats with Him, but entered the Sanctuary once and for all time with His own blood by which He had paid the price for our eternal redemption. ¹³If the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a burnt calf sprinkled on those who were ceremonially unclean could take away their ritual impurity, ¹⁴how much more cleansing power does the blood of Christ have. In the power of the Spirit He offered Himself to God as the perfect sacrifice which cleanses us from all sin, freeing us from works that end in death to rightly serve the living God!

¹⁵This is why Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant under which He paid the price for sin and set us free from the sentence of death. This payment was made not only for our sins, but also for the sins

of those who lived under the Levitical covenant that they too may receive the promise of eternal inheritance by faith.

No Atonement Without Blood

¹⁶This arrangement is somewhat like a will which people make before they die. Before the will can take effect, the person who made it must be pronounced dead. ¹⁷The will is not binding while that person is still alive. It takes effect only after the person who made it is dead. ¹⁸This is why the old covenant had no meaning without the death of an animal. ¹⁹It also explains why Moses, after he read every commandment to the people, took the blood of bulls and goats, mixed it with water and then, taking a twig with hyssop leaves wrapped in red wool, used it to sprinkle blood on the scroll and on the people, saying, ²⁰"This blood symbolizes the blood that will be shed to fulfill the covenant God has commanded you to keep." ²¹Then he also sprinkled the Sanctuary tent and all the things to be used in worship. ²²In fact, according to God's instructions, almost everything was sprinkled with blood. This was to remind them that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

²³If copies of heavenly things had to be sprinkled with the blood of a sacrifice, then it also holds true that the heavenly services had to have a much better Sacrifice. ²⁴That's why Christ, who is the better Sacrifice, did not stay here to minister in the man-made Sanctuary on earth, which is only a copy of the true one in heaven, but entered heaven itself to appear in the presence of God on our behalf, who is not confined to the Most Holy Place. ²⁵In heaven everything is not done exactly the same as it was in the earthly Sanctuary. On earth the high priest offered a sacrifice for himself every year before he went into the holy places of the Sanctuary to appear in the presence of God with blood that was not his own. ²⁶If Christ had needed to do this, He would have had to come and die re-

peatedly since the world began. But He came once and for all at the end of the preceding ages to break the power of sin by the sacrifice of Himself. ²⁷Just as men have to die only once and then later face the judgment, ²⁸so Christ had to die only once to take away our sins. He will not return to bear them for us a second time, but will come to destroy sin and to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him.

The Earthly Sanctuary Reflected the Heavenly

10 There's no doubt that the law of Moses with its sacrificial system pointed forward to something better. The Sanctuary here on earth was only a shadow of the realities of things in heaven. Even though sacrifices were offered every day, they had no power to make people spiritually perfect. ²If those sacrifices had possessed power to change people's hearts and cleanse them from sin, then why did the priests keep on offering sacrifices? If people were really changed by the power of these sacrifices, why were they conscious of the fact that the real sacrifice for sin still had to be made? ³Yet, day after day, year after year, sacrifices were offered, reminding people that something had to be done about sin, and pointing them to the Lamb of God. ⁴It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats or any other ritual to take away our sins or to change our hearts.

The Adequacy of Christ's Sacrifice

⁵When Christ was about to come into this world, He said to God, "I know that animal sacrifices and burnt offerings are not what you want. That's why you prepared a human body for me. ⁶Obedience is what really pleases you, not burnt offerings and sacrifices." ⁷After Christ came he said, "I am here to do your will, O God, just as it is written about me in your book." ⁸Notice the sequence in this passage. First He said, "Sacrifices and burnt offerings are not what please you,"

even though He knew the importance of the sacrificial system was according to the law. ⁹After that He said, "I have come to do your will." From this we see that God set aside the first system of sacrifices and established the second because the first was only temporary and pointed to the reality that was to come. ¹⁰It was because Christ did His Father's will and offered His own body that we are cleansed from sin and accepted as holy. He made this sacrifice once and for all time, so it doesn't have to be repeated.

¹¹Every day the priests offer the same sacrifices which can never gain merit or take away sin. So their work is never done. ¹²But when Christ came, He offered one sacrifice for sin forever and then went to sit down at the right hand of God because His work on earth was finished. ¹³He's now waiting for the time to come when all men, even His enemies, will acknowledge His rightful authority. ¹⁴On the basis of this one complete sacrifice, Christ can now present us to the universe, counting those who are being made holy as already perfect. ¹⁵This is what the Holy Spirit meant when through Jeremiah, he said, ¹⁶"This is the covenant of promise that I will again offer to them. I will put my laws in their hearts and write them on their minds. ¹⁷I will forgive their sins and remember their lawless acts no more." ¹⁸It is not necessary to offer sacrifices for sins that have been forgiven.

Let's Come Into God's Presence With Confidence

¹⁹Therefore, my brothers, we have complete freedom to enter the holy places of the Sanctuary in heaven and with confidence come into the very presence of God through the blood of Jesus who gave His life for us. ²⁰Christ opened a new way into the Sanctuary through the curtain which represents His living body. ²¹And since we have a High Priest who has been put in charge of God's house, ²²let us come into God's presence

with confidence, being sure of our faith and cleansed from a guilty conscience—washed clean from the filth of this world through the symbol of baptism. ²³Let's hold firmly without wavering to the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. God is faithful and can be trusted to do what He promised. ²⁴So let's be compassionate and give some thought to how we can spur each other on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵Don't give up the habit of worshiping together as some have already done, but encourage each other all the more as you see signs of the Great Day approaching.

²⁶If we deliberately keep on sinning and go contrary to the truth we have, where can we go for a sacrifice for our sins and for power to transform our lives? ²⁷All we can look forward to then is the Judgment and the fire from God's glory that will consume us and the sins to which we so stubbornly cling. ²⁸In the days of Moses, anyone who turned against the law and stubbornly clung to his sins was put to death without recourse of appeal, after being judged guilty on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹If that happened back then under the law of Moses, how much more severe is the punishment of someone who spurns the Son of God. He sees Christ's blood as no different from anyone else's blood and insults the Holy Spirit by rejecting God's grace. ³⁰The Lord said, "It is my right to avenge all evil. I will make sure that the sentence against sin is carried out." Moses confirmed this when he said, "The Lord Himself will judge His people." ³¹It will be a dreadful experience to fall into the hands of the living God to face the consequences of our sins!

Recall Your First Love for Christ

³²Do you recall when God's truth and light first penetrated your heart? Remember how willing you were to suffer for Him and you didn't let your troubles and problems crush your faith?

³³Remember how you were treated publicly—laughed at, insulted and handled roughly? Do you recall how eager you were to defend your faith in Christ and how willing you were to fellowship with those who were being persecuted for it? ³⁴You had compassion on those who were arrested and put in prison; you suffered along with them. You also took it joyfully when people broke into your houses and took your belongings—even when they confiscated your property—because you knew that you had something better and more lasting in heaven. ³⁵So don't throw away your confidence in what Christ has done for you, because your faithfulness to Him will be rewarded. ³⁶But you need to keep on doing the will of God, then someday you'll receive what He has promised.

³⁷As the Scriptures say, "Just a little longer, and He who did come will come again and will not delay. ³⁸The one who is right with Me will be given life because of his faith. But if he draws back and throws away his confidence in Me, I will not be pleased with him." ³⁹We are not the kind who draw back and are lost. On the contrary, we are people of faith and will go on believing and be saved.

A History of Faith

11 To have faith means to be confident of the things we hope for and to be certain of the things we can't see. ²Faith is not in our ability to hold on to God, but in His ability to hold on to us. This is the kind of faith that gave some of our ancestors a good name and won God's approval. ³Faith in God not only reaches into the future, but also into the past. By faith we understand that God created the whole universe out of nothing. So the things we see were made out of things that didn't exist.

Faith From Abel to Noah

⁴This is the kind of faith that Abel had when he sacrificed a lamb and added grain, but Cain offered the grain without

the lamb. So Abel won God's approval as being righteous because he showed his faith in God by what he did. God was pleased and spoke well of him. And Abel's example of faith still speaks to us today. ⁵Enoch had this same faith. He showed his faith in God's promises by his obedience, and God was pleased and took him to heaven without seeing death. One day his family and friends looked for him, but they couldn't find him because God had taken him away. The Scriptures testify that before he was taken, he had pleased God. ⁶But it's impossible to please God without having faith. Those who come to God must not only believe that He exists, but that He cares and rewards those who search for Him. ⁷Noah is another example of this kind of faith. When he was warned of things to come, he believed what God said. He respected the warning and prepared for the flood by building a boat as God had told him to do. By his faith, Noah condemned those who failed to believe and was given the righteousness that comes by faith.

The Faith of Abraham

⁸When Abraham was called to leave the comforts of his home in Ur to live in tents in a land he was supposed to inherit, he obeyed, even though he didn't know exactly the place where he was going. ⁹By faith he lived in tents in a land God had promised to give him. He lived there as a foreigner, together with Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs of the same promise. ¹⁰By faith he looked forward with confidence to a city with lasting foundations whose designer and builder is God. ¹¹It was faith in God's promise that enabled Abraham and Sarah to become parents, even though she was too old to have children. ¹²God worked a miracle and she conceived and gave birth to a son. So from one old man and his aged wife, whose body was practically dead, came so many descendants that today they are as numerous as the stars in the sky and as difficult to count as grains of sand beside the sea.

Abraham Looked Forward to a Permanent Home

¹³Their descendants also lived by faith and looked forward with confidence to the time when God's promises would be fulfilled. They didn't receive all the things that God had promised, but by faith they saw the future and held on to the promise. They were not ashamed to admit that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth. ¹⁴Those who think of themselves this way show that they are looking forward to a better land, a country they can call their own. ¹⁵If Abraham and those with him had been thinking of the country they had left, they could have gone back to live in comfort rather than wandering around living in tents. ¹⁶But they were looking forward to a better country, a heavenly one. So God is not ashamed to be known as their God, for He's prepared a city for them.

The Faith of the Patriarchs

¹⁷By faith Abraham was ready to offer Isaac as a sacrifice when his love for God was tested. Even though he had been promised many descendants, he was willing to sacrifice the only son he had. ¹⁸God had said to Abraham, "It is through Isaac that you'll have the descendants I promised you." ¹⁹Abraham held on to that promise in spite of God's strange request to sacrifice Isaac and reasoned that God would keep His promise by raising Isaac from the dead. In one sense, that's what happened; he received him back as if he had been dead. ²⁰Isaac showed this same faith in God's promise by the way he blessed Jacob and Esau regarding their future. ²¹By faith Jacob included the two sons of Joseph in his fatherly blessing as he was dying. He then leaned on his staff as he bowed and worshiped. ²²Joseph also gave evidence of this same faith when, just before he died, he told the Israelites that one day they would leave Egypt and when they left, they should take his body with them.

The Faith of Moses

²³By faith the parents of Moses went against the king's command to kill all baby boys. They were not afraid to hide their son for the first three months of his life because they believed that he was no ordinary child and that God had a special reason for him to live. ²⁴Moses showed this same faith all through his youth. He refused to become emotionally attached to Pharaoh or even to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. ²⁵He chose to suffer persecution with God's people rather than to stay at the palace and enjoy the pleasures of sin for a few short years. ²⁶He regarded disgrace and scorn for the sake of Christ of more value than all the treasures of Egypt. He looked away from this world and steadily focused on the reward God promised His people. ²⁷It was by faith that he left Egypt but not because he was afraid to face the king. He left and never looked back or longed for Egypt, because by faith he saw the invisible One walking by his side. ²⁸By faith he returned to Egypt and urged the people to keep the Passover the night they were to be set free. He told them to sprinkle the blood of a lamb on their doorposts so that their firstborn would not be killed.

²⁹By faith the children of Israel left Egypt and passed through the Red Sea on dry ground. When the Egyptians came after them and tried to do the same, the sea closed up and they were drowned.

By Faith God's People Overcame

³⁰By faith the walls of Jericho collapsed after the children of Israel marched around the city each day for seven days. ³¹Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute in Jericho, believed in the God of Israel and was not killed with those who refused to believe. By faith she welcomed the spies and hid them at the risk of her own life.

³²There are many such people of faith, but there isn't time for me to tell you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets. ³³By faith

those who loved God conquered kingdoms, administered justice and gained what was promised. It was because of Daniel's faith that God shut the mouths of hungry lions. ³⁴It was faith that kept the three Hebrews from being burned up in the blazing furnace. It was faith that kept the Jews from being killed by a jealous Persian administrator in the days of Esther. It was faith that turned our people's weakness into strength to defeat entire armies of foreign troops. ³⁵And it was by faith that women received their dead raised back to life. Others chose torture and death rather than deny their faith and be set free. They looked forward to the promised resurrection and a much better life. ³⁶Many were cruelly mocked and whipped, put in chains and imprisoned. ³⁷Others have been stoned to death, sawed in half, killed by the sword. Others wore sheepskins or goatskins; they were poor, persecuted and mistreated. ³⁸For them the comforts of this world were not worth losing faith in God. They became refugees and wandered in deserts and mountains, making their homes in caves and holes in the ground.

³⁹What a record of faith all these people have left! They held on in spite of everything, even though they did not receive all the things that God had promised. ⁴⁰God had something better in mind. He didn't want to complete His plan for them apart from us.

The Race of Faith

12 Therefore, seeing we are surrounded by such a great throng of men and women of faith, let's rid ourselves of everything that hinders us from having this same kind of faith, especially the sin of unbelief which can so easily grip every one of us. Let's run with courage and persistence the race that God has set before us. ²Let's look away from all else and fix our eyes on Jesus our leader, the One on whom our faith depends from start to finish. By faith He looked past the cross to the coming joy of

salvation of those who love Him. That's why He endured the cross, scorned its shame and disgrace, and ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of God.

God's Love and Discipline

³Think about Jesus, what He went through and what hatred He had to endure at the hands of sinful men. Look at His example so you won't lose heart and give up your faith. ⁴In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood rather than sin. ⁵Have you forgotten the words of encouragement we received from God through Solomon, "My son, don't reject the discipline of the Lord or resent being reproved by Him. ⁶The Lord disciplines those He loves, just as a loving father disciplines his son." ⁷So accept the present hardships as discipline. God is treating you as His own sons, and what son is not disciplined by a loving father? ⁸If God didn't discipline you, you would be like illegitimate children and not true sons. ⁹We've all had fathers who had to discipline us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to God's discipline and live forever? ¹⁰Our earthly parents disciplined us for a few short years as they thought best; our heavenly Father disciplines us for our good that we may be like Him. ¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time. In fact, it can be quite painful. But after it's over, it brings a harvest of righteousness and peace to those who accept it as part of their training.

Don't Let Bitterness

Rob You of God's Grace

¹²Therefore, lift those drooping hands and strengthen those weak knees. ¹³As the Scriptures say, "Take only the way that is straight," so those who are spiritually weak and lame will not go astray but be healed. ¹⁴Do your utmost to be at peace with everyone and to keep on living that holy life without which no one will ever see God. ¹⁵Be

careful not to lose your hold on God's grace by allowing bitterness to come into your hearts, for this will not only hurt you, but many others. ¹⁶Don't give in to sexual sins or become as thoughtless as Esau who gave up his spiritual birthright as the oldest son for a pot of lentils just because he was hungry. ¹⁷Afterward he was sorry that he had given his birthright away and asked his father Isaac to give it back by blessing him. But his father refused because he couldn't change what Esau had done, regardless of his tears.

Two Mountains

¹⁸You are not standing in front of a mountain that you can see and touch as our ancestors could when they faced Mount Sinai. They trembled at seeing the top of it on fire, dark clouds rolling down its sides and lightning flashing from the sky with peals of thunder that shook the earth. ¹⁹Suddenly, there came a blast like the sound of a trumpet and then a voice like the roar of a great waterfall as God spoke the Ten Commandments. When our ancestors heard that voice, they begged God to stop speaking to them. ²⁰They were afraid they would die because they had been told, "If a person or an animal so much as touches the foot of the mountain, he must be stoned to death." ²¹What the people saw was so terrifying that even Moses said, "I'm shaking with fear." ²²Today we're no longer standing at the foot of Mount Sinai but at the foot of Mount Zion, the heavenly mountain. You've come to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God, where thousands of angels joyfully and happily come into God's presence. ²³We also belong to that great assembly because our names are written in heaven, and we have all the spiritual rights of a firstborn. We who have been made perfect through Christ have come in heart and spirit into the presence of God, the Judge of all the earth, ²⁴and to Jesus, the Mediator of the covenant of faith, whose

blood has a better word for us than the blood of Abel which calls only for justice.

God Will Come and Shake the Earth

²⁵Don't refuse to listen when God speaks. If our ancestors didn't escape the consequences of refusing to hear what God said to them through Moses at Sinai, do you think that we will escape the consequences of refusing to hear what God is saying from heaven through His Son? ²⁶When God spoke at Mount Sinai, His voice shook the earth, and He has promised to shake the earth again. Through the prophet Haggai He said, "One more time I will shake the earth, and not only the earth, but also the heavens." ²⁷The words "one more time," refer to the end of the world. Everything that can be shaken will be shaken so that which cannot be shaken will remain. ²⁸Therefore, let's be thankful that we're part of a kingdom that can't be shaken. Let's worship God acceptably with hearts full of reverence and awe. ²⁹Our God is not only gracious and forgiving, but His glory is a consuming fire.

Some Moral Instructions

13 Keep on loving one another as Christian brothers should. ²Remember to make strangers feel welcome in your meetings and in your homes. Those who have done this in the past have sometimes entertained angels without knowing it. ³Remember those in prison as if you were there. Remember those who are being mistreated as if you were being mistreated. ⁴Marriage should be honored by all and the bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all those who are immoral. ⁵Don't covet what others have. Be content with what you have. God has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." ⁶Let us say with David, "The Lord is my helper. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me that will hurt my soul?"

Keep Your Eyes on Jesus

⁷Don't forget the church leaders in your prayers, especially those who brought you God's word. Talk about the good things they have done and by faith do the same. ⁸But keep your eyes on Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever. ⁹Don't let your faith become unbalanced by every kind of strange doctrine that comes along. May your hearts be strengthened by God's grace, not by eating ceremonial foods from the altar, which are of no help to anyone. ¹⁰We, too, have an altar and on it is a Sacrifice from which we eat, but the priests and those who worship in the Temple have no right to eat from it because the cross means nothing to them. ¹¹What does the high priest do on the Day of Atonement? He takes the blood of the slain animal into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but its body is taken outside the camp and burned. ¹²That's why Jesus was crucified outside the city. It is His blood that cleanses us from sin and makes us holy. ¹³So let's follow Him outside the city and be willing to bear the shame and disgrace for Him that He bore for us. ¹⁴We have no permanent city here, but we look for one that's still to come. ¹⁵Through Christ, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, and may our lips thankfully acknowledge His blessed name. ¹⁶Do not forget to do good and to share with others what you have. This is the most pleasing sacrifice you can give to God.

Respect and Pray for Your Leaders

¹⁷Respect your leaders and obey them. They're carrying tremendous responsibilities and are burdened for all the churches because they must give an account to God for those under their care. Cooperate with them so they may do their work with joy and not with sadness. To do otherwise will be of no help to them or to you.

¹⁸Keep praying for them, and pray for us, too, because even though we have a

clear conscience, we want to continue doing what's right and to act honorably at all times. ¹⁹Pray even more earnestly that God will let me come to see you soon.

Benediction

²⁰May the God of peace who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, that Great Shepherd of the sheep who died for us and sealed the eternal covenant by His own blood, ²¹equip you with everything you need to do His will. May He help you do what is pleasing to Him through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Final Exhortation

²²In closing, I beg you, my brothers, to take this letter to heart. I've written it to encourage you. It is not very long. ²³In the meantime, I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released from prison, for which we're all thankful. If he arrives soon, we will both come to see you. ²⁴Give our greetings to all the leaders and members there, those precious saints of God. The brothers and sisters from Italy send you their greetings. ²⁵May God's grace be with all of you.

JAMES

Greeting to the Twelve Tribes

1 From James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the Jewish believers who are scattered among many nations.

Faith and Wisdom

²My brothers, when sufferings and temptations come your way, try to face them joyfully. ³You know that when your faith in God is tested and survives the test, it will be stronger than before. ⁴So hold on and let your faith be tested, because as it survives and matures, your character will mature as well and you will become even more steadfast.

⁵If any of you need wisdom, go to God who gives it graciously and generously to all who ask Him, and it will be given to you. ⁶But when you pray for wisdom or for anything else, do so with confidence. A person who believes that God answers prayer but then doubts it, wavering back and forth, is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷He should not expect an answer to his prayer, because he can't make up his mind whether God hears him or not. ⁸A man who can't make up his mind is unstable in everything he does.

Riches and Poverty

⁹If a brother is poor, he should rejoice in what God has done for him by giving him spiritual riches. ¹⁰And the well-to-do brother should be glad that God has shown him his spiritual poverty because he will die, in spite of his riches. ¹¹A man's life is like a flower in the field which blossoms in the morning when the sun comes up. By noon it begins to droop in the burning heat, and by night, its beauty is gone and it dies. That's how short a man's life is from God's perspective, no matter how successful he is; life fades even as he goes about his business.

Response to Temptation Comes From Within

¹²Blessed is the man who endures the

trials and remains true to God. He will receive the crown of eternal life, which the Lord has promised to all those who love Him. ¹³When a person's loyalty to God is tested, he shouldn't blame God for the temptations that come. God doesn't tempt people to see how strong their faith is. He tempts no one. ¹⁴Temptations come from the inside, from our own evil desires, and when we give in to them, we're lured away from God. ¹⁵When evil desires grow and mature, they give birth to sin, and sin brings death.

¹⁶So don't be fooled about this, my dear brothers. ¹⁷Everything good in life is a gift from heaven, and it comes from the Father of lights. Unlike shadows which shift with the turning earth, God never changes. ¹⁸No one prompted Him to create us. He made us of His own free will, lovingly and tenderly, with all the risks involved. He also gave us a new birth and spiritual gifts through the power of His word to make us the choicest of all His creatures.

Listen to God's Word and Obey Him

¹⁹Remember, my brothers, to be quick to listen to God's word, careful in what you say and slow to become angry. ²⁰When you are angry, you create an atmosphere in which righteousness cannot flourish, and God can't produce in you the righteous life that He desires.

²¹So strip yourselves of any moral filth and evil that might still be clinging to you, which is so prevalent everywhere we look. Don't be proud, but humbly accept the word of truth which has been planted in you to protect and save you.

²²Don't deceive yourselves into thinking that all you have to do is to listen to God's word. You also have to put it into practice. ²³Whoever listens to God's word and doesn't do what it says is like a man who takes a good look in a mirror, ²⁴sees himself as he really is, and then goes away and ignores what he just saw.

²⁵But if he carefully looks into the mirror of God's perfect law, he will see that it is a law of liberty, intended to set him free from sin. If he continues to do this and doesn't forget what it says, but puts it into practice, God will bless him in what he does.

²⁶Anyone who considers himself religious, but can't control his tongue, is only deceiving himself. His religion is worthless. ²⁷A genuine Christian looks after the needs of others, especially orphans and widows in distress, while keeping himself unspotted from the moral pollution of the world. This is the kind of religion that our heavenly Father accepts.

Avoid Prejudice

2 My brothers, you can't say that you're a believer in Jesus Christ our glorious Lord and then show respect for some people more than others. ²Suppose someone comes to your meetings fashionably dressed, wearing an expensive gold ring, and another person comes in shabbily dressed, ³and you greet the well-dressed person graciously and with great respect show him to the best seats near the front, saying to him, "You may sit here, Sir." then you greet the shabbily dressed person and say to him, "You can stand over there or sit by my feet on the floor." ⁴aren't you being partial and judging people by the clothes they wear? If that's the case, aren't you discriminating? Doesn't that tell you something about your sense of values? ⁵Listen, my brothers, Doesn't God prefer to take to heaven people who are poor in this world's goods but rich in faith rather than rich people who ignore what He says? Isn't it generally the poor who feel a need of God who have faith? The rich in faith will inherit the kingdom that God has promised to those who love Him. ⁶You look down your noses at the poor and shower attention on the rich. Yet it's mainly rich people who are oppressing you and having you dragged into court. ⁷These are the same people who curse Jesus Christ, the

very One by whose name we're called and to whom we belong.

⁸If you really want to live by God's supreme law in Scripture, then you need to do what it says: "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." If you do this, you'll do what's right. ⁹But if you show more respect for some people than for others just because they're rich, you're sinning, and according to heaven's law, you're a lawbreaker. ¹⁰Whoever keeps the whole law except for one part is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹Let me show you what I mean. The same God who said, "Do not commit adultery" also said, "Do not murder." Now if you don't commit adultery but you murder someone, aren't you a lawbreaker? Breaking one law breaks the whole law. ¹²So speak and act as those who will be judged by the law of liberty, which, sets us free from the bondage of sin through Jesus Christ our Lord. ¹³There will be no mercy for those who have shown no mercy. But those who have shown mercy will rejoice triumphantly and stand in the Judgment without fear.

Faith Is Made Evident by Works

¹⁴My brothers, what good is it if someone says that he has faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but his actions tell a different story? Can a verbal belief in Christ without corresponding actions save him? ¹⁵When brothers and sisters in need of clothing and food come to you for help ¹⁶and you say to them, "We're so sorry. We will certainly pray for you. Keep warm and fed, and may the God of peace be with you," but you don't do anything to help them, your words are worth nothing. ¹⁷This shows that your faith in Christ is meaningless. Faith alone without action is as good as dead.

¹⁸Someone will come up with a smart answer and say that different people have different gifts—one has faith and another has actions. My response is: How can people tell if your faith in Christ is real if they don't see you doing anything?

People can easily see that my faith is genuine because of what I do, not what I say. ¹⁹You believe in one God, and that's good. But the demons also believe that and shudder from fear. ²⁰How foolish can you be? Do you want me to show you from Scripture that faith without works means nothing? ²¹Look at our father Abraham. Wasn't he considered righteous because he was willing to offer his beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice? ²²Can't you see that his belief in God and what he did went together? His actions made his faith complete and we know that his faith was genuine by what he did. ²³The Scriptures vindicate his action when they say, "Abraham believed God and because of what he did, his faith was accepted and God declared him righteous." That's why he was called God's friend.

²⁴So you can see that only by what we do can others tell whether or not our faith is real. Therefore, a man is put right with God by a faith that acts, and not by a faith that does nothing. ²⁵It was the same with Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute who lived in Jericho. She demonstrated her faith in God by welcoming the Jewish spies and then helping them escape. She did this at the risk of her own life. We know her faith was genuine by what she did. ²⁶As a person's body is useless without breath, so our statements of faith are meaningless without action.

The Power of the Tongue

3 Another thing I want to mention to you, my brothers, is this. Don't suppose that everyone who thinks he can lead or teach should be put into office. God expects more of leaders and teachers and will judge them more strictly than others. ²All of us make mistakes and say things we shouldn't. If someone can control his tongue and never make a mistake in what he says or how he says it, he's a perfect man and able to keep his whole body in check. ³How does a man control a horse? He puts a bit in its mouth and controls its whole body, and the horse obeys

him. ⁴Or consider a ship. It's pushed along by strong winds filling its sails, yet it's controlled by a very small rudder which makes it go wherever the captain desires it to go. ⁵That's how powerful the tongue is. Though small, it can do a lot of boasting. And it only takes a little flame to start a forest fire. ⁶The tongue is just like that. It can inflame emotions and create a world of evil. It can poison the whole body and set a person's whole life on fire, as if it had been done by the devil himself.

⁷Men have been able to tame all kinds of creatures, such as wild animals, birds, snakes and even large fish. ⁸But what man hasn't been able to tame is his own tongue. It is a restless evil and can spread the deadliest poison. ⁹If not disciplined and controlled, one minute it can praise and bless God and the next minute it can curse those created in God's image. ¹⁰All too often words of blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers, these things shouldn't be. ¹¹Can both good and bad-tasting water come out of the same spring? ¹²Can a fig tree grow olives? Can a grapevine grow figs? The answer is obvious. Neither can a salty spring give you fresh water!

True Wisdom

¹³If you're wise enough to understand what I'm talking about, then prove it by your uplifting conversation and your good deeds and do it without boasting about how good you are. Good deeds done in humility are the fruit of wisdom. ¹⁴If you have any bitterness or envy in your heart, I hope you won't boast about how committed to the Lord you are. That will discredit the gospel truth quicker than anything I know. ¹⁵The wisdom that permits you to vent your anger on others is not from above. It's devilish and certainly not consistent with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁶Where there is anger, jealousy and selfish ambition, you'll find confusion and all kinds of other evils. ¹⁷The wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure, then peace-

loving, gentle, easy to get along with, compassionate, full of good works and free from partiality and hypocrisy.¹⁸Fruits of righteousness can come only from seeds of kindness sown in peace.

Selfishness

4 Where do all the fights and quarrels among you come from? Don't they come from the selfish desires and passions that rage within your heart? ²You want certain things and can't have them. You want your own way and can't get it. So you quarrel and fight with a hatred to kill in order to get what you want. You don't get what you want because you don't ask God for it. ³Even if you do ask God, He doesn't give it to you because you ask for the wrong reason, so you can have it for your own selfish pleasure. ⁴You're acting no different from fornicators and adulterers. Don't you know that loving the world shows hostility against God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world, longing for its acceptance, cannot at the same time be a friend of God, but actually becomes His enemy. ⁵Do you think that the Scriptures are meaningless when they say, "God jealously longs for His people to love Him and to have the right spirit"? ⁶He continuously offers His grace. As the Scriptures say, "God gives His grace to those who are teachable, not to those who are proud."

Humility

⁷Submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Come close to God and He will come close to you. Wash your hands of those bad things you've been doing; purify your thoughts and stop trying to love God and this world at the same time. ⁹Repent and be sorry for your sins. Don't be afraid to shed some tears over your misbehavior. It'll do you good. But just being sorry for what you did is not enough. You also need to change your ways. ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord and ask Him to help you, and He will lift you up.

Judging Others

¹¹Brothers and sisters, don't speak evil of one another. If you do, you're taking the place of God and enforcing the law instead of obeying it. ¹²There is only one Lawgiver and Judge who has a right to enforce the law. He rewards those who keep it and punishes those who violate it. So who are you to criticize and judge others?

Boasting

¹³Listen. You say to yourselves, "Today or tomorrow we will go to that city over there and open a business, and in the first year or so we should make a good profit." ¹⁴How do you know you'll live that long? Life is like a mist that is here for a little while and then it disappears. ¹⁵You should say something like this: "If the Lord is willing that we live, then we will do this today and that tomorrow." ¹⁶But presently, you're so sure of yourselves and so proud of your plans and of what you're going to accomplish that you're blind. Your arrogant attitude is the root of the problem. ¹⁷He who knows what's right but doesn't do it, is sinning.

Honest Wages

5 Let me say a word to the rich. The time is coming when you will weep and howl because of all the misery coming on you. ²Your money and property will become worthless. Your hoarded goods will rot and your costly garments will be destroyed by moths. ³Your gold and silver will tarnish, and your rusted coins will be a witness against you. Your investments will vanish, and your savings accounts will disappear. Your greed will cause your own destruction, and your flesh will be consumed in the fires of the last days. ⁴Look, you haven't even paid an honest wage to the people who work for you. Your injustice has caused them to cry out to God for help, and their cry has reached His ears. ⁵You've lived in luxury and self-indulgence. You've become fat and lazy as if you were preparing yourselves for slaughter. ⁶You've

condemned and sentenced to death innocent men just to get them out of the way, and no one dared resist you.

Patience and Hope

⁷My fellow believers, be patient. The Lord will come. Look at the farmer who sows the seed and waits for the harvest. He watches for the early rain in the spring and then for the latter rain in the fall to help ripen the grain. ⁸You, too, need to be patient. Strengthen your hearts and stand firm in the faith. Don't give up hope, because the coming of the Lord is sure. ⁹Don't keep complaining and grumbling against each other, or you will come under judgment. The times in which we live demand that we be prepared to die for the Lord. ¹⁰If you want examples of steadfastness and patience in suffering, look at the prophets of old who spoke for the Lord. ¹¹We look back and admire them because they were willing to suffer for what they believed. You've heard of the patience of Job and how he lost everything he had and suffered physically, yet he never let go of God. You also know what the Lord did for him after he was tested. How full of compassion and mercy the Lord is!

¹²Above everything else, my brothers, be truthful. Don't try to let people know how honest you are by taking an oath to prove that you're telling the truth. Let your Yes mean yes and your No mean no. Keep your word, and you will not incur judgment.

The Power of Prayer

¹³Are you suffering misfortune? Take it to the Lord in prayer. He'll give you the strength to get through it. Are you happy? Sing about it and praise the Lord. ¹⁴Are any of you sick? Call the elders of the church and ask them to pray for you. They'll anoint you with oil and call on the name of the Lord to heal you. ¹⁵If the Lord sees fit, this kind of prayer offered in faith will heal the sick and restore them to health. If a sick person turns to the Lord and confesses his sins, he will be forgiven, and this, too, will help him get well. ¹⁶Admit your faults to each other and confess your sins to God. Pray for each other, and if it's God's will, the sick among you will be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person has tremendous power. ¹⁷Elijah was an ordinary man just like us. As he searched his heart, he seemed to be less and less in heaven's sight. When self was gone and he asked God to hold back the rain, the Lord heard his prayer, and it didn't rain for three years and six months. ¹⁸After the people admitted that the Lord was God, Elijah prayed for rain, and it came, and once again the land produced its crops.

Saving Someone

¹⁹My brothers, if someone wanders away from the truth and one of you brings him back to the Lord, you've saved a life for eternity. ²⁰By helping him turn from his error, you not only save him from eternal death but also cover a multitude of sins which will never be revealed.

1 PETER

Peter, an Apostle

1 This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's people scattered throughout the regions of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia Minor and Bithynia. ²You are God's chosen ones, made such by the Holy Spirit according to the future God the Father has in mind for you. He has purified you by the blood of Jesus Christ and is leading you into obedience through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

A Living Hope

³Praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of His great mercy, He has given us a new birth and a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. ⁴He has promised us an imperishable inheritance that will never fade away, kept for us in heaven. ⁵God will continue to watch over you and protect you until Jesus comes and you receive all He has promised to give you. ⁶So keep your minds focused on this hope and rejoice in it, even though you're somewhat disheartened by all the troubles you've been having. ⁷These troubles test the genuineness of your faith which is more precious than gold, because faith will last while the gold of this world will perish. When your faith is tested and proven to be pure, it will bring glory and honor to Christ. And when He returns, you will share in His glory. ⁸I know that you love Him, even though you've never seen Him, because you believe in Him and are filled with inexpressible joy over what He's done for you. ⁹Day by day you receive the outcome of your faith in Him, which is the salvation of your soul and deliverance from sin.

¹⁰These are the mysterious workings of God's grace that the prophets wrote about and tried to understand. They marveled when, in vision, they saw salvation come to reality through Jesus Christ,

which happened in our day. ¹¹They tried to figure out the exact time the Holy Spirit was talking about when He told them about the sufferings of Christ and the glory to follow. ¹²They knew that these prophecies were not given for their time, but for ours. This is the good news we preached to you by the power of the Holy Spirit given to us at Pentecost. Even angels would like to know more about these things.

Called to Live a Holy Life

¹³Therefore, control your thoughts, stay alert and be ready for action. Set your hope totally on what Jesus Christ has done for you and what He will do for you when He returns. ¹⁴As born-again children, continue to show your confidence in Him by obeying Him. Don't be controlled by the same evil desires as you did before you heard about Him. ¹⁵Just as God, who extended His call to you, is holy and pure, so you should be holy in everything you do. ¹⁶As the Scriptures say, "Be holy, because I am holy." ¹⁷When you pray to your Father, remember that He judges each one impartially. Never lose your reverence for God. Live out your faith as pilgrims and strangers on their way to heaven. ¹⁸He was willing to pay an awesome price in order to set you free from the futile way of life inherited from your ancestors. Your freedom from the power of sin was not bought with silver or gold or the perishable things of this world, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of the Son of God, a prized lamb without flaw or blemish. ²⁰This arrangement was made by the Godhead even before the world was created. And with centuries of this world's history now behind us, you are the ones who have been given the privilege of sharing in the reality of God's gift. ²¹Because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and taken to heaven, you know that you can believe what God says. So

your faith and hope are grounded in what God has done for you and in what He says He will continue to do for you.

Born Again

²²Now that you've accepted this truth about God and through the power of the Spirit purified your lives, love each other with all your hearts. ²³You've been born again, not from human seed, nor by some mysterious power inside of you, but through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴As the Scriptures say, "All human life is like grass, and all human accomplishments are like the flowers of the field. Grass dries up and flowers fade and fall, ²⁵but the word of the Lord abides forever." That's the same word that was preached to you when we shared with you the good news about Jesus Christ.

2 Therefore, get rid of all wickedness in your life such as malice, deceitfulness, hypocrisy, envy, lying and foul language. ²Feed on the word of God as newborn babies feed on milk so you can grow spiritually strong. ³When you feed on the word of God you will find out how good God really is.

Christ, the Living Stone

⁴Stay close to the Lord who is like that huge rock that the builders of Solomon's Temple rejected as being useless but later found to be the very rock needed for the cornerstone. That rock pointed to Christ, who was chosen by God and is very precious to Him. ⁵And you are living stones with which God is building His spiritual house. Not only that, but you're also priests, offering spiritual sacrifices which are made acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶As He said in the Scriptures, "I am laying in Zion a most precious Cornerstone, one which I have personally chosen, and whoever trusts this Stone and builds on it will never be disappointed." ⁷You can see how precious this Stone is to you who believe. But to those who don't believe, the

Scriptures say, "The Stone the builders rejected turned out to be the only Stone that could bear the weight of the Temple." ⁸Also, "The disobedient will stumble over the importance of this Stone because it offends them, but it's the Stone that they can't ignore." They stumble because they don't want to do what God says.

A Special People

⁹But you are a special kind of people, a royal priesthood of believers and the spiritual Israel chosen by God. Praise Him for bringing you out of darkness and into His marvelous light. ¹⁰At one time you were not God's people, but now you are. Once you didn't know about God's mercy, but now you have received it.

Be Good Neighbors and Citizens

¹¹Dear friends, I appeal to you as pilgrims and strangers in this world, don't do the evil things your body wants you to do at the expense of your soul. ¹²Live such noble lives that your Gentile neighbors who falsely accuse you may one day give their hearts to God and rejoice with you when Christ returns.

¹³Be good citizens and obey the laws of the land as handed down by the king ¹⁴or by governors who have been asked to maintain law and order. They not only punish those who do wrong, but praise those who do right. ¹⁵God wants you, by doing good, to silence the ignorant rumors that foolish people spread about you. ¹⁶Live as free people but don't use your freedom as an excuse to do evil, but live as loyal servants of God. ¹⁷Respect everyone. Love your brothers and sisters in Christ. Reverence God. Honor the king and those in charge of the government.

Follow Christ's Example

¹⁸Some of you have been brought from other countries to this part of the world to serve as slaves to the Romans. You have an extra burden to carry, but you, too, should respect those who are over

you and obey even those who are harsh. ¹⁹It is to a man's honor to bear up under the pain of unjust suffering without retaliation. You can do this because you know what Jesus Christ endured. ²⁰What credit is it to you to take punishment bravely when you've done wrong? But if you suffer for doing good and accept it patiently, then God can show the power of the gospel through you.

²¹In one way or another all of us have been called to this kind of ministry. Christ also had to suffer, and He left us an example that we should follow in His steps. ²²Christ never sinned and no deceit ever came from his mouth. ²³When they insulted Him, He never retaliated. When they beat Him, He didn't threaten them with destruction. He committed Himself into the hands of His heavenly Father who is the righteous Judge. ²⁴He let them crucify Him, not only to pay for our sins, but also that we might die to sin and live for God as He did. It is by His wounds and suffering that you have been healed. ²⁵Before you knew Him, you were like sheep going astray, but now you've returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Wives and Husbands

3 These same principles apply to husbands and wives. Wives should respect their husbands. If a Christian woman is married to a man who does not obey the gospel, her conduct may convince him of the truth. ²He will see the purity and sweetness in her life and the reverence she has toward God and will have to admit that there's more to her faith than he thought. ³Beauty in a woman does not come from the way she adorns her body or fixes her hair, or from the gold jewelry or fine clothes she wears. ⁴Real beauty in a woman comes from within, that enduring charm of a gentle, tender spirit which in God's sight is priceless. ⁵Devout women of the past obtained this kind of beauty by putting their trust in God and accepting the fam-

ily leadership of their husbands. ⁶Sarah endeared herself to others by honoring her husband. When speaking of him, she referred to him as the head of her house. If you do as she did, then you're Sarah's daughters. Don't worry about what others say about you, but concern yourself with doing what's right.

⁷The same principle applies to men. Husbands should treat their wives with thoughtfulness and understanding, honoring them as the gentler partner and joint heirs with them of the life to come. If husbands treat their wives otherwise, how can they expect God to answer their prayers?

Be Kind and Courteous

⁸Finally, be united in Christ, be compassionate, love each other as brothers and sisters should, and be kind and courteous to everyone. ⁹Don't respond to evil with evil, or to cursing with cursing, but just the opposite. Ask God to bless those who mistreat you. This is what God is calling you to do and He will bless you for it. ¹⁰As the Scripture says, "Anyone who loves life and wants genuine happiness all his days should keep his tongue from speaking evil and his lips from telling lies. ¹¹He should turn away from doing evil and do good. He should try with all his heart to be at peace with everyone. ¹²The Lord watches over the righteous and answers their prayers for help. But He will not help those who do evil."

Suffer for the Right Reason

¹³So who's going to stop you from doing good? No one. ¹⁴But even if you have to suffer for doing good, you're still blessed. Don't worry about their threats and don't be afraid to do what's right. ¹⁵Continue to give the Lord Jesus Christ the most honored place in your life. Then you'll be ready to give an answer to people when they ask about this hope bubbling up inside of you. Don't be afraid to tell them who gives you this hope, but do so with gentleness and respect. ¹⁶This

way your conscience will be clear, and those who speak evil of you will be ashamed of what they've said. ¹⁷God may not always stop others from hurting you, but it is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Remember Noah's Day

¹⁸Look at Christ. He was innocent, but in order to bring us back to God, the One who was righteous had to die for the unrighteous. And that one death paid for all our sins. They killed His body, but it was brought back to life by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹It was also through the power of the Holy Spirit that Christ worked for the salvation of people in the past to set them free from the prison house of sin. ²⁰This was the case in Noah's day when the Holy Spirit offered the people a way of escape. But they kept right on sinning. God patiently waited for one hundred and twenty years, the whole time that Noah was building the ark. But only eight people decided to come into the ark and be saved. ²¹Figuratively speaking, those eight people were baptized by the flood and their lives were spared. This is what happened to you when you were baptized. You went through those baptismal waters as a sign that you were saved, and you came out clean. I'm not talking about washing away bodily dirt—all you have to do is take a bath—but about the promise you made to God in all good conscience to live a clean life, made possible by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. ²²Now Christ is in heaven, sitting to the right of God, with all the angels and other powerful beings throughout the universe in willing submission to Him.

Change Your Lives to Serve God

4 Since Christ suffered physically, you, too, might have to suffer. So arm yourselves with the same attitude He had. He who is willing to suffer for Christ shows that he has turned his back on sin. ²This means that you're no longer controlled by evil human desires but are

eager to do God's will. ³You've already spent enough time in the past doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, sexual orgies and idolatry. ⁴People who knew you then are surprised to see the change in you. They can't believe it when you refuse their invitations to join them in the wild and reckless life you participated in before. Yet they now hate you and accuse you of all kinds of things just because you're Christians. ⁵Some day they will have to give account to God who judges both the living and the dead. ⁶This is the reason the gospel was preached to you and to those from among you who have now died. Men may set themselves up as judges, condemn you and even put you to death, but God will reverse their judgment. God is our judge, and as surely as He lives, He will give us eternal life.

⁷Considering the times in which we're living, the end may come to any of us quicker than we think, so use good judgment in all you do and be earnest in your prayers. ⁸Above everything else, love each other genuinely. Love for your brothers and sisters in the faith covers many sins. ⁹Continue to practice hospitality. Open your homes to each other without grumbling. Do it willingly and happily. ¹⁰Each of you has received some of God's gifts, so use those gifts to help others like good stewards, administering God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹For instance, whoever preaches should preach the word of God with conviction. Whoever serves should do it with the strength that God has given him, so that God will be praised through Jesus Christ. Yes, all glory and power and dominion belong to Him both now and forever. Amen.

Suffering for Christ Not Something Strange

¹²My dear friends, don't be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering for Him, as if it were something strange and unusual. ¹³Be glad to suffer physically for Christ, sharing in what He suffered for

you. When He returns, you'll be overjoyed to see Him and will share in His glory. ¹⁴If people insult you because of Christ, you are indeed blessed, because the Holy Spirit is resting upon you and helping you live for God. They may curse you, but God is with you. ¹⁵Being punished as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or for causing trouble is not the kind of suffering I'm talking about. ¹⁶But if you suffer as a Christian, for living a life of kindness and compassion, don't feel ashamed, but praise God for it. ¹⁷If the time of judgment begins with the people of God, what will happen to those who have rejected the gospel? ¹⁸As the Scriptures say, "If things are painful for good people who are being saved, what will it be like for sinners who are lost?" ¹⁹Those of you who suffer for your faith, remember that God allows it to happen for a reason which we don't always understand. We do know that God is a loving Creator and that we can trust Him. So commit your lives to Him and continue to do good.

Feed the Flock of God

5 Now I want to say a word to the church elders, of whom I am one. What I'm telling you about the sufferings of Christ I saw with my own eyes! If by God's power I can live as He did, then I know I'll share with you the glory to be revealed when He returns. ²Be the kind of shepherds you ought to be, nourishing the flock and watching over it the way God wants you to. Do it willingly and happily, not because you have to, but because you want to; not because of the salary you receive, but because you're eager to serve and help others. ³Don't lord yourselves over those who

have been put under your care, but be an example to them. ⁴And when the Shepherd of shepherds comes back, He'll give you a crown of glory that will never fade away.

Stand Firm in the Faith

⁵Those who are young should treat those who are older with respect. And all of you should put on the apron of humility, ready to do whatever needs to be done. As the Scriptures say, "God can't do much with proud people, but He gives grace to the humble."

⁶So stay humble in the sight of our mighty God, and in His own good time, He will lift you up. ⁷Leave all your anxieties and worries with Him because He cares for you. ⁸Stay alert and be careful because the devil is roaming around like a hungry lion seeking to destroy anyone he can. ⁹Stand firm in the faith and resist the devil, knowing that believers everywhere are going through the same things you are. ¹⁰Your suffering is only temporary, but the God of mercy who invited you to share in Christ's glory will mend your hurts and strengthen you, making you firm and steadfast. ¹¹To Him be power and glory both now and forever. Amen.

Final Greetings

¹²I wrote this letter to you with the help of Silas, a most dependable brother. My purpose was to encourage you and tell you that the message of God's grace is true. So stand fast in His grace. ¹³The church here in Rome, which is also chosen and guided by God, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, who is like a son to me. ¹⁴Give everyone a brotherly embrace for me. Peace be with all of you who are in Christ.

2 PETER

Peter, a Servant of Christ

1 This letter is from Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received the same precious faith as we have, the good news about the righteousness of God and what He has done for us through our Savior Jesus Christ. ²Grace and peace be yours a thousandfold, as your knowledge of God grows deeper through Jesus Christ.

³God's divine power has given us everything we need to live a Christian life, according to His goodness and glory. ⁴Because He is good, He has given us many precious promises through which we may participate in His divine power to live above the evil, lustful desires of this world.

Be Effective for Christ

⁵For this reason, add to your faith, goodness, and to goodness, a greater knowledge of God's will, ⁶and to such knowledge, self-control, and to self-control, perseverance, and to perseverance, godliness, ⁷and to godliness, kindness to your brothers and sisters, and to kindness, love—that selfless love of Christ. ⁸When these qualities are in you and overflow to others, you'll never be ineffective for Jesus Christ, nor will your love for Him diminish. ⁹But the person who doesn't want these qualities is shortsighted and has forgotten that Jesus Christ died to save him and to give him power to live above sin. ¹⁰Therefore, brothers, be eager to respond to God's calling and to make His plan for you sure. If you do these things, you will never fall, ¹¹and you will receive a royal welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Peter Anticipates His Death

¹²Now I intend to keep reminding you of these things so that you won't forget them as some have done, even though you are firmly rooted in the truth of Christ. ¹³Yet I think it's only right for me to refresh your memories as long as I can and to help you recall the experiences we

told you we had with Christ. ¹⁴I don't think I have much longer to live. I have a feeling that I'll soon be arrested and crucified just as the Lord Jesus Christ told me. ¹⁵I want to put my thoughts in writing so you can remember them after I'm gone.

God's Word Can Be Trusted

¹⁶What we told you were not some fabricated stories about the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We saw His majesty with our own eyes. ¹⁷When we were with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, we were given a preview of His coming. He was invested with the glory and power He had before coming to this earth. The Father Himself spoke to us from that magnificent cloud which covered us, saying, "This is my Son with whom I'm very pleased. Listen to what He has to say." ¹⁸Yes, we actually heard God's voice speaking to us from heaven! All this happened right there on the mountain before our very eyes! ¹⁹But you have something even more sure than our report—the prophecies of the Old Testament. Pay attention to them. Those prophecies are like a lamp shining in darkness until the light of Christ's coming breaks through the clouds and He, as the glorious Morning Star, fills your hearts with joy. ²⁰You need to understand that these prophecies are not the prophets' personal opinions, nor are they simply a record of what people decided to believe. ²¹They did not come from the will or impulse of man, but holy men spoke as they were moved to do so by the Holy Spirit.

False Prophets

2 But there were also false prophets among our people. And you will have false teachers among you who will quietly slip in false doctrines denying that Christ needed to die for their sins. By doing this they're quickly bringing destruction on themselves. ²Many will believe and follow these false teachers. As a result, the way of truth will be brought into disrepute. ³All

these greedy teachers seem to want is your money. They make up stories to get you to support them. God is aware of what they're doing, and they will reap what they have sown.

The Judgment Will Come

⁴If God didn't spare the angels who had sinned but had to put them out of heaven to remain in darkness until they are judged, it's only a matter of time before these false teachers will have to face the consequences of what they have done.

⁵The same thing happened during the flood. God didn't spare those godless people. The only ones He saved were Noah, that great teacher of righteousness, and the seven other members of his family.

⁶Look at what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah. Evil became so rampant and entrenched in people's hearts that their behavior became irreversible. The destruction of their cities is an example of what will happen to all the ungodly. ⁷But God delivered Lot, a good man who was distressed by the immorality and filthy lives around him. ⁸Day after day that good man's heart was hurt by all the lawlessness and wickedness he saw and heard. ⁹From Lot's experience you can see that the Lord knows how to rescue His people but bring the wicked to judgment to face what they have done.

¹⁰That day will be particularly hard on those who follow the evil desires of their sinful nature. They falsely accuse others and are defensive and arrogant when corrected. They have little respect for authority, including God and His word.

¹¹In contrast, angels, who are much more intelligent than false prophets and teachers, would never think of insulting or falsely accusing anyone before God, not even the wicked.

Pleasure Seekers

¹²But these people seem to live more by instinct than anything else. They act like irrational animals and attack anything they don't understand. Wild animals out of control are captured and killed. And like

wild animals, they too will perish. ¹³They will pay for all the suffering they have caused. Their greatest pleasure is doing their shameful things brazenly and openly. They're a disgrace to everyone when they come to church to eat with you, bragging about what they have done. ¹⁴They eye women, thinking of nothing but adultery. They never stop sinning. They bait those who are not thoroughly grounded in the faith. They pride themselves on their acquired skills of getting what they want and don't know that they're under the judgment of God. Yet, sad to say, many of our members are charmed by their flair. ¹⁵These people have left the path of truth and have lost their sense of direction. They're like Balaam who was so self-centered that he was ready to do anything to further his own interests. ¹⁶God even used a donkey to rebuke him. The donkey spoke to Balaam with a human voice, and Balaam answered back. This shows how insanely intent he was on benefiting himself. Finally, he stopped beating the poor animal when God opened his eyes to reveal an angel standing in the way with a sword in his hand.

False Teachers

¹⁷These false teachers are like dried-up wells without water, like clouds being blown in all directions by swirling winds. The blackest night is reserved for them.

¹⁸They're always talking about how great they are, and by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they try to entice others, especially those recently baptized. ¹⁹They promise our members a more advanced freedom, one which gives them license to do almost anything without having to feel guilty, but they're slaves to their own depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever masters him. ²⁰If believers have been freed from the destructive power of sin by accepting Jesus Christ, and then again become entangled in sin, such people are worse off than they were before. ²¹In one way, it would have been better for them not to have known the way of salvation than to have accepted Christ as their

personal Savior, then forsake Him by turning their backs on the sacred things they were taught. ²²It's like the old proverb which says, "A dog returns to lick what he has vomited," and, "A pig that has been washed goes back to roll in the mud."

Christ's Return

3 My dear friends, this is the second letter I've written to you. In both of them I've tried to remind you of what I taught you before. ²I don't want you to forget what the ancient prophets predicted and what we, as apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, told you we had seen with our own eyes. ³Understand that not only now, but especially in the last days, scoffers will come, scoffing at the word of God while following their own selfish interests. ⁴They'll make fun of Christ's return, saying, "We've heard about His coming for years, and now our parents have died and He still hasn't come. Things will continue as they always have." ⁵But these critics ignore the fact that God created the universe long ago, and covered the earth with water. Then He made dry land come out of the water and gathered the waters in their place. ⁶During the days of Noah, God used water to destroy everything on the earth. ⁷This shows that God can do with this planet whatever He wants. He's preserving the heaven and the earth we now have until the Day of Judgment when all the ungodly will be destroyed by the presence of the Lord and His consuming fire.

⁸Because time has lasted this long is no indication that God has changed His mind. With God, time is not a factor—one day or a thousand years—it makes no difference in His purposes. ⁹This doesn't mean that the Lord is slow in keeping His promises, or that He does things only when He gets around to it. Time has gone on only because of God's patience and kindness. He loves everyone, even the wicked, and He doesn't want anyone to lose out on heaven but to turn from their sins and be saved.

Everything Will Burn Up

¹⁰The Lord will come as unexpectedly

as a thief in the night. When He comes, the sky will roll back with a roar, and everything on earth will be set on fire. Even the basic materials that compose the earth will melt under this intense heat. The whole earth will be ablaze and everything on it that man has made will burn up. ¹¹Since this will happen when people least expect it, what kind of lives do you think we ought to live? We should be wholly dedicated to God, in piety, respect and reverence. ¹²As we look forward to the day of the Lord, let's do everything we can to speed its coming. And when that day comes, the heavens themselves will be on fire and the surface of the earth will melt because of the intense heat. ¹³But in harmony with God's promise, we look beyond all this to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of the righteous.

Don't Be Mislead

¹⁴My dear friends, as you look forward to that day, make every effort to be found morally pure, blameless and at peace with Christ. ¹⁵Consider His delay as evidence of His great patience and love and as an opportunity for others to repent of their sins and be saved. Paul, our dear brother who was blessed by God with great wisdom, also pointed this out in his writings. ¹⁶He emphasized the importance of holy living in all his letters. I realize that some things he said are hard to understand, and those who are spiritually unstable distort what he said. This is to be expected, because they do the same thing with the rest of the Scriptures. Unfortunately, by doing this, they're destroying themselves.

A Final Word

¹⁷Therefore, my dear friends, since you already know this, I don't need to say anything else. Just be on guard so you won't be misled by those who misapply the Scriptures. You don't want to end up losing your hold on God and fall from your secure position of faith.

¹⁸Continue to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To Him be all honor and glory both now and forever! Amen.

1 JOHN

The Word of Life Became Visible

1 The One who existed from the beginning is the One we heard, saw, watched and touched—the Word of eternal life. ²This Word of life became audible and visible, and we heard and saw Him ourselves. This is the One we want to tell you about, the Word that was with God the Father and then with us. ³We want to share with you what we've seen and heard so you can have fellowship with us and together we can have fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴We also want to share this with you so you can have the same joy that we have and that your joy may be complete.

Light and Darkness

⁵The message we received from Him and are telling you is that God is light, and within Him is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say we have fellowship with God, but choose to walk in darkness, we're living a lie and not telling the truth. ⁷But if we walk in God's light as Jesus walked in God's light, then we are His friends and have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus Christ continues to purify us from every kind of sin. ⁸If we say we've never sinned or if we refuse to admit that by nature we're sinners, we're deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins, dismiss the charges against us, and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say we've never sinned or if we deny that we have a sinful nature, we're saying that God is a liar and that what He told us in the Scriptures is not true.

2 My spiritual children, I'm sharing these things with you so you won't sin. If any of you do fall into sin, there is One who stands in the presence of the Father and speaks in our behalf: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²His atoning sacrifice covers our sins and the sins of

the world for all who believe and accept Him as Savior and Lord.

The Test of Knowing Him

³The way we know that we know Him is by our willingness to obey Him. ⁴If anyone says he knows God and doesn't obey Him, he's a liar and the truth is not in him. ⁵He who lives in harmony with God's law will find God's love continuously growing in him, perfecting him more and more. This is how we know that we are in Him. ⁶If anyone says God is in him or that he is in God, he ought to do the things that Jesus did.

⁷My brothers, I'm not telling you anything new, nor am I giving you a new commandment. I'm just reminding you of an old commandment which has been around from the very beginning. You've heard me tell you this before. ⁸Yet, in another sense, what I'm telling you is something new because the truth of this commandment is seen in His life and in yours. So now we see love in a new light, and the darkness we were in is passing away. ⁹If anyone says he's walking in the light but hates his brother, he's still in darkness. ¹⁰On the other hand, anyone who really loves his brother is walking in the light, and there's nothing in his life to cause his brother to stumble. ¹¹The one who hates his brother is in darkness and doesn't know where he's going because the darkness has blinded him.

Compliments

¹²My dear spiritual children, I have shared this truth with you before: I want you to know that through His name your sins have been forgiven because of what He has done for you. ¹³Fathers, I'm proud of you because for some time you have known Him who existed from the beginning. Young men, I'm also proud of you because you have overcome the evil one. Little children, I'm proud of you too, because you know that your heavenly Father loves you. ¹⁴I want to compliment

you, fathers, because you still know Him. I also want to compliment you, young men, because you are strong in the Lord and the word of God is in your hearts to help you continue to overcome the evil one.

Love of the World

¹⁵Don't love the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is no longer in him. ¹⁶The evil things of this world such as the cravings of our sinful human nature, the lusting of our eyes and the boasting of what we have do not come from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷This world is passing away, but those who do the will of God will live forever.

Deceptions

¹⁸My dear children in the Lord, in the last days Satan will work harder than ever to discredit the Son of God. This is the coming of the spirit of antichrist we told you about, and a number of antichrist teachings are already circulating. ¹⁹These lies are being spread by those who were once with us. They were never really one of us or they wouldn't have left. Their going showed that they were not one of us to begin with. ²⁰But you're still with us because you've been given the Holy Spirit and know what is true. ²¹I'm writing to you because I want you to understand what's happening. You know the truth, and you know that no lie comes from the truth. ²²The lie being circulated is that Jesus of Nazareth is not the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Those who say this have the spirit of antichrist and deny the truth about the Father as well. ²³Whoever denies that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God is denying the truth about the Father. Whoever accepts Jesus Christ as the Son of God also accepts the truth about the Father.

Mixture of Truth and Error

²⁴So hold on to what we've told you about Him from the very first, and if this truth stays in your heart, you will con-

tinue to have fellowship with the Father, as well as with the Son. ²⁵Christ promised us all this, including eternal life!

²⁶I'm pointing this out to you because those who are teaching these lies will try to seduce you and rob you of your faith. ²⁷This doesn't mean that I don't have confidence in you. You've been anointed by the Holy Spirit so you don't need anyone to tell you what's true. There's no mixture of truth and error with the Holy Spirit. So be faithful to what He has taught you.

Abide in Christ

²⁸And now my dear children, abide in Christ so that with confidence you can look forward to His coming and stand before Him unashamed. ²⁹You know in your hearts that Christ is righteous and that those who do right are the children of God.

3 Look how much love the Father has showered on us to accept us as His sons and daughters! That's why the world does not accept us, because it hasn't accepted Him. ²Dear friends, without a doubt we are God's sons and daughters. Although we haven't been told what we'll look like when Christ returns, we know we'll be changed into His likeness. Then we'll see Him as He really is. ³Everyone who has this hope within him will purify his life, even as Christ is pure.

Sin Is Breaking God's Law

⁴Everyone who breaks God's law sins, because sin is law-breaking. ⁵As you know, Christ came to die for our sins, not His, for He had no sin. ⁶Anyone who is in Christ doesn't keep on living in sin, and those who do so don't really know Christ. ⁷My dear children, don't let anyone fool you. The person who does what is right is considered righteous, just as Christ is righteous. ⁸But the person who keeps on living sinfully is being influenced by the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. That's why Christ came, to break the devil's power. ⁹No one who has been born of God will continue

living a sinful life because the seed of God is within him and he's been born again by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Importance of Love

¹⁰This is the basic difference between the children of God and the children of the devil. Those who don't do what's right and don't love their brothers and sisters in Christ don't really belong to God. ¹¹The message that you heard from the beginning is still the same, that we should love one another. ¹²Let's not be like Cain who was so influenced by the wicked one that he ended up killing his own brother. Why did he kill him? Because his brother Abel did what was right, and Cain didn't. ¹³So don't be surprised if those who don't know God hate you. ¹⁴One way to know that we have left death and have life in Christ is by our mutual love. Those who don't love their brothers and sisters in the faith are still in the grips of death. ¹⁵Whoever hates his brother is a murderer in his heart, and you know that no murderer will be given eternal life.

Love Is Made Evident by Works

¹⁶We know how much God loves us because He sent His Son to die for us; therefore, we ought to be willing to die for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷When you who have material possessions see a brother or sister in need but you don't help him, how can you say that you love God? ¹⁸My dear children, to love someone doesn't mean just saying so, it means helping him. We should do this whether we like what he does or not.

¹⁹This is how we know that we really belong to the truth when our hearts are at rest in God's presence. ²⁰When our hearts make us feel guilty, let's listen, but let's also remember that God is bigger than our hearts and knows whether we love Him or not. ²¹If our hearts are tender, let us rest with confidence in God's love without needlessly condemning ourselves. ²²We can ask Him for what-

ever we need to do His will, and He will give it to us because we obey His commands and do what pleases Him. ²³This is His command: Believe in His Son, and love one another as He instructed.

²⁴Those who live by God's law of love live in Him and He in them. We know that God is living in our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given to us.

Test Things by the Word of God

4 Dear friends, don't believe everything you hear. Test what you hear by the word of God, because the world is full of false prophets. ²One way to know whether a message is from the Holy Spirit is to ask those who claim to be teaching the truth if they agree that the Son of God became a man. ³Anyone who teaches something contrary to this is not of God and has the spirit of the antichrist. You knew this would happen, and now it's already happening. ⁴But you, my dear children, belong to God, and you've overcome the temptation to listen to false teachers because the One who lives in you is stronger than the evil one whose spirit controls the world. ⁵These false teachers are influenced by the way the world thinks. That's why they teach what they do. And some believers eagerly listen to them because they, too, are influenced by the way the world thinks. ⁶We belong to God because we're guided by what He says. Those who listen to us know God, while those who refuse to listen do not really know Him. This is how we can tell the difference between those guided by the Spirit of truth and those guided by the spirit of falsehood.

Love One Another

⁷Dear friends, let us love one another as God loves us. Such love comes only from Him. Everyone who has genuine love for others has been born again and knows God. ⁸Anyone who doesn't love others doesn't really know God, because God's love. ⁹This is how God showed His love for us, by sending His only Son to this world so

we might have eternal life. ¹⁰It's by looking at Calvary that we really see what love is all about. It was God's love for us that sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

¹¹Dear friends, if God loved us so much, we really ought to love each other.

God Is Love

¹²None of us can say that we've seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us and His love will be perfected in us as we share it with others. ¹³This is how we know we have fellowship with God and He with us, because He has given us this love through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁴We can say that we've seen God and know what He's like because He sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵Whoever acknowledges that Jesus of Nazareth is the divine Son of God and by his actions shows that he has God's love in his heart, reveals that he knows God and is in harmony with Him. ¹⁶We know and rely on the love God has for us because God is love. And anyone who lives out this love lives in God and God in him.

Love Casts Out Fear

¹⁷We know that our love is being perfected when we can look forward to the Day of Judgment with confidence and live a life of love like Christ did in a world of sin. ¹⁸Fear and love just don't go together. Love dispels fear because fear focuses on punishment and won't let love mature. The one who is afraid of God does not understand God's love. ¹⁹We love God because He first loved us. That's where our love comes from.

²⁰If someone says, "I love God with all my heart," but hates his brother, he's a liar. A person who doesn't love his brother whom he sees every day can't possibly love God whom he's never seen. ²¹This is what Jesus wants us to do: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

The Victory of Faith

5 Whoever believes that Jesus of Nazareth is the divine Son of God has

been born of God, and whoever loves the Father will love the Father's children.

²How do we know we love God's children? Because we love God and live by His commandments. ³Loving God means keeping His commandments. His commandments are not burdensome. ⁴Everyone born of God can overcome the world. And this is what gives us victory over the world: our faith in God. ⁵Who can overcome the world? Anyone who believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and goes to Him for help.

Three Witnesses

⁶Jesus, the divine Son of God, was baptized and then shed His blood for us. The Holy Spirit testifies to this, and the Holy Spirit does not lie. ⁷In heaven there are three who testify to this: the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. And these three are One. ⁸There are also three earthly events which give their testimony: Christ's baptism in the waters of Jordan; Christ shedding His blood on Calvary; and Christ's gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. ⁹If in a court of law we accept the testimony of witnesses as confirming a thing and making it legally binding, then why shouldn't we accept the testimony of God? God's testimony is infinitely more reliable than man's testimony, and He's already told us who His Son is. ¹⁰He who believes what God said about His Son, has an additional witness within himself because he's been born again by the Holy Spirit. The one who doesn't believe what God said is a liar because he refuses to accept the evidence God gave concerning His Son. ¹¹But this is our testimony: God has given us eternal life through His Son. ¹²Anyone who has the Son of God in his heart has life, and anyone who does not have the Son of God in his heart does not have life. ¹³I wanted to point out these truths to you so you will know that you have eternal life and so you will believe on His name.

Prayer

¹⁴We have confidence in approaching God to know that He will listen to whatever we ask in harmony with His will.

¹⁵And if we know that He listens to us, we know that He will give us whatever is best. ¹⁶If anyone sees a brother sinning, pray for him. If he repents of what he has done, God will forgive him and give him eternal life. But how can God give him eternal life if he refuses to repent and stubbornly goes on sinning?

¹⁷All wrongdoing is sin, but all sins are not the same, because God takes into consideration what a person knows.

A Final Word

¹⁸We know that anyone who is born of God does not deliberately keep on sinning. Jesus Christ claims him as His own, and the wicked one cannot harm him.

¹⁹We know that we belong to God and that the whole world is controlled by the wicked one.

²⁰We know that the Son of God has come to help us understand the truth about God and be one with Him. He is the true God and the fountain of eternal life.

²¹My dear children, stay close to God and don't be enticed by anything that would turn you away from Him.

2 JOHN

A Lady and Her Children

¹This letter is from the old apostle John, to the dear lady whom I love in the truth and to her dear children. I'm not the only one who admires your commitment to Christ; all who love the truth love you. ²A spiritual bond exists among us because we love the truth, and the truth will be with us forever. ³May the mercy and peace that comes from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, be with you in truth and love.

Live According to His Commandments

⁴I was really happy when I heard that your children have accepted the truth of the gospel and are living as our heavenly Father told us to. ⁵Dear lady, I'm not writing something new, but rather something we've known from the beginning, that we should all love and care about each other. ⁶This is love: that we live according to His commandments. From the beginning you've heard us say that we should follow them, loving God and one another.

Truth and Error

⁷Some are spreading the word through-

out the world that Jesus Christ was not truly human. Those who preach this are deceiving people and doing the work of the antichrist. ⁸So be careful that you don't lose the truth for which you've worked so hard. You will certainly receive your reward when the Lord returns. ⁹A person who does not preach the truth about Jesus Christ is not sent from God. Anyone who does preach the truth about Jesus has a relationship with both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰If someone comes to you who doesn't teach the truth, don't take him into your house and welcome him. ¹¹If you do, you're saying that you approve of his teaching, and in that sense, you share in his wicked work.

Farewell

¹²There are many other things I would like to warn you about, but I'd rather not put them in writing. I prefer talking to you about these things face to face the next time I come and rejoice with you in the Lord.

¹³Your sister's children send their greetings.

3 JOHN

Gaius, a Brother in the Truth

¹This letter is from the old apostle John, to Gaius, whom I truly love as a brother in the truth. ²Dear friend, above everything else I want things to go well with you and for your body to be as healthy as your soul. ³I was really happy when some of your members stopped by to see me and told me how much you love God's truth and how faithful you are. ⁴Nothing makes me happier than to hear that my spiritual children are walking in the way of truth.

Gaius' Generosity

⁵My dear friend, you're so faithful in everything you do. You not only help your fellow believers, but even those you don't know. ⁶The brothers we sent to you have written and told us of your loving care for them. Continue helping them all you can, and send them on their way feeling blessed of God. ⁷They have set out on their mission in the name of Christ, receiving no help from unbelievers. ⁸We must help these brothers and do what we can for them. When we do, we become partners with them in spreading the gospel.

Diotrephes Spreads False Rumors

⁹I have written a letter to the church

there, but Diotrephes, who wants to have the final word on everything, does not accept what we say. ¹⁰So I've decided to come myself as soon as I can, and when I do, I will point out what he's doing and what malicious lies he's been spreading about us. He doesn't open his home to any of our brothers, and when others invite them home, he accuses them of associating with heretics and threatens to put them out of the church.

¹¹My dear friend, do what's right, no matter what Diotrephes says. Anyone who does what is right belongs to God, and anyone who doesn't do what's right doesn't know God. It's just that simple. ¹²In the meantime, I'm sending Demetrius to you, who has a good reputation everywhere he goes, and the believers appreciate his stand for God's truth. So do I, and what I'm telling you about him is true.

Farewell

¹³There are many other things I'd like to tell you, but I would rather not put them in writing. ¹⁴Anyway, I hope to see you soon. Then we can visit together about many things. Peace be to you. Your friends here send their greetings and love. Greet our friends there and give them our love.

JUDE

Jude, a Servant of Christ

¹This letter is from Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and stepbrother of the Lord, together with James, who's now guiding the church from Jerusalem. It is being sent to those who are loved by God the Father, kept by Jesus Christ and called by the Holy Spirit. ²May God's mercy, peace and love be abundantly yours.

Defend the Faith

³Dear believers, although I'm writing to clarify some things about the salvation we share, I also urge you to continue defending the faith entrusted to us against those who are challenging it. ⁴Certain men of dubious reputation who have caused trouble in the past have slipped in among you. You need to be aware of them because they change the grace of God into permissiveness for all kinds of immorality, thus nullifying God's plan to save us from sin and denying that Jesus Christ is our only Master and Lord.

An Example of God's Judgment

⁵I want to remind you, even though you know it, that though God saved Israel and brought them out of Egypt, He destroyed those who were rebellious and refused to believe. ⁶Going back further in time when some of the angels rebelled against God, He had to expel them from heaven and confine them to this world until the Day of Judgment when they will be destroyed. ⁷Look at what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities. They were so filled with immorality, sodomy, and other sexual perversions that their destruction by fire is an example of what will happen to those who insist on living that way.

⁸The same kind of ungodly men have attached themselves to your congregation, living perverted and filthy lives. They reject authority, despise restraint and are quick to accuse those in leadership of being unkind. ⁹In contrast to

these ungodly men is the Lord Jesus, also called Michael the Archangel, for He is over the entire angelic host. When He was challenged by Satan about His intentions to resurrect Moses, He didn't come at Satan with a blistering attack, nor did He condemn him with mockery. He simply said, "God rebuke you for claiming Moses' body." ¹⁰Ungodly men speak abusively against anything they don't understand and criticize what they know nothing about. They go by instinct and, like irrational animals, end up destroying themselves. ¹¹Condemnation is theirs. They have followed the path of Cain. They run after money as greedily as Balaam. The same rebellion is in their hearts as was in the heart of Korah, and they'll be destroyed as surely as he was.

Enoch's Prophecy

¹²These men come to your fellowship dinners and eat with you as if nothing were the matter. They're like clouds that promise showers, but are empty, carried along by the wind. They're like fruitless trees at harvest time, dried up at the roots, twice dead. ¹³They're like untamed waves bringing their foam and scum to the beach or like meteors that streak across the sky and disappear into the darkness.

¹⁴Enoch, the seventh in line from Adam, prophesied what would happen to such people when he said, "I was shown in vision the Lord coming to earth with ten thousand angels. ¹⁵He's coming to execute judgment and to rebuke all the ungodly of all their ungodliness, their immorality, their arrogance, and the hard things they have spoken against Him."

¹⁶These people are constantly grumbling and finding fault. They indulge their own lusts. They brag about themselves and flatter others to get what they want.

Last-day Scoffers

¹⁷Dear friends, remember what the apostles of the Lord Jesus told us? ¹⁸They

said, "In the last days scoffers will come who will follow their own selfish desires, even questioning the promise of His coming." ¹⁹The problem is that these kinds of people bring divisions into the church because they're guided by the spirit of this world and not by the Holy Spirit.

Keep Building Your Faith

²⁰But you, my dear friends, keep building your faith, asking the Holy Spirit to help you. ²¹Keep yourselves in the love of God as you look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, who through God's mercy will give you eternal life.

²²And show this same compassion toward others, especially to those who are weak in faith. ²³Help save the lost as if they were caught in a fire. Be merciful and kind to them, while hating sin as you would a filthy garment.

Closing Prayer

²⁴Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before His Father and the assembled universe with great joy, ²⁵to such a wise God and Savior belong glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever! Amen.

REVELATION

Blessed Are Those Who Read

1 This book is a revelation of what Jesus Christ is doing and of the things God told Him to share with us which must begin to come to pass. He sent His angel to show these things to His servant John. ²John wrote down everything he saw just as he was told. Thus, this book is the testimony of Jesus and tells us what God wants us to know. ³Blessed is the one who reads the prophecy of this book; blessed are those who listen in order to understand; and blessed are those who take it to heart, especially at the time of the end.

A Message to Seven Churches

⁴Greetings from me, John, to the seven congregations in Asia Minor which have been selected by Jesus to receive the following letters. Grace and peace to each of you from God our Father who is, who was, and who is coming to take us home, from the Holy Spirit, who in His seven-fold ministry stands before the throne, ⁵and from Jesus Christ, God's faithful witness. He was the first who rose from the dead by His own power, and He is the rightful Ruler over all kings in the world.

He is the One who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His own blood. ⁶He has formed a new kingdom of priests to proclaim the good news of salvation to the whole world. Therefore, to Jesus Christ be glory and power forever and ever. Amen. ⁷Look, He is coming back riding on the clouds of heaven, and everyone will see Him, even those who crucified Him, just as He told them. It will be heart-wrenching for all who have rejected Him, no matter where they live. So shall it be! Amen.

⁸When the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to me, He said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the One who was and is and ever will be. I am the One who will come. I am the Almighty One."

A Vision of Christ

⁹I'm John the apostle, your brother and companion in suffering, enduring persecution because I believe in Jesus Christ and in His coming kingdom. I was exiled to this barren island called Patmos for preaching the word of God and for sharing with people the testimony of Jesus Christ. ¹⁰On the Sabbath of the Lord I went to the island's rocky shore to worship. Suddenly the Spirit took control of me, and I heard a voice behind me that sounded as loud as a trumpet. ¹¹The voice said, "Write a book about what I'm going to show you and send it to the seven churches in Asia Minor in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

¹²As frightened as I was, I turned to see who was talking to me, and I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and someone like the Son of Man was walking among them. He was wearing a long, white robe down to His ankles and had a golden sash around His waist just below His chest. ¹⁴His hair was white like wool, or even whiter—like snow, and His eyes blazed like flames of fire. ¹⁵His feet glowed like bronze burning in a furnace. When He spoke, His voice sounded like the thundering of a mighty waterfall. ¹⁶In His right hand He held seven stars. Each time He spoke, a beam of light like a two-edged sword came out of His mouth. His whole face radiated with light as dazzling as the noonday sun.

¹⁷When I saw this, I fell down as dead. He came close, put His hand on me and said, "Don't be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸I was dead but I'm alive, and I will never die again. All authority is given to me in heaven and on earth. I alone have the keys to death and the grave. ¹⁹Write down everything you see. This includes what is happening now and what will happen in the future. ²⁰The seven stars that you saw in my hand and the seven golden lampstands are symbols. The seven stars represent the

seven overseers who serve as messengers to the seven churches, and the seven golden lampstands represent the seven congregations.

The Church That Lost Its Love for Christ

2 “To the overseer of the church in Ephesus write: Greetings from the One who firmly holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among His people. What’s happening in your congregation is typical of what will happen during the first phase of the church’s history, and it has important lessons for my people until the end of time.

²“I know how hard you and your people have worked for me. I know the tremendous effort you’ve put forth, your perseverance, and your willingness to die rather than be disloyal to me. I know how you hate wickedness, how you test those who claim to be apostles but are not, and how you have exposed their lies. ³You’ve gone through many hardships for my sake, but you never gave up. You’ve remained loyal to me. ⁴However, I do have something to say to you. You have lost the love you had for me in the beginning and have become more concerned with doctrine and the work of the church than in loving and serving me. ⁵Remember how much you loved me before you fell? Repent and start doing things for me for the same reason you did them at first. If you don’t, I will come and take away your lampstand. ⁶But you have this in your favor: you can’t stand what the Nicolaitans are doing. They’re abusing the freedom I gave them and are teaching that obedience has no bearing on salvation. Like you, I abhor what they do. ⁷If you have ears to hear, then you need to listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you. To those who recapture their first love for me I will give the right to eat from the Tree of Life which was once in the Garden of Eden but is now in the Paradise of God.

The Church That Died for Christ

⁸“To the overseer of the church in

Smyrna write: Greetings from the One who is the beginning and the end, who died and is alive again. What is happening to your church also shows what will take place during the second phase of the church’s history and what will happen to some of my people until the end of time.

⁹“I know all the stress and pressure you’re going through and how you’ve been made destitute because of me. Yet this experience has made you rich in heaven’s sight. I know all about the slander that some who call themselves Israelites have brought against you, but they are not true Israelites, no matter what they say, because they are not friends of God but instruments of Satan. ¹⁰Don’t be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Satan will have some of you thrown into prison, which will test your faith. There will come a time of severe persecution that will be extremely hard on you and it will last for ten days, each day meaning a year. Be faithful until death and I will give you a crown of eternal life. ¹¹If you have ears to hear, then you need to listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you. The one who overcomes will not die the second death.

The Church That Compromised Its Faith

¹²“To the overseer of the church in Pergamum write: Greetings from the One who, when He speaks, has a stream of light coming out of His mouth like a sharp, two-edged sword. This message is not only for your congregation, but for my people who will be living during the third phase of the church’s history and will be helpful to believers until the end of time.

¹³“I know what you’ve done and that you’re living in a city which Satan rules and where demonic forces feel at home. I know how you’ve kept the faith in spite of intense persecution, even during those dark days when they executed my loyal disciple Antipas and others like him who gave their lives for me in this very city where Satan loves to live. ¹⁴But I need to

point out a few things to you and to my people who later will be living during a time similar to yours. Some who worship with you are making suggestions like Balaam made to Balak. He suggested that Balak could separate the children of Israel from God by enticing them to have sexual relations with the Moabite women during their pagan festivals and then have them eat food which had been sacrificed to idols. By listening to these kinds of people, you're drifting away from me. ¹⁵You also have in your congregation those who believe what the Nicolaitans teach, that it doesn't matter what you do as long as you have faith. ¹⁵Repent and change your ways or I will come and with the sword of my mouth fight against those who compromise the truth. ¹⁷If you have ears to hear, then listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you. Those who overcome, I will feed with heavenly manna. I will also give you the white stone of acquittal with your new name on it. It will be a special name between us, which meaning no one else will know.

The Church That Became Corrupt

¹⁸To the overseer of the church in Thyatira write: Greetings from the Son of God whose eyes blaze like flames of fire and whose feet glow like burning bronze. This message is not only for you and your congregation, but for my people who will be living during the fourth phase of the church's history covering centuries of spiritual darkness. It is also for those who might face similar situations in the future.

¹⁹"I know what you have done. I know how much you love me. I know your activities, your faithfulness, your perseverance and your willingness to serve. I also know that you're working harder for me now than you did before.

²⁰However, I need to point out some things to you. Unfortunately, you tolerate people like Jezebel who claimed prophetic authority but who led my people into sexual sins and into eating foods

sacrificed to idols. Similar mixed worship has been going on among you. ²¹I have given these people time to repent, but they refuse to change their ways. ²²I will bring a terrible sickness on Jezebel and those who commit spiritual adultery with her unless they repent. ²³And those who consider themselves to be her children I will not protect from the plague of death. Then all who believe will know that I search hearts and minds, and will repay each one for what he has done. ²⁴But to the rest in Thyatira who have been faithful to me and have not sought to know Satan's secrets, I will put no other burden on you except to keep your eyes on me. ²⁵So hold on to what you have until I come back. ²⁶I will give to those in Thyatira and to my people everywhere who hold on to their faith, and continue in my deeds, authority over nations. ²⁷When I return, my people will sit with me on thrones judging the wicked. As it is written, 'I will come with an iron scepter to crush the arrogance of this world as a man crushes a clay pot.' ²⁸Just as I have received the right to rule from the Father, you will stand out as brilliantly as the morning star. ²⁹If you have ears to hear, then listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you.

The Church That Was Alive and Became Dead

3 "To the overseer of the church in Sardis write: Greetings from the One who with the Holy Spirit is holding the seven stars in His hand. This message is not only for your congregation, but also for my people who will be living during the fifth phase of the church's history and will be helpful to believers until the end of time.

"I know your works. You have a name for being alive, but you're almost dead because you're living on your past reputation. ²You should wake up and strengthen what zeal you have left before it completely dies. What you started was good,

but I have not found your deeds acceptable in the sight of God. ³Remember how you responded when you first understood the truth of the gospel. You need to continue to respond like that or you'll lose your hold on what you have. If you don't wake up, I will come when you least expect it, like a thief in the night, and catch you unaware. ⁴There are a few in Sardis who have kept their spiritual robes clean. They will walk beside me dressed in white, for they are worthy. ⁵He who overcomes will be dressed in my righteousness. I will not take his name out of the Book of Life, but will declare him mine before my Father and the whole universe. ⁶If you have ears to hear, then listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you.

The Church That Was Loyal

⁷"To the overseer of the church in Philadelphia write: Greetings from the Holy One who is true, the One who has the key of David. When He opens a door, no one can shut it, and when He shuts it, no one can open it. This message is not only for your congregation, but for my people living during the sixth phase of the church's history which is near the time of the end.

⁸"I know what you're trying to do for me. I have opened a door of opportunity for you which no one can shut. I know how little strength you have, yet you have held to the teachings of Scripture and have not denied my name. ⁹Listen carefully. Some among you are instruments of Satan. They claim they are true sons of Abraham, but they are not. They are lying, and someday I will make them come and bow at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. ¹⁰Since you have obeyed me and kept my word and endured because of me, I will keep you during the time of trouble that will come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth. ¹¹I want to say to those who will be living at that time, 'Don't become discouraged, because I will come quickly to save you. Hold on to what you have and don't let anyone rob you of

your faith and cause you to lose your crown.' ¹²He who remains steadfast I will make like a pillar in the Sanctuary of my God. He will never have to leave. I will inscribe on his heart the name of my God, the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, and my own new name. ¹³If you have ears to hear, then listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you.

The Church That Preferred to Be Lukewarm

¹⁴"Finally, to the overseer of the church in Laodicea write: Greetings from Him who is God's Amen, who is the faithful and true witness and who is the source of all creation. This message is not only for you and your congregation, but for my people living during the final phase of the church's history at the time of the end.

¹⁵"I know what you have done for me, but I also know that you're neither totally for me nor totally against me. I wish you were one or the other. The way you are only confuses people. ¹⁶Because your religious experience is neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm, I intend to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷You say, 'I have prospered and become spiritually rich. What else do I need?' You don't realize that you are spiritually destitute, pitiable, poor, blind and naked. ¹⁸I advise you to buy from me gold, a faith that has been purified and tested by fire, and the white robe of my righteousness to cover your spiritual nakedness, and the eyesalve of the Holy Spirit to help you discern the things of God. ¹⁹Those I love, I correct and discipline. So be earnest, repent and change your ways. ²⁰I am standing at your heart's door, knocking. Anyone who hears my voice and opens the door will be glad, for I will come in and eat with him and he with me. ²¹He who overcomes will receive the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and now sit next to my Father on His throne. ²²If you have ears to hear, then listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you."

God's Throne Room

4 After Jesus finished speaking, I looked up to see where He might have gone, and when I did, I saw an open door in heaven. The first voice I heard coming from there sounded as loud as a trumpet and very much like the voice of Jesus that I had just heard. It said, "Come up, and I will show you what must still happen." ²Immediately the Holy Spirit took me up through this open door in heaven. There I saw a throne and Someone sitting on it. I knew it must be God. ³His face was too radiant for me to look at, and His throne was bathed in light with the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow over the throne glistened as brightly as an emerald in the sun. ⁴Around the front of the throne I saw twenty-four smaller thrones on which sat twenty-four elders dressed in white and wearing crowns of gold. ⁵From the large throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. I also saw in front of the throne seven lamps of fire, which I was told represented the ministry of the Holy Spirit. ⁶The floor of the throne room looked like a large sea and was clear, like crystal, as if it were made of glass. Close to the throne stood four living beings. They were covered with eyes in front and back, symbolizing their intelligence and vigilance. ⁷The first being looked as kingly as a lion, the second looked as strong as an ox, the third looked like a kindly human, and the fourth looked as keen-eyed as an eagle. ⁸Each one of these living beings had six huge wings. When I looked, I saw markings under their wings that looked like eyes. These living beings praise God day and night as they sing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who always was, who now is and who is coming." ⁹Whenever these beings give glory and honor and thanks to the One sitting on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰the twenty-four elders fall on their knees to worship Him, and as they do so, they lay their crowns at His feet, singing,

¹¹"O Lord, our God, you are worthy to receive all glory, honor and power because you are the One who created all things. By your own choice you created them and by your power they continue to exist."

The Lamb Takes the Scroll

5 I also saw a tightly rolled scroll in the right hand of the One who sat on the throne. It had writings on both sides and was sealed with seven wax seals. ²Then I saw a powerful angel appear and call out in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" ³No one was found in heaven or on the earth, or below the earth, who was worthy to take the scroll out of the hand of God, break the seals and read what was written on the scroll. ⁴I was so discouraged that I started to cry, because no one was found worthy to take the scroll and look inside to see what it said. ⁵Then one of the elders said to me, "Don't weep. Look! The Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Strength and Heir of David, He is worthy and able to take the scroll and break the seals."

⁶I looked and saw a Lamb standing in front of the throne, surrounded by the four living beings and the twenty-four elders. The Lamb was covered with blood as if it had been sacrificed, yet it was alive! As I looked more closely, I noticed that it had seven little horns and seven eyes, which I was told represented the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to convict men of sin and draw them to God. ⁷Then I saw the Lamb go up to the One sitting on the throne and take from Him the scroll that He was holding in His right hand.

Worthy Is the Lamb

⁸When the Lamb took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell on their knees and worshiped the Lamb. The twenty-four elders had harps and golden bowls in their hands full of incense, which represented the prayers of God's people. ⁹Then the

twenty-four elders stood and sang a new song to the Lamb, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to break the seals. You were crucified for the sins of men and have brought them back to God. By your blood you redeemed us out of every family, language, people and nation. ¹⁰You have set up a new kingdom of priests, and they will forever reign with you on earth."

¹¹Suddenly, I heard what seemed like a hundred million angels joining their voices in praise at the coronation of the Lamb as they encircled the throne and the four living beings and the twenty-four elders. ¹²The chorus swelled into an overwhelming crescendo: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain! All power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and praise belong to Him!" ¹³Then voices seemed to come from every part of creation, in heaven, on earth, below the earth and in the sea to join in the last great shout of praise, saying, "To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise, honor, glory and power, forever and ever!" ¹⁴The four living beings shouted, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders slipped to their knees and worshipped Him who lives forever and ever.

First Seal: Controversy

6 After the chorus had ended, I saw the Lamb break all the seals and unroll the scroll. As He revealed the events of the first seal, I heard the first of the four living beings say to me in a voice that sounded like thunder, "Come! See the controversy over giving the gospel!" ²I looked to where he was pointing and saw a galloping white horse. The rider on it had a bow in his hand and arrows strapped to his back. He was allowed to wear a victory wreath on his head and galloped into the future bent on spreading the gospel and overcoming the enemies of God. This is the first phase of the history of opposition to the gospel.

Second Seal: War

³As the Lamb revealed the events of the second seal, the second living being said to me in a voice that sounded like thunder, "Come! Look!" ⁴I looked and saw a red horse galloping into the future. Its rider had a sword in his hand. He waged war against God's people who refused to compromise to have peace. I saw people being killed and family members turning against each other as the conflict continued to spread. This is the second phase of the history of opposition to the gospel.

Third Seal: Persecution

⁵As the Lamb revealed the events of the third seal, I heard the third living being speak in a voice that sounded like thunder, "Come! Look!" I looked and saw a black horse galloping into the future. Its rider was holding a pair of scales. ⁶I was trying to figure out the meaning of this when I heard a voice coming from among the four living beings, saying, "Wheat and barley will be scarce. It will cost a day's wages for one quart of wheat or three quarts of barley, but the drought will not hurt the oil and the sweet wine of grapes. True believers will be few, but faith and love will not die out." This is the third phase of the history of opposition to the gospel.

Fourth Seal: Death

⁷As the Lamb revealed the events of the fourth seal, the last of the four living beings spoke in a voice that sounded like thunder, saying, "Come! Look!" ⁸I looked and saw a pale-colored horse galloping into the future. Its rider seemed to bring with him nothing but death. As he rode by, I saw tombstones pop up in the tracks of his horse's hooves. The power of death seemed to be everywhere, covering one-fourth of the earth. Death came from persecution, starvation, exposure, disease and torture from men behaving like beasts. This is the fourth phase of the history of opposition to the gospel.

Fifth Seal: The Cry of the Martyrs

⁹As the Lamb revealed the events of the fifth seal, I looked and saw a sacrificial altar, and under it were the bodies of those who had died for the Lord. They had faithfully proclaimed God's word and had been killed because of their faith. ¹⁰Their bodies were crying out for justice, saying, "Almighty God, we know that you're faithful and true, but how much longer do we have to wait before you vindicate us and judge those who spilled our blood?" ¹¹A voice said, "White robes of righteousness and victory wreaths have been set aside for each of you, but you must wait a little longer until the enemy's cup of rebellion is full. A number of your brothers and fellow servants will yet be killed." This is the fifth phase of the history of opposition to the gospel.

Sixth Seal: Cosmic Action

¹²As the Lamb revealed the events of the sixth seal, the earth shook mightily, the sun darkened and appeared as black as sackcloth made of goat's hair, and the moon looked as if it had been dipped in blood. ¹³The stars of heaven fell as thick and fast as late-ripening figs fall from a tree when shaken by a strong wind. ¹⁴But these were only early warning signs to the inhabitants of the earth of what was yet to come. Then I saw the sky come apart as if someone was rolling it up like a scroll. Mountains sank out of sight and entire islands disappeared. ¹⁵Kings, heads of governments, political figures, military commanders, the rich, the powerful and all others, whether oppressed or free, who had not listened to God, hid themselves in caves and behind rocks. ¹⁶They shouted to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the One sitting on the throne and from the power of the Lamb!" ¹⁷The day of God's judgment has come! Who can survive?"

God's People Sealed

7 Then I saw those who would survive and what had happened between the

time when the early warning signs had first been given and the actual end itself. I saw four angels holding back the four winds of destruction to keep them from blowing too strongly on the land or on the sea or on any person. ²¹I also saw another angel come flying from the rising of the sun carrying the Seal of God. When he arrived, he called loudly to the four angels to whom God had given power to hold back the destroying winds, saying, ³"Hold back the winds of destruction and don't let them blow full force on the earth, on the sea, or on any vegetation, so people may live until we have placed God's final seal on the foreheads of those who serve Him." ⁴¹I was told that one hundred and forty-four thousand would be selected from the twelve tribes of spiritual Israel as firstfruits of the final harvest. ⁵There would be twelve thousand each from the tribes of Judah, Reuben and Gad; ⁶twelve thousand each from the tribes of Asher, Naphtali and Manasseh; ⁷twelve thousand each from the tribes of Simeon, Levi and Issachar; ⁸and twelve thousand each from the tribes of Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin.

The Great Multitude

⁹Then I saw so many people, no one could count them! They had been taken from every race, tribe, nationality and language and were all dressed in white as they stood in front of the throne and the Lamb, with palm branches in their hands as a sign of their victory. ¹⁰They praised God, saying, "Our salvation came from the One who sits on the throne and from the Lamb." ¹¹Then all the angels, the twenty-four elders and the four living beings fell to their knees, bowed in worship and praised the One sitting on the throne, ¹²saying, "Amen! Praise, honor, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, power and might belong to our God forever and ever! Amen!"

¹³After this, one of the twenty-four elders asked me, "Do you know who these special people are who are dressed in

white with victory palms in their hands? Do you know where they came from?" ¹⁴I answered, "Sir, I'm sure you know, but I don't." He said to me, "These are people who have come out of the great tribulation of the last days. They have washed their filthy garments and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵They will stand in the presence of God and joyfully serve Him day and night in His Temple. He will pitch His tent over them to shelter them and fill their hearts with joy. ¹⁶Never again will they go hungry or be thirsty, scorched by the sun or persecuted. ¹⁷The Lamb who is before the throne will be their Shepherd and will feed them. He will lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God Himself will wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Seventh Seal: Homecoming

8 As the Lamb revealed the events of the seventh seal, and there was an expectant pause in the activity of the universe for half an hour, which prophetically represents a week. Every being in heaven was anticipating the arrival of God's children. The work of the gospel was finished and God's plan of redemption completed.

The Seven Trumpets

²Then the scene changed and I saw seven angels standing before God. Each of them was given a trumpet of judgment. ³As I looked, I saw an angel with a golden censer in his hand standing by the altar. He was given a large quantity of incense, which I was told represented the prayers of God's people. He then took the incense and poured it on the coals of fire on the golden altar before the throne. ⁴The smoke of the incense rose up before God from the altar as the angel offered to Him the prayers of His people. ⁵Then the angel filled the empty censer with hot coals from the same altar and threw the coals of fire down to the earth. As soon as it hit, there were distant rumblings, the sound of thun-

der, flashes of lightning and a strong earthquake.

⁶This alerted the seven angels who had been given the seven trumpets of God's judgments, and they prepared to blow them.

First Trumpet: Armies From the North

⁷When the first angel blew his judgment trumpet, hordes of men from the north were allowed to attack the Roman Empire that had persecuted God's people. These attacks were as devastating as the destruction brought on by lightning and huge hailstones on a field ready for harvest. I saw that the hailstones were colored with drops of blood, which I was told symbolized the loss of many lives. When these hordes of men were finished, one-third of the Empire was engulfed in flames. They had scorched the earth and set the trees and grass on fire wherever they went.

Second Trumpet: Navies From the South

⁸The second angel blew his judgment trumpet and many ships were allowed to sail up from the south to attack the Roman Empire. These attacks were as devastating as if a mountain covered with flowing lava had been picked up and thrown into a seaport full of ships. A third of the nation's seaports turned red with blood. ⁹One-third of the fish in the harbors died, and by the time it was all over, one-third of the Empire's navy had been destroyed.

Third Trumpet: Attacks From the East

¹⁰The third angel blew his judgment trumpet, and hordes of men swept in from the east to attack the Roman Empire. This action was as devastating as if an enormous meteor burning like a torch had dropped from the sky and destroyed one-third of the earth's water supply. ¹¹The bitterness represented by this meteor was called Wormwood. One-third of the people suffered as a result of these attacks, and many of them died in bitterness and rage.

Fourth Trumpet: Revolt From Within

¹²The fourth angel blew his judgment trumpet, and the Roman Empire was attacked from within. This was as devastating as if the sun, moon and stars had stopped shining for a third of the time. The suffering of man and beast and the effects on nature were impossible to describe. These four attacks on the Roman Empire from the north, south, east and from within led to its collapse, and it came to an end.

¹³As I looked, I saw in vision an eagle soaring high overhead, crying with a human voice, "Woe, woe, woe to you people on earth, because history is not yet over and three more angels need to blow their judgment trumpets!"

Fifth Trumpet: Armies From the East

9 The fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth. I was told that the star represented Satan, who held the key to what I was shown. ²Next I saw the angel go up to a dark and troublesome pit and open it, and when he did, out came billowing black smoke as from a huge furnace until it darkened the sun and poisoned the atmosphere. ³Out of this billowing smoke came swarms of riders like swarms of locusts, and they stung people with a sting like that of scorpions. They were allowed to attack the eastern area of the former empire and to sweep westward across vast deserts along the great sea. ⁴They were told not to harm the grass of the earth, the trees and the plants, nor to kill God's people—only those who did not have His seal. ⁵Though they did not kill God's people, they did persecute them, and their suffering was as painful as the sting of a scorpion. This lasted for five prophetic months (one hundred and fifty years). ⁶During this time many of God's people preferred death to life. They looked for ways to die, but death ran away from them.

⁷The locusts I saw coming out of the smoke looked as large as horses ready for

war. On the backs of those horselike locusts I saw strange-looking riders, but from their faces I could tell that they were human. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold. ⁸Their hair was tied back like women tie their hair and their teeth looked as fearsome as those of a lion. ⁹Each rider's chest was covered with a breastplate of iron. The sound of the wings of these horselike locusts was like the sound of many chariots being driven into battle. ¹⁰These fierce-looking animals with their riders could sting people as scorpions do with their tails. What I saw looked like an indestructible army, but they were permitted to inflict pain for only five prophetic months. ¹¹They had a king guiding them who rules over the dark and troublesome pit of evil that exists in this world. He was determined to advance his kingdom. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek it's Apollyon, which means Destroyer.

¹²This ended the fifth trumpet and the first woe; there are still two more woes to come.

Sixth Trumpet:***More Armies From the East***

¹³Then the sixth angel blew his judgment trumpet and the second woe began. I heard a voice that seemed to come from the horns on the four corners of the golden altar standing before the throne. ¹⁴This voice said to the sixth angel who had just blown his trumpet, "Go quickly and tell the four angels stationed at the river Euphrates that the time has come to let it overflow." ¹⁵Then the four angels let go and vast armies flooded the land for a prophetic hour, day, month and year (or three hundred ninety-one years). During this time they were free to kill one third of the population. ¹⁶There were thousands upon thousands of riders. ¹⁷Then I saw them coming, and I noticed that each one wore a breastplate which, in the sun, looked like it was on fire. The horses acted like lions ready for the kill. When they breathed, fire, smoke and poisonous

fumes seemed to come out of their nostrils. ¹⁸They were allowed to sweep in from the east across many nations and attack the western part of the former Roman Empire. A third of the people were killed by fire, smoke, or poisonous fumes which seemed to be coming out of the horses' mouths. ¹⁹The power of these horses was evident from the way they held their heads and their tails as their riders raced along to wound and to kill. ²⁰Those who had not died from these fierce attacks still did not repent but continued to worship their holy relics and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone or wood, none of which can hear, see, speak, or walk. ²¹Nor did they repent of their murders, magic arts, immoral practices and robberies. This is the judgment of the sixth trumpet and the second woe.

The Little Scroll

10 Then I saw a powerful Angel come down from heaven dressed in what appeared to be a dazzling white cloud with a brilliant rainbow arched over His head. His face shone as bright as the sun and His ankles and feet looked like pillars of fire. I knew that it was the Lord Jesus. ²He was holding a little open scroll in His hand. As He touched the earth, He set His right foot on the sea and His left foot on the land. ³He gave a great shout, like a loud roar of a lion. This was followed by seven thundering voices, each with its own message. ⁴I started to write down what I heard, but a voice from heaven said, "Don't write down the meaning of the seven thunders, because God's people must not know their trials beforehand." ⁵Then the Lord Jesus, whom I saw standing with one foot on the sea and the other on the land, raised His right hand to heaven and took an oath. ⁶He swore by the One who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, who created everything in heaven, on the earth and in the sea, saying in a loud voice, "The time of which the prophets wrote has come to an end! There will be

no long delay! ⁷During the days of the seventh angel before he blows his trumpet, the work of the gospel will be finished just as God foretold through His prophets."

John Told to Eat the Little Scroll

⁸Next the voice from heaven which had told me not to write down the meaning of the seven thunders spoke to me again and said, "Go and take the little open scroll out of the hand of the mighty Angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." ⁹So I went up to the Son of God and asked Him if I could have the little scroll, and He answered, "You may have it. Take it and feed on its message. When you do, you will find that it will taste as sweet as honey in your mouth but make your stomach bitter." ¹⁰I reached out and took the little scroll from His hand and started to eat it. Just as He had said, it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth but made my stomach bitter. ¹¹He said to me, "God's people will be happy to know that the Lord is coming, but they must take the gospel to every race, language, nationality and people."

God's Two Witnesses

11 Then he gave me a measuring stick and said, "Go and measure the temple in heaven, the altar and the people who claim to worship there. It's time for the truth of the heavenly Sanctuary to be restored and for my people to get ready. ²Don't measure the outer court and those who worship there, for it belongs to the Gentiles who have rejected the truth of the heavenly Sanctuary. They have trampled on it for forty-two prophetic months ³or one thousand, two hundred and sixty days (each day representing a year). I will give power to my word which, like two faithful witnesses, will continue to proclaim the truth. But they will mourn in sackcloth because many will not listen."

⁴I was told that the two witnesses represent God's word and are like the two

lamps that get their power from the oil of the two olive trees which stand in the presence of God. ⁵If anyone tries to harm them, fire will come out of their mouths, and their enemies will be consumed along with the wicked. ⁶These witnesses have power to close up the sky so that it does not rain, to turn water into blood and to strike the earth with plagues.

The Bible Rejected

⁷When the two witnesses had finished the first part of their work, the one in charge of the bottomless pit stirred up the people against them to overpower them and kill them. ⁸Next I saw the bodies of these two witnesses lying in the street of a great city spiritually like Sodom and Egypt. They rejected God's word and by doing so crucified the Lord all over again. ⁹As the two witnesses lay in the streets, people from different races, languages and nationalities laughed at them and would not even give them an honorable burial. This lasted for about three-and-a-half prophetic days (or three-and-a-half years). ¹⁰People celebrated the deaths of these two witnesses and sent each other gifts. They were relieved and glad, because the two witnesses had tormented their consciences, convicting them of sin.

The Bible Resurrected

¹¹When the three-and-a-half years were over, the Holy Spirit came and breathed life into the two witnesses. They stood up, and those who saw this were filled with fear. ¹²A voice from heaven spoke to the two witnesses and said, "Come up here!" So they went up to God in a cloud and were given their rightful place while their enemies stood by and watched. ¹³Then there was a great earthquake and one tenth of that nation was in turmoil and thousands of people were killed. The rest of the people were afraid and repented and gave glory to God.

¹⁴All this happened following the second woe. The third woe is still coming.

Seventh Trumpet: Final Events Begin

¹⁵Then I heard the seventh angel blow his trumpet, and the third and last woe began. I heard voices coming out of heaven, saying, "The time has come for the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdom of the Lord our God and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever!" ¹⁶The twenty-four elders, whom I had seen sitting on thrones, slipped to their knees, bowed low before the throne and worshiped God, saying, ¹⁷"We thank you, Lord. You are the Almighty God, the One who is, who was and who always will be. You have decided to exercise your rightful power and have begun to reign. ¹⁸The nations are angry because the time has come for you to judge those who are dead, to reward those who proclaimed the truth and all those who love you, both small and great. The time has come for you to destroy those who destroy the earth."

¹⁹Then God's Temple in heaven was opened to me, and I saw the Ark of His covenant in the Most Holy Place. There were flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, an earthquake that shook the whole world, and huge hailstones began to fall. This ended the judgment of the seventh trumpet which was the third and final woe.

The Woman and the Dragon

12 Next I was given a series of visions to help God's people understand more fully the final events and the fury of the dragon. I saw an amazing sign in the heavens, a woman wrapped in the light of the sun with the moon under her feet, and on her head a wreath with twelve stars. ²She was pregnant, and I heard her cry out in pain, for the time had come for her to give birth. ³I saw another sign in the heavens, a huge red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns, one crown on each head. ⁴I saw him use his powerful tail to

pull down one-third of the stars from heaven. The dragon, I was told, represented Satan and the stars were the angels he had pulled down from heaven with him. I saw him stand in front of the woman, waiting for her to give birth so he could kill her Child as soon as He was born. ⁵She gave birth to a Son who would judge and rule the world. The Child was snatched away from the dragon, and later ascended to God and to His throne. ⁶I saw the woman (representing God's people) run from the dragon into the wilderness to a place He had prepared for her where she was taken care of for one thousand, two hundred and sixty prophetic days (each day representing a year).

Satan Thrown Out of Heaven

⁷This controversy between God and the dragon began years ago in heaven. God's Son Michael and the loyal angels fought against the dragon and his angels. ⁸The dragon and his angels fought back, but were defeated and lost their place in heaven. ⁹The great dragon, called the devil and Satan, that ancient serpent who is leading the whole world astray, was thrown out of heaven and came down to this earth with his angels. ¹⁰Then the scene changed and I seemed to be at Calvary. I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "Salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God have come, and so has the authority of Christ to rule. The accuser of our brothers who accused them before God day and night and has been defeated and is cast out of heaven forever. ¹¹Those he accused overcame him by their faith in the blood of the Lamb and by their personal witness, and they did not shrink from giving their lives in death for Him who loved them. ¹²Rejoice you angels and you who dwell in the heavens, but woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil is extremely angry and is coming at you with great fury. He is filled with rage because he knows that his time is short."

The Woman Persecuted

¹³When Satan saw that God had been vindicated, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male Child. ¹⁴God helped the woman by giving her two large wings which she used to fly to a place prepared for her in the wilderness to escape from the wrath of the dragon. There she would be safe for a time, times and half a time (which equals three-and-a-half prophetic years or one thousand, two hundred and sixty days, each day representing a year). ¹⁵When the dragon saw that the woman went to hide in the wilderness, he opened his mouth and out came a flood of people. They all went in search of the woman to find her and to kill her. ¹⁶But the desolate places of the earth helped her. It was as if the ground opened its mouth and swallowed the flood of people coming after her. ¹⁷Then the dragon became furious and decided to attack the woman and the last of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

The Beast From the Sea

13 Then I was given another vision. I saw a huge beast which looked like nothing I had ever seen before come up out of the sea. In a way, it was similar to the dragon because it also had seven heads and ten horns, but this beast had ten crowns instead of seven, one on each horn. Blasphemous words against God were written on each head. ²This sea beast had the body of a leopard, the paws of a bear, and each head had the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave this beast its power, its earthly throne and great spiritual authority. The dragon used this beast to deceive and kill God's people. ³I saw one of the heads of this sea beast suddenly go limp as if it had been fatally wounded. This greatly affected the beast and it looked as if it would bleed to death. But suddenly the wound was healed and it was well again. Then I saw the beast begin to walk the earth. Everywhere it went, people were influenced by its charm. ⁴Soon they

were worshiping this beast and said to each other, "Who is as powerful as this huge beast, and who would dare fight against it?" But they didn't realize that by worshiping the beast, they were worshiping the dragon that had given the beast its power and spirit.

⁵This sea beast made all sorts of religious claims for itself and even blasphemed God by claiming to speak for God. It exercised its power for forty-two prophetic months (or one thousand, two hundred and sixty years.) ⁶It continued to blaspheme God and those who dwell in heaven by misusing His name and undermining the truth of His dwelling place in heaven. ⁷Then the dragon gave power to the beast to make war against God's people to overcome them. Soon it exercised its authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. ⁸Everyone on earth worshipped the sea beast, all those whose names had not been written in the Book of Life belonging to the Lamb of God who was willing to die for us even before this world was created. ⁹He who has ears should listen to what I'm saying. ¹⁰If anyone takes God's people captive, he will be taken captive; if anyone kills with the sword, he will be killed also. This calls for steadfast endurance and faithfulness on the part of all who love God, but God will take justice into His own hands and will deliver His people.

The Beast From the Land

¹¹Then I saw a large animal come out of the earth. It had two little horns like a harmless lamb, but it developed the power and spirit of the dragon and began to speak and act like one. ¹²This land animal began to listen to the sea beast. It decided to exercise its authority on behalf of the sea beast and to make everyone in the world worship the beast whose fatal wound had been healed. ¹³The dragon used this animal as a false prophet to perform incredible "miracles," such as bringing down fire from heaven for all to see. ¹⁴Then the land an-

imal deceived people with false prophecies and with the miracles it could do with the dragon's help. It told the inhabitants of the earth to honor the beast that had been wounded by the sword but did not die. ¹⁵The animal threatened with death anyone who would not honor and worship the beast. ¹⁶It forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to accept the mark of the sea beast on their right hand or on their forehead. ¹⁷After this, no one could buy or sell unless he honored the sea beast by having its mark, which has its name and number. ¹⁸This calls for more than human wisdom, but with spiritual insight anyone can calculate its name and number, which is six hundred and sixty-six. It's a name and number made by man.

The Lamb and the 144,000

14 The scene changed and I saw the Lamb standing on Mount Zion surrounded by the hundred and forty-four thousand who had refused to accept the mark of the sea beast and had been sealed in their foreheads with the Father's name. ²Then I heard a chorus as one voice coming from heaven that sounded like a mighty waterfall accompanied by great peals of thunder and by thousands of harpists playing their harps. ³The hundred and forty-four thousand and those with them were singing a new song before the One sitting on the throne and before the four living beings and the twenty-four elders. Only those who had gone through the last great trouble could sing the song of victory as they did. ⁴These are the ones who had not corrupted themselves but resisted all spiritual seduction and are as pure in faith as virgins. They had been loyal to the Lamb and had faithfully followed Him wherever He led. They were offered to God and to the Lamb as first-fruits of earth's final harvest. ⁵No lies were found in their mouths, but they had held on to God's truth, and now they stood blameless before His throne.

The Messages of the Three Angels

⁶Then the scene changed back to the final events on earth, and I saw an angel flying high in the air, proclaiming one last time the eternal gospel to every nation, tribe, language and people. ⁷He called out in a loud voice for all to hear, saying, "Honor God and glorify His name, for the time has come for His judgment to begin. Worship Him who created the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

⁸I saw another angel flying behind the first one, and he, too, gave his message in a loud voice for all to hear, saying, "Babylon! Confusion! There is a falling away from truth because the sea beast is working to make every nation drink the intoxicating wine of its spiritual adulteries."

⁹I noticed a third angel flying behind the first and second ones, and he also gave his message in a loud voice for all to hear, saying, "Those who worship the sea beast and its image and agree to receive the mark of its name on his forehead or on his hand ¹⁰will have to drink the wine of God's judgment, which will be poured out unmixed with mercy from the cup of His indignation. This will take place in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹The fire of God's judgment will not rest until those who worship the sea beast and the animal and have the mark of its name are totally destroyed."

¹²These things that I saw call for special endurance on the part of God's people who keep the commandments of God and have faith in Jesus.

¹³Then a voice spoke to me from heaven, saying, "Write this down: 'Blessed are those who die in the Lord,' says the Spirit, 'for they will rest from their labors, and the good they have done will follow them.'"

The Harvest Is Ripe

¹⁴Next I saw in the distance a little white cloud and as it came nearer, it grew larger and I could see the Son of Man sitting on it. On His head He had a

golden crown, and in His hand, a sharp sickle. ¹⁵An angel came out of the Sanctuary in heaven and called in a loud voice to the One sitting on the huge cloud, "Swing your sickle and reap, for the time to reap has come, and the inhabitants of the earth are ready to harvest." ¹⁶Then the Son of Man swung His sickle over the earth as a signal to the angels to reap the earth's harvest.

God Withdraws His Spirit

¹⁷The angel who had come out of the Sanctuary in heaven also had a sharp sickle in his hand. He came down to earth to reap the grain. ¹⁸Then the angel who had been in charge of the fire on the altar of incense came out of the Sanctuary and in a loud voice called after the angel with the sharp sickle, "Don't forget to harvest the wild grapes because they too are ready." ¹⁹So the angel swung his sickle over the earth to harvest the wild grapes and to throw them into the winepress of God's indignation. ²⁰Then God withdrew His Spirit from the earth, and there was a great slaughter as the wicked began killing each other. Blood flowed everywhere. The earth resembled the slaughter in ancient Babylon whose river came up to the horses' bridles and flowed red with blood for more than a hundred miles.

Christ's Priestly Ministry Ends

15 Then I saw an amazing sight in heaven. Seven angels were commissioned to carry the seven last plagues down to earth as an expression of God's justice against sin.

²¹I also saw what seemed to be a large expanse of water as smooth and as transparent as glass. Underneath this expanse of water were flames of fire. As I looked, I saw those who had gained the victory over the dragon, over the beast with its name and number and over the land animal, all standing on this sea of glass playing their harps. ³They were singing the song of Moses and the Lamb, a song of

deliverance, saying, "Great and wonderful are your works, Lord God Almighty. Righteous and true are your ways, King of Nations. ⁴Who does not stand in awe of you? Who will not glorify your name? You are the Holy One! All nations will kneel before you because they have seen what you have done and know that you have been gracious and just."

⁵The scene changed and I saw that the Most Holy Place of the Sanctuary in heaven had been opened, a sign that Christ's priestly ministry was over. ⁶Then the seven angels who had been asked to carry the seven last plagues to the earth came out of the Sanctuary dressed in white linen robes with golden belts around their waists. ⁷Before they left for earth, one of the four living beings standing by the throne handed each of the seven angels a golden bowl. Each bowl was filled with one of the judgments of God, who lives for ever and ever. ⁸Suddenly the throne room was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one could enter the Sanctuary until the seven last plagues were over.

The Seven Last Plagues

16 Next I heard an authoritative voice speaking out of the smoke-filled Sanctuary to the seven angels, "Go! Do your work quickly and empty the seven bowls of God's judgments on the earth."

First Plague: Festering Sores

²So the first angel poured out his bowl on the land. And the people who had agreed to receive the mark of the sea beast and who were worshiping the image set up by the land animal broke out with painful, festering sores all over their bodies.

Second Plague:

The Sea Turns to Blood

³The second angel quickly followed and poured out his bowl on the oceans of the world. The waters stopped mov-

ing and became stagnant and red as the blood of a dead man, and every creature in the sea died.

Third Plague: The Waters Turn to Blood

⁴Quickly the third angel followed, and he poured out his bowl on the springs and rivers of the earth, and all of them turned into the consistency of blood. ⁵I heard this angel say, "Lord, you are righteous in your judgments. You have always been just, and you will continue to be so forever. ⁶The inhabitants of the earth have killed many of your people. They thirsted for blood, so you are giving them what they deserve." ⁷Then I heard voices from the altar in heaven respond, "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are your judgments."

Fourth Plague: Scorching Heat

⁸The fourth angel quickly followed and poured out his bowl on the rays of the sun. The rays intensified and burned people so severely that they thought they were on fire. ⁹Those who were being burned by the rays of the sun cursed God for allowing this to happen and would not repent of their sins or glorify God.

Fifth Plague: Darkness

¹⁰Quickly the fifth angel followed and poured out his bowl on the headquarters of the sea beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People were in such pain that they bit their tongues. ¹¹They cursed the God of heaven because of their pain and festering sores, but they refused to admit that what they had done was wrong.

Sixth Plague: Euphrates Dried Up

¹²The sixth angel quickly followed and poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates and immediately the waters dried up. As anciently Cyrus and the kings of the East diverted the river to defeat Babylon so this prepared the way for Christ to come to defeat spiritual Babylon. ¹³Then I saw three evil spirits which

looked like ugly frogs, one each coming out of the mouth of the dragon, the sea beast and the land animal turned false prophet. ¹⁴These evil spirits fanned out over the whole world, working miracles. Because of these miracles, the demons were able to unite the kings and authorities of the world against God's people. This led to the final battle between Almighty God and the forces of evil. ¹⁵The Lord says, "Listen! I will come and rescue my people as suddenly as a thief appears out of the night. But you need to stay awake and hold on to my righteousness so you won't be caught naked for others to see the shamefulness of your sins." ¹⁶Then the dragon led the kings of the earth to set a date for all of God's people to be killed at one time. This is the battle between God and the dragon. In Hebrew the battle is called Armageddon.

Seventh Plague: Global Earthquake

¹⁷Quickly the seventh angel followed and poured out his bowl into the earth's atmosphere. Then the One who sat on the throne spoke from the Sanctuary in heaven, saying, "It is done!" and announced the coming of His Son. ¹⁸All across the sky were flashes of lightning followed by loud peals of thunder. There was a tremendous earthquake, stronger than any earthquake since man was created. It was so severe that the entire planet shook. ¹⁹The efforts of the dragon, the sea beast and the land animal—that wicked trinity—came to an end. The global city they had built lost its cohesion and split up into its three separate parts. God remembered what spiritual Babylon had done and gave her the cup filled with the wine of His judgment. ²⁰The earthquake struck with such force that islands disappeared, and mountains dropped out of sight. ²¹This earthquake was followed by a global hailstorm with each hailstone weighing about a hundred pounds. Those who survived cursed God because of the hail. This ended the seven last plagues, and the earth looked like a wilderness.

The Woman and the Beast

17 Then one of the seven plague-bearing angels said to me, "Come, let me show you the reason for the judgments of God on the sea beast whose activities were like a prostitute sitting enthroned over many waters. ²The world's authorities had committed fornication with her and the inhabitants of the earth had become intoxicated with her spiritual adulteries." ³Then the Holy Spirit carried me into the wilderness. There I saw this same woman sitting on a huge red beast which had insults to God written all over it. The beast had seven heads and ten horns just like the dragon and the sea beast, but it had no crowns. ⁴The woman was dressed like a queen, wearing purple and scarlet with jewelry of gold, diamonds and pearls. In her hand she was holding a golden cup full of her adulteries and other abominable things. ⁵She had mysterious names written on her forehead such as: "Babylon the Great," "Mother of Prostitutes" and "Mother of Spiritual Wickedness on Earth." ⁶The woman was drunk with power from torturing and killing God's people. She did this because they had held on to the Word of God and had witnessed for Jesus. I was shocked by what I saw.

⁷The angel who accompanied me said, "Why are you so shocked? Let me tell you a little more about the secret life of this woman and about the beast with its seven heads and ten horns that she sits on. ⁸What you saw is symbolic. The beast on which the woman sits represents her political power which once was, then was not and then recovered. After that, everyone began worshiping the huge beast, except those whose names are recorded in the Book of Life which has been kept since the creation of this world. ⁹To identify the huge beast calls for more than human wisdom. The seven heads represent seven mountains on which the woman sits, where her political power is headquar-

tered.¹⁰ The seven heads also represent seven great kingdoms which through the ages have used their political power against God's people. Five have come and gone, the one that followed still is, and the last one will be allowed to exercise its authority for only a short time.¹¹ The beast himself is an eighth king and in spirit belongs to the seven, but is on its way to destruction.¹² The ten horns on top of the seven heads represent the kings and rulers of the earth. They are not yet united, but they will be allowed ruling authority with the beast for one prophetic hour, representing a very short time.¹³ They will be of one mind and will use their power to support this beast.¹⁴ They will even fight against the Lamb by attacking His people, but the Lamb will defeat them because He is Lord of lords and King of kings. Those with Him are His chosen ones who have answered His call and followed Him.

¹⁵ Then the angel pointed me back to the waters where the prostitute sits and said, "The waters represent masses of people, multitudes from every nation and tribe and language group on earth.¹⁶ The ten horns on the seven heads of this great beast represent the kings and rulers of the world, which eventually will turn on the prostitute, stripping her naked and ripping her body apart like hungry vultures. They will then destroy her with fire.¹⁷ God will allow the nations to be of one mind and to use their power to support this huge beast until the word of God is fulfilled.¹⁸ The prostitute represents the great city of spiritual Babylon, which dominates the kings of the earth."

The Fall of Babylon

18 Next I saw another angel coming down from heaven having great power and authority. As he approached the earth, his presence bathed the whole world in a brilliant light. I was told that this angel had been sent from God to give power to the final proclamation of the

gospel.²¹ I heard the angel cry out in a loud voice for all to hear, "The great religious-political city which men have built has fallen. Like ancient Babylon, she has become a home for demons and for every kind of foul spirit and hateful bird of prey.³ Every nation has been forced to taste her wine and has committed adultery with her. The world's businessmen have grown rich from the resources of her luxuries."

⁴ Then I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, before you are seduced by her charms, before you share in her sins and receive her plagues!⁵ Her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.⁶ Treat her as she treated others. Let her drink double the amount from her cup just as she made others drink.⁷ Let her suffer according to the glory she gave herself and the luxury in which she lived. She boasted and said, 'I sit as a queen of all nations. I'm not a poor widow. With my riches I will never see poverty, nor will I ever have pain.'⁸ But in one prophetic day (a literal year), she will be totally destroyed by the plagues which will come on her. Death, disease and famine will be everywhere. Fire will sweep through her streets destroying everything in its path. Mighty is the Lord God who judges her.

The Earth's Merchants Mourn

⁹ "The merchants of the earth who took part in her immoral practices and enjoyed her favors will weep and mourn when they see the smoke from her burning body.¹⁰ They will stand back in amazement and fear and will say to each other, 'Oh, no! Our great city, this global Babylon that we have built, in one short hour her judgment has come!'

¹¹ "Businessmen will weep because they cannot sell their merchandise. They will cry out,¹² 'The city has no money to buy our silver and gold, our gems and pieces of art, our fabrics of purple and scarlet or our fine linen and silk; she does

not import our treasures of ivory, bronze, marble, special metals and rare woods, ¹³our spices, exotic foods, rich perfumes, miracle ointments and incense. She can no longer trade in wine, oil, flour, wheat, cattle, sheep, horses and chariots, or in the labor and lives of men.'

¹⁴"The world's merchants will say to her, 'All the good things you desired, those dainty and luxurious things you bought from us to satisfy yourself are gone, as are your investments and wealth. You will never recover.'¹⁵ Those who became rich from trading with her will stand back and weep, terrified at her suffering. ¹⁶They will cry out, saying, 'Oh, no! That great city which loved to dress in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, and to adorn herself with gold and diamonds and pearls ¹⁷has in a single hour lost all her wealth and been brought to ruin!' All the sea captains and their wealthy passengers, the sailors, and all the others who earn their living by ships will stand back and weep. ¹⁸When they see the great city go up in smoke they will say, 'There was no city like this magnificent city!' ¹⁹They will throw dust in the air as an expression of their grief, and they will mourn, saying, 'Oh, no! How terrible! The great city is gone! The city which kept our ships sailing and made us rich has been destroyed! In a single hour she has been totally destroyed!'" ²⁰Then the angel called out in a loud voice saying, "Rejoice, you who live in heaven! Rejoice, you saints, apostles and prophets! The great city has been treated just as she treated you."

Babylon's Destruction

²¹As I looked, I saw a powerful angel pick up a huge boulder shaped like a millstone used for grinding wheat and with great violence throw it into the ocean. As he did so, he said, "That great city which has become like ancient Babylon will be thrown down with such violence as to never be found again."²² Then he said to her, "The sound pro-

duced by your harps, flutes and trumpets will never be heard again. The activities of your craftsmen will end. Your production lines will come to a standstill. ²³Never again will your streets be lighted at night nor will they hear the happy laughter of brides and bridegrooms. Your merchants will no longer be the city's great men nor will you lead people astray by your technology and magic spells. ²⁴You will be destroyed because the blood of the prophets and the saints of all ages was found in you."

The Lamb's Wedding

19 After this I heard what sounded like the shout of a great multitude coming from heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation, glory, honor and power belong to the Lord our God! ²True and righteous are His decisions. He has judged the woman for leading the world into spiritual adultery. He has allowed the prostitute to taste her own violence for shedding the blood of God's people."³ They shouted again and said, "Alleluia! Let the great city go up in smoke until she is gone forever!" ⁴The twenty-four elders and the four living beings fell on their knees before the One sitting on the throne and before the Lamb and said, "Amen! Alleluia!" ⁵A voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise God, you who serve the Lord and reverence His name, all of you, both small and great!" ⁶Then I heard a multitude of voices, which sounded like the roar of a mighty waterfall, like distant rolling thunder. These voices rose to a crescendo, saying, "Alleluia! The Lord God Omnipotent reigns! ⁷Let us all be glad and rejoice and give honor to Him who sits on the throne, because the time has come for the Lamb to meet His bride and to bring her home. She's made herself ready and is waiting. ⁸She's wearing that bright white gown that the Lamb gave her. She received it with gladness and has kept it bright and clean by her righteous deeds."

⁹My accompanying angel said to me,

"Write this down: 'Blessed and happy are those who have been called and who have accepted God's invitation to the Lamb's wedding and the feast that follows.'" Then he added, "God's invitation is trustworthy because His words are true." ¹⁰When I heard this, I fell on my knees in front of the angel to thank him, but he raised me up and said, "Don't kneel down in front of me! I'm only a servant like you and one with those who hold on to what Jesus said. Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Christ Comes as King of Kings

¹¹The scene changed, and I saw heaven's door wide open and a rider on a white horse come galloping down to earth. The name of the rider is Faithful and True. With righteousness He judges and makes war. ¹²As I looked more closely, I noticed that His eyes blazed like fire, and He was wearing many crowns, one on top of the other. A name was written on Him, the meaning of which no one knows but He Himself. ¹³His robe looked as if it had been soaked in blood. He is called The Living Word. He was on His way to fulfill His promise to His people and to destroy their enemies. ¹⁴An army of angels, all dressed in clean white robes and riding on white horses, followed Him. ¹⁵Out of His mouth came a beam of light which looked like a sharp sword. With this sword He will strike the nations to protect His people, just as a shepherd uses an iron rod to protect his sheep. He will carry out the judgments of the Almighty God as thoroughly as a man crushes grapes in a winepress. ¹⁶His name was written on His robe over His thigh: "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

Christ's Enemies Defeated

¹⁷Then I saw an angel standing in the sky illuminated by the sun. He shouted in a loud voice to all the vultures flying under heaven, saying, "Come to the great supper of God, for He has withdrawn His mercy from the earth." ¹⁸Come! Soon you

will eat the dead flesh of kings and captains, of riders and horses, of all kinds of people, whether they were free or bond, great or small." ¹⁹Then I saw the huge red beast on which the woman called for the armies of the world to fight against the One on the white horse and against His army. ²⁰But the sea beast and the animal turned false prophet were taken prisoner. This is the false prophet who had worked miracles to deceive people and had forced them to worship the sea beast and to receive its mark. Both of them were engulfed by a lake of fire and destroyed. ²¹The beam of light which looked like a sword coming out of the mouth of the One sitting on the white horse slew the rest of the people, and vultures gorged on their flesh.

Satan Bound 1,000 Years

20 After all this I saw an angel come down from heaven with a key and a massive chain, symbolizing God's power. ²The angel took hold of the dragon, that ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan, and bound him to this planet for a thousand years. ³It was like throwing him into a dark pit and sealing it so he could not escape. The angel confined him to earth, and he had no one to deceive until the thousand years were over. That's when the wicked will be raised to life, which is known as the second resurrection. Satan will again be active, but only for a little while.

The Saints in Heaven 1,000 Years

⁴The scene changed, and I saw thrones in heaven, and those who sat on them were given authority to judge the wicked. I saw those who had been beheaded because of their faithfulness to Jesus and the word of God. I also saw those who had not worshiped the sea beast or the land animal and had not received the mark on their foreheads or on their hands. They all lived and reigned with Christ in heaven for a thousand years.

⁵But the wicked remained dead and were not resurrected until the thousand years were over. ⁶Blessed are those who were raised in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power. They will serve God and Christ as priests and will rule with Him for a thousand years.

Satan's Final Rebellion Crushed

⁷At the end of the thousand years, I saw God free Satan from his imprisonment and end his isolation by resurrecting the wicked. ⁸When Satan saw the unsaved from all nations, called Gog and Magog, fill the earth again, he sprang into action. The number of the wicked from all ages looked like the sands of the sea. Then Satan persuaded them to join him in a battle against the city of God which had just come down out of heaven and settled on earth. ⁹The wicked listened to him and, under his leadership, surrounded the beloved city where the saints were. As they launched their attack, fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them completely. ¹⁰And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and consumed together with the sea beast, the land animal, and all the wicked. Their destruction will be forever and ever.

The Last Judgment

¹¹Before they were destroyed, I saw a great white throne. The form of the One who sat on it was so radiant that the earth and the sky seemed to disappear from His very presence. ¹²Then all the wicked who had been resurrected to be judged, whether they had been great or small, stood together with Satan in front of the One sitting on the throne. The Book of Life was opened and the Book of Death. The lives of the wicked were shown to them, and they were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³Everyone who had ever lived was there, those who had been buried at sea, as well as those who had been buried on land. All the wicked were judged by what they had

done. ¹⁴Then I saw death and the grave thrown into a lake of fire. This is called the second and final death. ¹⁵Anyone whose name was not recorded in the Book of Life was consumed by this same fire.

A New Heaven and Earth

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. God had recreated it just as He had made it in the beginning. The old heaven and earth were gone and so were the vast oceans. ²¹I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, come down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed to meet her husband. ³I heard a loud voice coming from the throne, saying, "God will now make His home on earth. He will personally live with His people and be with them. They will be part of His royal family, and God will always be their God. ⁴He will wipe away all their tears, and there will be no more death, or sadness, or crying or pain. The former things are passed away."

⁵The One who sat on the throne said, "Look, I have made everything new!" Then He said to me, "Write this down: 'These words are trustworthy and true.'" ⁶He said, "It's done! Evil is gone! I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Those who are thirsty will drink free of charge from the spring of the water of life. ⁷He who overcomes will inherit all this, for I am his God and he is my son. ⁸But those who continued lying, cheating, killing, committing adultery, playing with magic and worshiping the idols they made for themselves have had to suffer the consequences of their sins. That's why they were consumed by the lake of fire, which is the second death."

The New Jerusalem

⁹One of the seven angels who had been given one of the seven bowls holding one of the seven last plagues said to me, "Come, let me give you a closer look at the holy city, the bride of the Lamb."

¹⁰Then the Spirit carried me away to the top of a very high mountain and showed me the holy city, New Jerusalem, as it descended and settled on earth. ¹¹The city shone with the glory of God and looked like a brilliant diamond glistening in the sun, clear as crystal. It settled where old Jerusalem had been before the earth was cleansed and remade. ¹²From where I was, I could look down on the city and see that it had a massive wall around it, with twelve gates and an angel at each of the gates. Above each gate was inscribed the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. ¹³There were three gates on each side of the city, three on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west. ¹⁴The city and its walls rested on twelve foundation stones, each one having the name of one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb inscribed on it.

¹⁵Then my accompanying angel took a golden measuring rod to measure the city, its gates and its walls. ¹⁶The city was laid out in a square. Its length was the same as its width. It measured fifteen hundred miles along each side. ¹⁷Next he measured the wall, and it was one hundred forty-four cubits or more than two hundred feet high. The measurement the angel used was the same kind that humans use. ¹⁸The wall was made of green jasper, while the city itself was made of pure transparent gold, clear as glass. ¹⁹The foundation stones of the city and its walls were made of all kinds of precious stones of varying colors. The first cornerstone was deep green, made of jasper; the second, rich blue, made of sapphire; the third, milky white, made of chalcedony; the fourth, bright green, made of emerald; ²⁰the fifth, reddish pink, made of sardonyx; the sixth, deep red, made of carnelian; the seventh, bright yellow, made of chrysolite; the eighth, deep blue, made of beryl; the ninth, pale blue, made of topaz; the tenth, gold colored, made of chrysoprase; the eleventh, red, made of jacinth; and the twelfth was purple, made of amethyst. ²¹Each of the twelve gates was made of one huge pearl, and the streets of the city were

made of pure gold, yet they were as transparent as glass.

The Glory of God and the Lamb

²²I didn't see the Temple in the New Jerusalem. Actually, there was no need of one, since God and the Lamb were there. The Temple I had seen was now outside the city as a memorial of what God had done for His people. ²³The city was so filled with light that even the sun and the moon were not needed. The glory of the presence of God and the Lamb was its light. ²⁴The city was made for the redeemed of this world, and people from every nation will walk in its light. Each nation will bring its own grandeur into the city to the glory and praise of God. ²⁵The gates of the city will always be open and will never have to be locked, for there will be no darkness there. ²⁶The honor and greatness of the city will be the redeemed who have come from all nations on earth. ²⁷No one who is impure will enter there, nor will anyone who is wicked or dishonest, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

The Redeemed Will See God

22 Next the angel took me into the city and showed me the River of Life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ²From the throne the water gently flowed through the city, and in the middle of the city stood the Tree of Life, spanning the river with half its trunk on either side. I was told that the tree bore twelve kinds of fruit a year, one new fruit every month, and that its fruit and leaves were for the nurture of God's people. ³Never again will there be sin. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city and His people will serve Him forever.

⁴They will see God and look into His face as little children look trustingly into the face of a loving father. They will have the Father's name to show that they are part of His family. ⁵There will be no night

there, so they will not need light from a lamp or from the sun, for the Lord God will be the light of the city. And His people will rule the universe with Him throughout the ages of eternity.

Christ's Coming Is Certain

⁶The angel who had shown me all these things said, "What you saw in vision and everything I've told you is true and trustworthy. The Holy Spirit will help you write down what you saw and heard just as He did the prophets before you when He showed them what must take place."

⁷Then Jesus said to me, "When I come, I will come quickly. Blessed are those who hold on to the prophecies written in this book."

⁸I, John, your brother in the faith, saw and heard all these things in vision. After I had heard and seen them, I was so overwhelmed that I fell on my knees in front of the angel who had just talked to me. ⁹He quickly helped me to my feet and said, "Don't kneel in front of me. I'm just a servant of God as you are, as your brothers the prophets were and as those who are holding on to the prophecies of this book. Worship God, not me!"

¹⁰He said to me, "Don't close up and seal the prophecies of this book, because God's servants need to know these things, especially at the time of the end. ¹¹Just before Jesus comes, probation will close and He will say, 'Let those who are doing wickedly remain wicked and those who are filthy-minded remain filthy. Let those who are doing right continue to do right, and those who are holy, continue to grow in holiness.'"

¹²Then Jesus spoke to me and said, "When I come, I will come quickly and will reward everyone according to what he has done. ¹³I am Alpha and Omega,

the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

¹⁴"Blessed are those who have washed their robes in my blood and lived by my commandments. This is what gives them the right to the Tree of Life and to enter through the gates into the city. ¹⁵But outside the city are those who, like snarling dogs, have practiced sorcery, murdered, been immoral, worshiped their idols and loved to tell lies."

¹⁶He said, "I have shown you all these things and through my angel explained them to you so you can write them down and share them with the churches. I am the Root and Offspring of David, the Bright Morning Star."

The Holy Spirit's Invitation

¹⁷The Holy Spirit and the beautiful city are saying, "Come!" Whoever accepts the messages in this book, let him say, "Come!" Everyone who is thirsty may come and freely drink of the Water of Life.

The Importance of This Book

¹⁸I, John, warn everyone who reads or hears the prophetic words in this book not to add anything contrary to what is written. If they do, God's seven last plagues will certainly fall on them. ¹⁹If anyone takes away any part of this book or lessens the urgency of these prophetic messages, God will take away his right to the city and to the Tree of Life which are herein described.

Jesus, Come Quickly

²⁰Jesus says, "When I come, I will come quickly!" Yes, come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly!

²¹May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all of God's people. Amen.

A SELECTED BIBLE YEAR

Read the stories and parables of the Bible chronologically in one year.

JANUARY

- 1 How the World Came to Be, Part 1 Genesis 1:1-2:7
- 2 How the World Came to Be, Part 2 Genesis 2:8-25
- 3 How the World Went Bad Genesis 3
- 4 The First Sibling Rivalry Genesis 4:1-15
- 5 The Man Who Walked With God Genesis 5:18-24; Jude 14, 15
- 6 Why God Brought a Flood..... Genesis 6
- 7 The Flood..... Genesis 7
- 8 The Rainbow Promise Genesis 8:1-9:17
- 9 High-tech Rebellion Genesis 11:1-9
- 10 Abram's Journey..... Genesis 11:27-12:9
- 11 Adventures in Egypt..... Genesis 12:10-20
- 12 A Parting of Ways..... Genesis 13
- 13 Tithing the Spoils Genesis 14
- 14 God Covenants With Abram Genesis 15
- 15 Hard Times for Hagar Genesis 16:1-16; 21:1-21
- 16 Entertaining Angels Genesis 18
- 17 The Burning of Sodom..... Genesis 19:1-29
- 18 God Protects His Own Genesis 20
- 19 Abraham Offers Isaac Genesis 22:1-19
- 20 The Death of Sarah..... Genesis 23
- 21 Isaac and Rebekah Genesis 24
- 22 Esau Sells His Birthright Genesis 25:19-34
- 23 Jacob Deceives Isaac Genesis 27
- 24 Stairway to Heaven Genesis 28:10-22
- 25 Jacob Finds His Uncle Genesis 29:1-14
- 26 Laban Deceives Jacob Genesis 29:15-30
- 27 Time to Move On Genesis 31:1-21
- 28 Dark Wrestler Genesis 32
- 29 Jacob Meets Esau..... Genesis 33
- 30 Outrageous Conduct Genesis 34
- 31 A New Name for Jacob..... Genesis 35:1-15

FEBRUARY

1	A Dreamer Betrayed	Genesis 37
2	The Price of Integrity	Genesis 39
3	The Reward of Integrity	Genesis 41
4	Joseph's Brothers Go to Egypt	Genesis 42
5	Back to Egypt Again	Genesis 43
6	Judah Gives Himself	Genesis 44
7	The Revelation	Genesis 45
8	Jacob Moves to Egypt	Genesis 46:1-47:12
9	The Last Words of Jacob	Genesis 48; 49
10	Joseph Forgives	Genesis 50
11	The Troubles of Job	Job 1
12	From Bad to Worse	Job 2
13	The Good Old Days	Job 29
14	Happily Ever After	Job 42
15	A Hero Is Born	Exodus 1:1-2:10
16	Shattered Ambitions	Exodus 2:11-25; Psalm 90
17	God Calls a Reluctant Hero	Exodus 3:1-4:17
18	Back to Egypt Again	Exodus 4:18-6:13
19	The First Six Plagues	Exodus 7:1-9:12
20	The Last Four Plagues	Exodus 9:13-11:10
21	The Passover and the Exodus	Exodus 12
22	Salvation in a Tight Place	Exodus 13:17-14:31
23	The Test	Exodus 16
24	God and the Grumblers	Exodus 17
25	The Covenant at Sinai	Exodus 19; 20
26	The Golden Calf	Exodus 32
27	Close Encounters With God	Exodus 33:7-34:9
28	Building the Tabernacle	Exodus 40
29	Nadab and Abihu (read on 28 when no 29)	Leviticus 10

MARCH

1	Clean and Unclean Foods	Leviticus 11
2	The Day of Atonement	Leviticus 16
3	Sabbaths and Feasts	Leviticus 23
4	Manna or Meat?	Numbers 11
5	Sibling Rivalry Again	Numbers 12
6	Don't Listen to the Pessimists	Numbers 13
7	The Rebels	Numbers 16
8	Almonds From the Rod	Numbers 17
9	Moses' Mistake	Numbers 20:1-13
10	A Death, a Vow, a Snake	Numbers 20:22-21:9; 2 Kings 18:1-4
11	A Talking Donkey	Numbers 22-24
12	The Legacy	Deuteronomy 6
13	Perils of Prosperity	Deuteronomy 8
14	Showing Your Gratitude	Deuteronomy 26
15	Blessings and Curses	Deuteronomy 28
16	God Will Take You Back	Deuteronomy 30
17	The Death of Moses	Deuteronomy 32:48-52; 34:1-12
18	Joshua Takes Charge	Joshua 1
19	Backdoor Diplomacy	Joshua 2
20	Wet Feet, Wide River	Joshua 3
21	The Fall of Jericho	Joshua 5:13-6:27
22	The Gridlock of Greed	Joshua 7
23	The Gibeonite Deception	Joshua 9
24	The Sun Stands Still	Joshua 10:1-27
25	A Place to Call Home	Joshua 14
26	Civil War Averted	Joshua 22
27	Joshua's Farewell	Joshua 23; 24
28	Backsliding	Judges 2
29	Deborah	Judges 4
30	Gideon's Fleece	Judges 6
31	Gideon's Victory	Judges 7

APRIL

1 From Barren to Blessed	Judges 13
2 Stronger Than a Thousand Men	Judges 15
3 Samson's Weakness	Judges 16
4 Ruth Finds a Friend	Ruth 1; 2
5 Ruth Finds a Husband	Ruth 3; 4
6 A Mother's Sacrifice	1 Samuel 1
7 When God Calls Your Name	1 Samuel 3
8 The Ark of the Covenant Is Taken	1 Samuel 4
9 The Ark Comes Back Home	1 Samuel 5; 6
10 The Revival Under Samuel	1 Samuel 7
11 "Give Us a King"	1 Samuel 8
12 Saul Is Anointed	1 Samuel 9:15-10:27
13 Samuel's Farewell	1 Samuel 12
14 Standing Up to the King	1 Samuel 13:1-15
15 Courage Against the Odds	1 Samuel 14:1-23
16 Saul's Deadly Greed	1 Samuel 15
17 David Is Anointed	1 Samuel 16
18 David and Goliath	1 Samuel 17
19 Rewards of Righteousness	Psalms 37
20 Friendship	1 Samuel 18:1-16; 20:1-42
21 From Prince to Fugitive	1 Samuel 21
22 A Garden of Promises	Psalms 34
23 The Cave of Confrontation	1 Samuel 24
24 Story of a Liberated Woman	1 Samuel 25
25 Visit With a Witch	1 Samuel 28
26 Suicide	1 Samuel 31
27 New King's First Conquest	2 Samuel 2:1-7; 5:1-16
28 A Warrior Moves the Ark	2 Samuel 6
29 God's Covenant Promise	2 Samuel 7
30 Rejoicing With a Clear Conscience	Psalms 18

MAY

1	The King's Kindness	2 Samuel 9
2	The King's Treachery	2 Samuel 11; 12
3	Skeletons in the Closet	Psalms 32 or 38
4	Repentance	Psalms 51
5	God's Compassion	Psalms 103
6	Rebellion of a Prince	2 Samuel 15; 16
7	Betrayed	Psalm 55
8	Absalom's End	2 Samuel 17:1-19:8
9	The Census	2 Samuel 24
10	Solomon's Coronation	1 Kings 1
11	A Prayer for the New King	Psalm 72
12	David's Last Words	2 Samuel 23:1-7; 1 Kings 2:1-12
13	Solomon's Wisdom	1 Kings 3; 4:20-34
14	The Secret of Prosperity	Proverbs 3
15	God Gets a New House	1 Kings 8
16	The Queen of Sheba	1 Kings 10:1-13
17	On Controlling the Appetites	Proverbs 23
18	Solomon's Downfall	1 Kings 11
19	The Trap of Immorality	Proverbs 6:20-7:27
20	Final Advice	Ecclesiastes 11; 12
21	A Kingdom Divided	1 Kings 12
22	Two Sorry Leaders	1 Kings 14
23	Elijah and the Birds	1 Kings 16:29-17:7
24	Generosity Pays	1 Kings 17:8-24
25	When Water Burns	1 Kings 18
26	Listen for the Whisper	1 Kings 19
27	Attack on Samaria	1 Kings 20
28	God Is My Refuge	Psalm 91
29	A King Who Wanted It All	1 Kings 21
30	Ahab's End	1 Kings 22:1-40
31	Chariots of Fire	2 Kings 2:1-18

JUNE

1 Elisha's Miracles	2 Kings 4:1-37
2 Poison Made Pure	2 Kings 2:19-25; 4:38-44
3 New Cure for Leprosy.....	2 Kings 5
4 Floating Iron and Feasting Armies	2 Kings 6:1-23
5 The Lepers' Feast	2 Kings 6:24-7:20
6 An Officer, Not a Gentleman	2 Kings 9
7 The Boy King	2 Kings 11
8 Joash's Reforms	2 Kings 12
9 God's Runaway Spokesman	Jonah 1; 2
10 Jonah's Mission	Jonah 3; 4
11 Amos Warns Israel.....	Amos 5
12 A Prostitute and a Promise	Hosea 1; 3
13 Goodbye Israel, Hello Samaritans.....	2 Kings 17
14 King at 16.....	2 Chronicles 26
15 Micah's Message	Micah 6:1-8; 7:8-20
16 The Call of Isaiah	Isaiah 6
17 Prophecy of the End	Isaiah 24
18 Hezekiah's Reforms.....	2 Kings 18:1-16
19 Invasion by the Enemy.....	2 Kings 18:17-19:19
20 Delivered Through Prayer	2 Kings 19:20-37
21 Day the Sun Moved Backward.....	2 Kings 20
22 Servant to the Blind.....	Isaiah 42
23 God's Suffering Servant.....	Isaiah 52:13-53:12
24 Hope for the Rejected Bride.....	Isaiah 54
25 The Key to God's Blessing	Isaiah 58
26 A Generation of Evil	2 Kings 21:1-18
27 Josiah's Revival	2 Chronicles 34:8-28
28 The Coming of the Lord.....	Joel 2
29 Habakkuk's Argument With God.....	Habakkuk 1:1-2:4
30 Rejoice No Matter What.....	Habakkuk 3

JULY

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|----|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Call of a Young Man | Jeremiah 1 |
| 2 | Guarding the Sabbath | Jeremiah 17:19-27; Nehemiah 13:1-31 |
| 3 | Conditional Prophecy | Jeremiah 18:1-17 |
| 4 | Trials of a Prophet | Jeremiah 36 |
| 5 | Prison Chronicles | Jeremiah 37; 38 |
| 6 | Ezekiel's Vision | Ezekiel 1 |
| 7 | The Judgment of Jerusalem | Ezekiel 8; 9 |
| 8 | The Fall of Jerusalem | 2 Chronicles 36:11-21; Jeremiah 52 |
| 9 | From Self-pity to Self-examination | Lamentations 3 |
| 10 | A Plea From the Vanquished | Psalms 74; 79 |
| 11 | By the Rivers of Babylon | Psalms 137 |
| 12 | Daniel and His Three Friends | Daniel 1 |
| 13 | Nebuchadnezzar's Dream | Daniel 2 |
| 14 | The Golden Image | Daniel 3 |
| 15 | Seven Years of Insanity | Daniel 4 |
| 16 | The Writing on the Wall | Daniel 5 |
| 17 | Daniel in the Lions' Den | Daniel 6 |
| 18 | Five Great Kingdoms | Daniel 7 |
| 19 | "Get Out of Babylon!" | Jeremiah 51 |
| 20 | Return From the Exile | Ezra 1 |
| 21 | The Promise of Blessing | Haggai 1; 2 |
| 22 | A Change of Clothing | Zechariah 3; 4 |
| 23 | The Temple Rebuilt | Ezra 5; 6 |
| 24 | Nehemiah's Quest | Nehemiah 1; 2 |
| 25 | Social Reforms | Nehemiah 5 |
| 26 | Celebrating God's Word | Nehemiah 8 |
| 27 | Orphan Girl Becomes Queen | Esther 2:1-18 |
| 28 | The Plot | Esther 3 |
| 29 | The Plot Thickens | Esther 4 |
| 30 | The Tables Are Turned | Esther 7; 8 |
| 31 | Fidelity and Honesty | Malachi 2:10-17; 3:8-18 |

AUGUST

1	Wilderness Man	Luke 1:5-25
2	Born in a Barn	Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-7
3	Shepherds Visit Jesus	Luke 2:8-20
4	An Old Woman's Prophecy	Luke 2:21-40
5	The Magi	Matthew 2:1-12
6	Exiled in Egypt	Matthew 2:13-23
7	Minding His Father's Business	Luke 2:41-52
8	Jesus' Baptism	John 1:19-34
9	Three Tempting Offers	Matthew 4:1-11
10	Jesus Begins Preaching	Matthew 4:23-25; Luke 4:14-30
11	A Wedding to Remember	John 2:1-12
12	Selling in the Church	John 2:13-25
13	The Enquirer	John 3:1-21
14	Judean Ministry	John 3:22-36
15	Jesus Wants to Be Alone	Matthew 14
16	The Samaritan Woman	John 4:1-42
17	Nobleman's Son	John 4:43-54
18	Call by the Sea	Luke 5:1-11
19	Paralytic by the Pool	John 5
20	Sermon on the Mount	Matthew 5
21	Jesus Talks About Prayer	Matthew 6:5-18
22	Money Matters	Matthew 6:19-34
23	Hometown Hopes	Luke 4:16-30
24	Master of Demons	Mark 1:21-39
25	Leprosy and Paralysis	Luke 5:12-26
26	The First Missionaries	Matthew 10
27	Keeping the Sabbath	Mark 2:23-3:6
28	Jesus Heals Centurion's Servant	Luke 7:1-10
29	Widow of Nain	Luke 7:11-17
30	Following Jesus Through Life's Storms	Matthew 8:18-27
31	Tombs to Triumph	Mark 5:1-20

SEPTEMBER

1	Jairus' Daughter	Matthew 9:18-26
2	The Kingdom in a Seed.....	Mark 4:26-34
3	Sower and Soils	Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23
4	Bad Tenants.....	Matthew 21:33-46
5	The Missing Wedding Garment.....	Matthew 22:1-14
6	The Great Feast	Luke 14:15-24
7	Unforgiven	Matthew 18:21-35
8	Lost Things.....	Luke 15:1-10
9	The Prodigal Son	Luke 15:11-32
10	Justified Injustice	Matthew 20:1-16
11	The Good Samaritan	Luke 10:25-37
12	Good Foundations	Matthew 7:24-29
13	Jesus Joins the Party.....	Luke 5:27-39
14	Death of John the Baptist	Matthew 14:1-12
15	5,000 Fed.....	John 6:1-14
16	The Transfiguration	Matthew 17:1-13
17	Jesus Heals Demoniac Boy	Mark 9:14-29
18	Caught in the Act.....	John 8:1-12
19	The Coin in the Fish.....	Matthew 17:24-27
20	Healing of Man Born Blind	John 9:1-34
21	The Good Shepherd	John 10:1-21
22	Washed With Tears.....	Luke 7:36-50
23	Mary and Martha.....	Luke 10:38-42
24	Jesus Raises Lazarus.....	John 11:17-44
25	Jesus Heals 10 Lepers	Luke 17:11-19
26	Overconfidence	Luke 18:9-14
27	Rich Young Ruler	Matthew 19:16-30
28	The Ambitious Brothers	Matthew 20:20-28
29	Zacchaeus.....	Luke 19:1-10
30	The Rewards of Risk	Luke 19:11-27

DECEMBER

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|----|--|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Almost Flogged | Acts 21:37-22:29 |
| 2 | Paul Before the Sanhedrin | Acts 22:30-23:10 |
| 3 | The Plot of the Assassins | Acts 23:11-35 |
| 4 | Paul Before Felix | Acts 24 |
| 5 | Paul Before Festus | Acts 25:1-12 |
| 6 | Paul Before Agrippa | Acts 25:13-26:32 |
| 7 | The Voyage to Rome | Acts 27:1-12 |
| 8 | Shipwrecked | Acts 27:13-44 |
| 9 | The Maltese Snake | Acts 28:1-10 |
| 10 | House Arrest in Rome | Acts 28:11-31 |
| 11 | The Great Rescue (written from Rome) | Ephesians 2:1-10; 4:17-32 |
| 12 | Holy Living | Colossians 3:1-11 |
| 13 | A Runaway Comes Home | Philemon |
| 14 | Humiliation Before Exaltation | Philippians 2:1-18 |
| 15 | Never Give Up | Hebrews 10:19-39 |
| 16 | Hall of Fame | Hebrews 11 |
| 17 | Counsel to a Young Man | 1 Timothy 4 |
| 18 | Watch Out for Wealth | 1 Timothy 6:3-21 |
| 19 | Teachings for Titus | Titus 2:11-3:8 |
| 20 | Sins of the Last Days | 2 Timothy 3 |
| 21 | Paul's Last Words | 2 Timothy 4:6-22 |
| 22 | Taming the Tongue | James 1:19-27; 3:1-12; 4:11, 12 |
| 23 | Submission | 1 Peter 2:13-3:17 |
| 24 | Why Hasn't Jesus Come? | 2 Peter 3 |
| 25 | Purity Through Love | 1 John 3 |
| 26 | Three Churches | Revelation 3 |
| 27 | Heavenly Worship | Revelation 4 |
| 28 | The Two Monsters | Revelation 13 |
| 29 | Three Angels' Messages | Revelation 14:6-16 |
| 30 | The Millennium | Revelation 20 |
| 31 | The New World | Revelation 21:1-22:5 |

THE BIBLE YEAR

Read the entire Bible in one year.

JANUARY

1. Genesis 1-3
2. Genesis 4-7
3. Genesis 8-11
4. Genesis 12-14
5. Genesis 15-17
6. Genesis 18-20
7. Genesis 21-23
8. Genesis 24; 25
9. Genesis 26-28
10. Genesis 29; 30
11. Genesis 31; 32
12. Genesis 33-35
13. Genesis 36-38
14. Genesis 39-41
15. Genesis 42; 43
16. Genesis 44-46
17. Genesis 47-50
18. Exodus 1-3
19. Exodus 4-7
20. Exodus 8; 9
21. Exodus 10-12
22. Exodus 13-15
23. Exodus 16-18
24. Exodus 19-21
25. Exodus 22-24
26. Exodus 25-27
27. Exodus 28; 29
28. Exodus 30-32
29. Exodus 33-35
30. Exodus 36-38
31. Exodus 39; 40

FEBRUARY

1. Leviticus 1-3
2. Leviticus 4-6
3. Leviticus 7; 8
4. Leviticus 9-11
5. Leviticus 12; 13
6. Leviticus 14; 15
7. Leviticus 16-18
8. Leviticus 19-21
9. Leviticus 22; 23
10. Leviticus 24; 25
11. Leviticus 26; 27
12. Numbers 1; 2
13. Numbers 3; 4
14. Numbers 5; 6
15. Numbers 7
16. Numbers 8-10
17. Numbers 11-13
18. Numbers 14; 15
19. Numbers 16; 17
20. Numbers 18-20
21. Numbers 21; 22
22. Numbers 23-25
23. Numbers 26; 27
24. Numbers 28; 29
25. Numbers 30; 31
26. Numbers 32; 33
27. Numbers 34-36
28. Deuteronomy 1; 2

MARCH

1. Deuteronomy 3; 4
2. Deuteronomy 5-7
3. Deuteronomy 8-10
4. Deuteronomy 11; 12
5. Deuteronomy 13-15
6. Deuteronomy 16-18
7. Deuteronomy 19-21
8. Deuteronomy 22-24
9. Deuteronomy 25-27
10. Deuteronomy 28
11. Deuteronomy 29-31
12. Deuteronomy 32-34
13. Joshua 1-3
14. Joshua 4-6
15. Joshua 7; 8
16. Joshua 9; 10
17. Joshua 11-13
18. Joshua 14-16
19. Joshua 17-19
20. Joshua 20-22
21. Joshua 23; 24
22. Judges 1-3
23. Judges 4-5
24. Judges 6; 7
25. Judges 8; 9
26. Judges 10; 11
27. Judges 12-14
28. Judges 15-17
29. Judges 18; 19
30. Judges 20; 21
31. Ruth

APRIL

1. 1 Samuel 1-3
2. 1 Samuel 4-6
3. 1 Samuel 7-9
4. 1 Samuel 10-12
5. 1 Samuel 13; 14
6. 1 Samuel 15; 16
7. 1 Samuel 17; 18
8. 1 Samuel 19; 20
9. 1 Samuel 21-23
10. 1 Samuel 24; 25
11. 1 Samuel 26-28
12. 1 Samuel 29-31
13. 2 Samuel 1-3
14. 2 Samuel 4-7
15. 2 Samuel 8-11
16. 2 Samuel 12; 13
17. 2 Samuel 14; 15
18. 2 Samuel 16; 17
19. 2 Samuel 18; 19
20. 2 Samuel 20-22
21. 2 Samuel 23; 24
22. 1 Kings 1; 2
23. 1 Kings 3-5
24. 1 Kings 6; 7
25. 1 Kings 8
26. 1 Kings 9; 10
27. 1 Kings 11; 12
28. 1 Kings 13; 14
29. 1 Kings 15; 16
30. 1 Kings 17; 18

MAY

1. 1 Kings 19; 20
2. 1 Kings 21; 22
3. 2 Kings 1-3
4. 2 Kings 4; 5
5. 2 Kings 6; 7
6. 2 Kings 8; 9
7. 2 Kings 10-12
8. 2 Kings 13-15
9. 2 Kings 16; 17
10. 2 Kings 18; 19
11. 2 Kings 20-22
12. 2 Kings 23-25
13. 1 Chronicles 1; 2
14. 1 Chronicles 3-5
15. 1 Chronicles 6; 7
16. 1 Chronicles 8-10
17. 1 Chronicles 11; 12
18. 1 Chronicles 13-16
19. 1 Chronicles 17-20
20. 1 Chronicles 21-23
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22. 1 Chronicles 27-29
23. 2 Chronicles 1-4
24. 2 Chronicles 5-7
25. 2 Chronicles 8-10
26. 2 Chronicles 11-14
27. 2 Chronicles 15-18
28. 2 Chronicles 19-21
29. 2 Chronicles 22-24
30. 2 Chronicles 25-27
31. 2 Chronicles 28; 29

JUNE

1. 2 Chronicles 30-32
2. 2 Chronicles 33; 34
3. 2 Chronicles 35; 36
4. Ezra 1-3
5. Ezra 4-6
6. Ezra 7; 8
7. Ezra 9; 10
8. Nehemiah 1-3
9. Nehemiah 4-6
10. Nehemiah 7; 8
11. Nehemiah 9-11
12. Nehemiah 12; 13
13. Esther 1-5
14. Esther 6-10
15. Job 1-3
16. Job 4-7
17. Job 8-10
18. Job 11-14
19. Job 15-18
20. Job 19-22
21. Job 23-28
22. Job 29-33
23. Job 34-37
24. Job 38-42
25. Psalms 1-9
26. Psalms 10-18
27. Psalms 19-26
28. Psalms 27-34
29. Psalms 35-40
30. Psalms 41-48

JULY

1. Psalms 49-55
2. Psalms 56-63
3. Psalms 64-69
4. Psalms 70-75
5. Psalms 76-79
6. Psalms 80-86
7. Psalms 87-91
8. Psalms 92-101
9. Psalms 102-105
10. Psalms 106-109
11. Psalms 110-118
12. Psalm 119
13. Psalms 120-134
14. Psalms 135-142
15. Psalms 143-150
16. Proverbs 1-4
17. Proverbs 5-9
18. Proverbs 10-13
19. Proverbs 14-17
20. Proverbs 18-21
21. Proverbs 22-25
22. Proverbs 26-28
23. Proverbs 29-31
24. Ecclesiastes 1-6
25. Ecclesiastes 7-12
26. Song of Solomon
27. Isaiah 1-3
28. Isaiah 4-7
29. Isaiah 8-10
30. Isaiah 11-14
31. Isaiah 15-20

AUGUST

1. Isaiah 21-24
2. Isaiah 25-28
3. Isaiah 29-31
4. Isaiah 32-35
5. Isaiah 36-38
6. Isaiah 39-42
7. Isaiah 43-45
8. Isaiah 46-49
9. Isaiah 50-53
10. Isaiah 54-58
11. Isaiah 59-62
12. Isaiah 63-66
13. Jeremiah 1-3
14. Jeremiah 4; 5
15. Jeremiah 6-8
16. Jeremiah 9-11
17. Jeremiah 12-14
18. Jeremiah 15-17
19. Jeremiah 18-21
20. Jeremiah 22-24
21. Jeremiah 25; 26
22. Jeremiah 27-29
23. Jeremiah 30; 31
24. Jeremiah 32; 33
25. Jeremiah 34-36
26. Jeremiah 37-39
27. Jeremiah 40-42
28. Jeremiah 43-45
29. Jeremiah 46-48
30. Jeremiah 49; 50
31. Jeremiah 51; 52

SEPTEMBER

1. Lamentations 1; 2
2. Lamentations 3-5
3. Ezekiel 1-4
4. Ezekiel 5-8
5. Ezekiel 9-12
6. Ezekiel 13-15
7. Ezekiel 16; 17
8. Ezekiel 18-20
9. Ezekiel 21; 22
10. Ezekiel 23; 24
11. Ezekiel 25-27
12. Ezekiel 28-30
13. Ezekiel 31-33
14. Ezekiel 34-36
15. Ezekiel 37-39
16. Ezekiel 40; 41
17. Ezekiel 42-44
18. Ezekiel 45; 46
19. Ezekiel 47; 48
20. Daniel 1; 2
21. Daniel 3; 4
22. Daniel 5-7
23. Daniel 8-10
24. Daniel 11; 12
25. Hosea 1-7
26. Hosea 8-14
27. Joel
28. Amos 1-4
29. Amos 5-9
30. Obadiah; Jonah

OCTOBER

1. Micah
2. Nahum; Habakkuk
3. Zephaniah; Haggai
4. Zechariah 1-5
5. Zechariah 6-10
6. Zechariah 11-14
7. Malachi
8. Matthew 1-4
9. Matthew 5-7
10. Matthew 8-10
11. Matthew 11; 12
12. Matthew 13; 14
13. Matthew 15-17
14. Matthew 18-20
15. Matthew 21; 22
16. Matthew 23; 24
17. Matthew 25; 26
18. Matthew 27; 28
19. Mark 1-3
20. Mark 4; 5
21. Mark 6; 7
22. Mark 8; 9
23. Mark 10; 11
24. Mark 12; 13
25. Mark 14-16
26. Luke 1; 2
27. Luke 3; 4
28. Luke 5; 6
29. Luke 7; 8
30. Luke 9; 10
31. Luke 11; 12

NOVEMBER

1. Luke 13-15
2. Luke 16-18
3. Luke 19; 20
4. Luke 21; 22
5. Luke 23; 24
6. John 1-3
7. John 4; 5
8. John 6; 7
9. John 8; 9
10. John 10; 11
11. John 12; 13
12. John 14-16
13. John 17; 18
14. John 19-21
15. Acts 1; 2
16. Acts 3-5
17. Acts 6; 7
18. Acts 8; 9
19. Acts 10-12
20. Acts 13; 14
21. Acts 15; 16
22. Acts 17-19
23. Acts 20; 21
24. Acts 22-24
25. Acts 25; 26
26. Acts 27; 28
27. Romans 1-3
28. Romans 4-7
29. Romans 8-10
30. Romans 11-13

DECEMBER

1. Romans 14-16
2. 1 Corinthians 1-4
3. 1 Corinthians 5-8
4. 1 Corinthians 9-12
5. 1 Corinthians 13-16
6. 2 Corinthians 1-4
7. 2 Corinthians 5-9
8. 2 Corinthians 10-13
9. Galatians
10. Ephesians
11. Philippians
12. Colossians
13. 1 Thessalonians
14. 2 Thessalonians
15. 1 Timothy
16. 2 Timothy
17. Titus; Philemon
18. Hebrews 1-5
19. Hebrews 6-9
20. Hebrews 10; 11
21. Hebrews 12; 13
22. James
23. 1 Peter
24. 2 Peter
25. 1 John
26. 2 John; 3 John; Jude
27. Revelation 1-4
28. Revelation 5-9
29. Revelation 10-13
30. Revelation 14-17
31. Revelation 18-22